



EDITED BY
**NANCY E.
SNOW**

≡ The Oxford Handbook of
VIRTUE

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

VIRTUE

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VIRTUE

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NANCY E. SNOW

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INTRODUCTION

NANCY E. SNOW

THE study of virtue has always had a place in the history of philosophy. The term *virtue* comes from the Latin word *virtus*, the root of which is *vir*, or ‘man.’ *Virtus* had connotations of manliness and originally referred to the Roman virtue of martial courage, though it later referred to a range of other Roman virtues, such as prudence, temperance, and self-control. The study of virtue did not begin with Roman philosophy, but can be traced to the Greeks, whose term for virtue was *arête*, which meant ‘excellence.’¹ The term *virtue* and associated terms in Greek and Latin have thus long been used to refer to excellent attributes. Virtue had pride of place in ancient Greek and Roman theories of ethics, as well as in non-Western philosophies, such as Confucianism. It occupied and continues to hold importance in prominent world religions, such as Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. One benefit of the chapters included here is that they provide scholars with useful overviews of the importance of virtue in traditions they might not have had the opportunity to study in depth, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Islam.

In Western philosophy, the centrality of virtue continued throughout the Middle Ages and took a subsidiary role only with the rise of modern philosophers such as Hume, Kant, and Mill. Even then, virtue did not disappear from the philosophical scene, but held a position of lesser theoretical importance to other ethical concepts, such as sentiments, rights, duties, rules, and consequences. In the late twentieth century, philosophers focused their attention on virtue anew. G. E. M. Anscombe’s seminal paper, “Modern Moral Philosophy” (1958), is typically identified as the catalyst for the rediscovery of virtue.² Anscombe criticizes deontology and consequentialism, the two dominant ethical theories of her day, and urges a return to Aristotle as a way of addressing the lack of an adequate philosophical psychology for ethics. A handful of philosophers on both sides of the Atlantic worked on virtue in the years following the publication of Anscombe’s paper, but it was not until the mid-1980s, with the publication of *After Virtue* by Alasdair MacIntyre, that the study of virtue regained prominence in philosophical circles.³ In 1999, the terrain shifted again with *On Virtue Ethics* by Rosalind Hursthouse.⁴ Her work marks a shift from ‘virtue theory,’ which is the study of virtue as it is developed within a larger type of ethical theory or worldview, such as deontology,

consequentialism, Buddhism, or Confucianism, to 'virtue ethics,' which seeks to develop a theoretical alternative to deontology and consequentialism with virtue as the central ethical concept.⁵

Since 1999, a veritable deluge of philosophical work has been done in virtue ethics and virtue theory, and even more new fields have emerged. Applied virtue ethics examines practical fields such as medicine, business, and jurisprudence, as well as practical problems to which they give rise, in light of virtue and character. Virtue epistemology is another new area that takes virtue as the central concept for understanding knowledge and other epistemic goods. Reliabilist virtue epistemologists argue that epistemic virtues are capacities such as perception and memory, whereas responsibilism holds that epistemic virtues are character traits, such as open-mindedness and intellectual humility. Virtue epistemology not only takes a virtue-based approach to traditional epistemological problems, such as how we know, how belief can be justified, and the problem of skepticism; it also opens new vistas to epistemological exploration, such as what it means to be a good knower, what intellectual virtues are and how they should be pursued, the relation of moral and intellectual virtues, and how epistemic goods, such as knowledge, truth, understanding, and wisdom, should be balanced against other kinds of goods. Applied virtue epistemology is a brand new, emerging area. This field examines how intellectual virtues such as open-mindedness, intellectual humility, and inquisitiveness, for example, can influence democratic life, clinical practice, religious dialogue, environmental virtue ethics, and education.⁶

The ideas mentioned in the foregoing sketch are examined and expanded upon in the forty-two essays presented in this *Handbook*. The aims of the volume are to provide readers with a representative overview of the philosophical study of virtue, and to stimulate further work on this exciting topic. Contributors include established scholars as well as younger philosophers who are making notable contributions to the field. A word about the parts of the volume and the essays is in order.

The volume is divided into seven parts: Conceptualizations of Virtue; Historical and Religious Accounts of Virtue; Contemporary Virtue Ethics and Theories of Virtue; Central Concepts and Issues in Virtue Ethics and Theories of Virtue; Critical Examinations of Virtue Ethics; Applied Virtue Ethics; and Virtue Epistemology. The sections are united around a common theme: the study of virtue. The serious study of virtue cannot really begin without an understanding of what virtue is; that is, what is the concept of virtue? This question is addressed by the three chapters that comprise Part I. A review of the literature on virtue yields three distinct conceptualizations: virtue as a trait, as a sensitivity, and as a skill. Three noted authors, Christian Miller, Bridget Clarke, and Matt Stichter, discuss each conceptualization, as well as the philosophical, and in some cases, psychological, writing within which it appears.

Part II features eleven essays by noted scholars on historical and religious accounts of virtue. Part II is included in the *Handbook* for three main reasons. First, it is an acknowledgment of the diversity of intellectual traditions to which thinking about virtue has contributed. These traditions are Western and non-Western, secular and religious. Various thinkers represented in this section overlap these categories. Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics are the progenitors of the study of virtue in the Western philosophical

tradition, and are ably discussed by Franco V. Trivigno, Howard Curzer, and Lawrence C. Becker, respectively. Matthew MacKenzie, Justin Tiwald, and May Sim treat non-Western traditions of Buddhism and Confucianism. Islamic philosophy, discussed by Elizabeth M. Bucar, is Western and influenced by Aristotle, yet Islamic virtue is deeply rooted in religion. Aquinas, Hume and Nietzsche, and Kant are the topics of chapters by Candace Vogler, Christine Swanton, and Thomas E. Hill and Adam Cureton. W. Jay Wood discusses Christian theories of virtue. Aquinas's thought, as well as Christian theories of virtue, overlaps philosophy and theology. Buddhism and Confucianism are Eastern, and Buddhism, like Islam and Christianity, is a major world religion.

The second reason for the prominence of Part II in the volume is that contemporary work on virtue was not created in a vacuum. Much ongoing work is deeply inspired by figures and themes from historical, philosophical, and religious traditions. Finally, as noted earlier, those philosophers who have not had the opportunity to study traditions that differ from their own, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Islam, can benefit from the overviews of those traditions provided here. In short, Part II represents traditions in historical, philosophical, and religious thinking about virtue that can and should be mined for insight and inspiration.

Part III turns to contemporary virtue ethics and theories of virtue. Again, noted scholars have made significant contributions. William David Solomon gives an overview of the early days of virtue ethics in work by figures such as Anscombe, Foot, Geach, Murdoch, and G. J. Warnock at Oxford, von Wright at Cambridge, and Frankena, Pincoffs, Wallace, and MacIntyre in the United States. Nancy E. Snow discusses the predominant theory-type of virtue ethics currently on offer, neo-Aristotelianism. Neo-Aristotelianism, as the name suggests, takes inspiration from Aristotle and involves commitments to eudaimonism, which is the view that virtue is conducive to and partly constitutive of human flourishing, and ethical naturalism, which holds, among other things, that virtues are grounded in our human nature. Michael Slote offers his latest thinking about virtue in "Sentimentalist Virtue Ethics"; Glen Pettigrove reviews contemporary alternatives to neo-Aristotelianism, namely, Slote's agent-based virtue ethics, Linda Zagzebski's exemplarism, Christine Swanton's non-eudaimonistic pluralism, and Robert M. Adams's neo-Platonic virtue ethics. This is followed by a treatment of feminist virtue ethics from Robin Dillon. The section concludes with Ben Bradley's chapter on contemporary consequentialist theories of virtue.

The plethora of views presented in Part III epitomizes the vigor and vitality of theoretical work on virtue today. Another approach to this rich and varied terrain is taken up in Part IV, which deals with central concepts and issues in virtue ethics and theories of virtue. The contributions deal with virtue acquisition, the role of ideals in developing virtue, virtuous motivation, and eudaimonism. The lead piece in this section, by Nafsika Athanassoulis, deals with how Aristotelian virtue is acquired, and exemplifies recent interest in how virtue is cultivated. A leading neo-Aristotelian philosopher, Daniel C. Russell, argues for a non-ideal approach to virtue development in his provocative piece, "Putting Ideals in Their Place." Virtuous motivation is central to most theories of virtue and approaches to virtue ethics. Karen Stohr takes on this issue in a philosophically erudite piece that separates virtuous motivation from ordinary moral motivation

by drawing on the characteristic motivational structure of the fully virtuous person. Mark LeBar's chapter, "Eudaimonism," focuses on the role of *eudaimonia*, often translated as 'flourishing' or 'happiness,' in virtue ethics. In emphasizing *eudaimonia*, does virtue ethics become objectionably egoistic? Does it collapse into perfectionism? LeBar discusses these as well as other objections to eudaimonism.

As LeBar's discussion shows, virtue ethics is not without its objectors and critics. Part V, "Critical Examinations of Virtue Ethics," deals with a range of objections. Jens Johansson and Frans Svensson consider the challenge that virtue ethics cannot provide a virtue ethical criterion of right action in their chapter, "Objections to Virtue Ethics." This objection and its treatment by neo-Aristotelians are also considered in Snow's piece. Chapter 16. Rebecca L. Stangl deals with the problem of cultural relativism in her contribution, "Cultural Relativity and Justification." Is relativism a special challenge for virtue ethics? Stangl argues that it is not. However, she also argues that ethical naturalism, which grounds neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, provides no special resources for addressing the challenge. Finally, philosophers have mined the resources of psychology to critique virtue ethics, especially Aristotelianism. Gilbert Harman, John M. Doris, and Maria Merritt have led this charge.⁷ Called 'situationism,' the critique is, in essence, that virtues have little, if anything, to do with producing behavior, and that Aristotelian virtue ethics in particular lacks an adequate empirical psychology. Tom Bates and Pauline Kleingeld offer a novel view on this debate by focusing on vices in their chapter, "Virtue, Vice, and Situationism." The situationist challenge unleashed a torrent of interest at the intersection of virtue ethics and psychology. In "Virtue from the Perspective of Psychology," Kristján Kristjánsson gives a comprehensive and informative overview of the many perspectives that psychology takes on virtue.

In Part VI, we turn to the field now called 'applied virtue ethics.' 'Applied ethics,' also known as 'practical ethics,' is the area in which ethical theories and their central concepts are applied to practical domains, such as medicine, law, and business. When this sub-discipline first began, deontology and consequentialism dominated theoretical ethics. In some applications of these theories to practical problems, central principles, such as Kant's categorical imperative and the principle of utility, were applied in almost mechanical fashion to ethical problems to generate a result. The focus was almost exclusively on specific actions. Should a woman have an abortion, or should a brain-dead patient be disconnected from life support? Ethical principles would then be applied: What would the principle of utility dictate? Sometimes more nuance would be involved: What would an act utilitarian say, as opposed to a rule utilitarian? In more sophisticated versions of applied ethical approaches—in bioethics, for example—principles such as those of patient autonomy or non-maleficence would be used.

The emergence of virtue ethics adds exciting new dimensions to this endeavor. Justin Oakley offers one such approach in his contribution, "Toward an Empirically Informed Approach to Medical Virtues." He seeks to develop an empirically adequate moral psychology of the medical virtues, such as the virtues of medical beneficence and medical courage. Not included in this volume, but noteworthy, is work by applied virtue epistemologists investigating the role of intellectual virtues in clinical practice. Miguel Alzola

uses virtue ethics to reconceptualize the nature of businesses and business practices. Character-based thinking invites us to focus on individual flourishing within organizations and business ethics, as opposed to larger policy issues such as how businesses respond to market forces. Chapin Cimino, David Carr, and Jason Kawall take similarly innovative approaches as they examine jurisprudence, education, and environmental virtue ethics, respectively. Sexual ethics and communication ethics are two relatively new areas of applied virtue ethics. Raja Halwani explores sexual temperance in “Sexual Ethics,” and Janie Harden Fritz provides a comprehensive overview of virtue-based approaches to communication ethics in “Communication Ethics and Virtue.”

Part VII concludes the volume with a sampling of developments in the field of virtue epistemology. As mentioned, virtue epistemology takes the concept of virtue to be central for understanding how people attain knowledge and other epistemic goods such as truth, understanding, and wisdom. The two dominant approaches are reliabilism, which takes intellectual virtues to be capacities such as perception and memory, and responsibilism, which considers intellectual virtues to be traits. John Greco and Jonathan Reibsam examine the former in “Reliabilist Virtue Epistemology,” and Sarah Wright furnishes insights into the latter in “Virtue Responsibilism.” Michael Slote and Heather Battaly propose a new approach to virtue epistemology in “Sentimentalist Virtue Epistemology: The Challenge of Personalism.” What is the relation of moral to intellectual virtues? Michael S. Brady takes up this question in his chapter, “Moral and Intellectual Virtues.” Jason Baehr inquires about the proper aim of intellectual virtues and explores relationships among intellectual virtues and different types of epistemic goods in “Intellectual Virtues and Truth, Understanding, and Wisdom.” Abrol Fairweather and Carlos Montemayor examine the implications of aspects of empirical psychology for reliabilism, responsibilism, and epistemic agency in their chapter, “Virtue Epistemology and Psychology.” The volume closes with a nod to applied virtue epistemology with Colin Farrelly’s chapter, “Virtue Epistemology and the Democratic Life,” which offers a virtue-based defense of democracy.

The contributions to this volume attest to the range and vitality of work on virtue. The book not only provides a representative overview of this area of study, but also offers directions for further research. The study of virtue is alive and well—a central part of the philosophical landscape.⁸

NOTES

1. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtus_\(virtue\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtus_(virtue)). Accessed January 12, 2017.
2. Elizabeth Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” *Philosophy* 33 (1958): 1–16.
3. See William David Solomon, “Early Virtue Ethics,” Chapter 15 in this volume.
4. See Nancy E. Snow, “Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics,” Chapter 16 in this volume.
5. See Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1–3.
6. See, for example, Colin Farrelly, “Virtue Epistemology and the Democratic Life,” Chapter 42 in this volume; James A. Marcum, “The Epistemically Virtuous Clinician,” *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics: Philosophy of Medical Research and Practice* 30 (2009): 249–265; Abraham Schwab, “Epistemic Humility and Medical Practice,” *Journal of Medicine and*

- Philosophy* 37 (2012): 28–48; Andrzej Grzegorcyk, “God’s Action in the Human World: Our Intellectual Humility and Dialogue between Religions,” *Dialogue and Humanism: The Universalist Journal* 3 (1993): 73–84; Stafford, “Intellectual Virtue in Environmental Virtue Ethics,” *Environmental Ethics: An Interdisciplinary Journal Dedicated to Philosophical Aspects of Environmental Problems* 32 (2010): 339–352; and Jason Baehr (ed.), *Intellectual Virtues and Education: Essays in Applied Virtue Epistemology* (New York: Routledge, 2016).
7. See Gilbert Harman, “Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 99 (1999): 315–331; Harman, “The Nonexistence of Character Traits,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 100 (2000): 223–226; and Harman, “Skepticism about Character Traits,” *The Journal of Ethics* 13 (2009): 235–242 John Doris, “Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics,” *Noûs* 32 (1998): 504–530; Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; and Maria Merritt, “Virtue Ethics and Situationist Personality Psychology,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 3 (2000): 365–383.
 8. I gratefully acknowledge the invaluable editorial assistance of Jennifer Marra, Calantha Tillotson, and Jordan Droira.

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P A R T I

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CONCEPTUALIZATIONS
OF VIRTUE

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CHAPTER 1

VIRTUE AS A TRAIT

CHRISTIAN B. MILLER

ONE of the most common assumptions about the moral virtues is that they are traits, or more specifically, traits of character. But what are character traits, and what character traits do we actually possess today? This chapter takes up each of these questions in turn. First it considers the metaphysics of character traits, distinguishing between three competing views. Then it turns to the empirical issue of whether most people actually have character traits, and if so, what they tend to look like. Throughout, the main focus is on presenting leading views, rather than trying to argue for any one view in particular. The focus is also on the moral character traits, rather than the epistemic, prudential, aesthetic, or other kinds of traits.

I. WHAT ARE CHARACTER TRAITS?

There are many examples of character traits. Bravery, grit, humility, dishonesty, hope, and cowardice are a few on the list.¹ As we typically think about them, character traits are a form of personality trait, and have to do with the psychological life of a person, including the mental states and mental processes that make up her thinking.² These mental states and processes are not inert. They give rise to still other mental states and process, and often impact our behavior in lots of ways as well. To take an example, an extroverted person might have a *desire* to talk in groups, and so will feel quite comfortable leading the conversation at office parties. An extremely introverted person *wants* to avoid these parties at all costs, and if present, is quite content to stand on the margins to let others do the talking.

This is a good first pass at describing character traits, but it doesn't tell us very much. What exactly are character traits supposed to be, after all? Unfortunately, we do not get a clear answer to this question in either the philosophy or psychology literatures. Instead we get three leading positions—what I call the summary view, the conditional view, and the dispositional view. Now to be fair, the dispositional view is

by far the leading contender in philosophy, but when we switch over to psychology it is much more controversial. For our purposes here, it is worth reviewing all three of them.

i. The Summary View

According to this view, a character trait term like ‘honesty’ refers to actual *patterns* of relevant mental thoughts and bodily actions. Take what a person has been thinking and doing over time with respect to a particular moral domain, such as helping others. That just is her character trait pertaining to that domain. In the case of honesty, a person’s being honest would, on this approach, simply amount to the honest thoughts she has had (including relevant beliefs, desires, emotions, and the like), together with the honest behavior that arose from them—end of story. In particular, unlike the dispositional view, which we will turn to later, there are no causal dispositions as part of this story, dispositions that can be triggered and give rise to honest thoughts and actions.

Here are some examples of writers advancing the summary view. The psychologists David Buss and Kenneth Craik, for instance, write that “the statement ‘Mary is arrogant’ means that, over a period of observation, she has displayed a high frequency of arrogant acts, relative to a norm for that category of acts.”³ Similarly, John Johnson claims that “[t]raits are consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings, or actions that distinguish people from one another.”⁴ Walter Mischel wrote in his famous 1973 paper that “the present position sees [traits] as the *summary labels* (labels, codes, organizing constructs) applied to observed behavior.”⁵ And Jerry Wiggins helpfully ties everything together by noting that “[w]hen we say that John is aggressive, we are asserting that the general trend or disposition of his conduct, to date, has been to engage in a variety of aggressive actions over a period of time.”⁶ Note that even though Wiggins mentions the term ‘disposition,’ all that term refers to here is just the aggressive behavior the person has already displayed up to this point in time.

Now if these psychologists are defining the terms ‘character trait’ in a particular technical way, then it is hard to complain about what they are doing. They can define their terms however they like, so long as they are explicit about what they are doing. And it is not as if there is a crystal clear understanding of ‘character trait’ in ordinary folk thinking either. Nevertheless, since advocates of the summary view typically intend their account of character traits to contribute to the important conversations that are happening about traits in both the academic and larger cultural context, they have been faced with at least three concerns about their approach.

The first concern is a point about what seems conceivable. Can’t we imagine, the critic might say, that someone has a particular character trait, but up to this point in her life she has never had an opportunity to exhibit it? For example, isn’t it possible for someone to be genuinely heroic, but not (yet) display that heroism (think of a deserted island example, for instance).⁷ If she does display heroism one day, people might say, “I never

realized that she had it in her.” Note, though, that this kind of scenario would not be conceivable on the summary view.

Here is a second concern. Change the example so that the person did exhibit heroic thoughts and actions, but years ago in his distant past. In the intervening years, there just have not been any chances to be heroic (or cowardly, for that matter). Now here is the question: Does he currently possess the virtue of heroism? It is natural to assume that there is a fact of the matter; either he does possess the trait or he does not. It might be very hard to *know* what the answer is. But presumably there is an answer. Furthermore, contrary to the summary view, the answer does not depend upon the patterns of heroic thought and behavior he exhibited decades ago (except, of course, in the innocuous sense that such patterns could have played a role in shaping his current character).⁸ Furthermore, it would be very questionable to go from the absence of heroic thoughts and actions now, to the conclusion that he does not possess the character trait of heroism. We should accept, according to these critics, that he still *could* be heroic, and perhaps would demonstrate heroism if the right situations arose in the future. Stepping back from the example, the more general point is that character traits can be possessed by individuals independently of whether they have been expressed in the recent past. The summary view, critics thereby conclude, is implausible because it cannot account for this claim.

Finally, a third concern with the summary view is that we often invoke such traits to talk, not about what a person actually does, but about what she *would do* or *would have done*. In other words, this is counterfactual rather than actual behavior (i.e., how Smith would think and act if he were to notice someone drowning, not how he has thought and acted in the past in that situation). This is a perfectly natural way to use character traits in our thinking about other people (and ourselves), and according to critics, it is not clear how the summary view would account for it.⁹

ii. The Conditional View

Advocates of the rival conditional view build on this last criticism. They agree that, metaphysically speaking, character traits are not real dispositional properties which play a causal and explanatory role in giving rise to relevant thought and action (more on this later when we get to the dispositional view). But in departing from the summary view, they argue that character traits pertain to a person’s *potential* or counterfactual behavior. Thus the conditional view focuses on what people would do in nearby possible worlds, rather than on what they do in the actual world.¹⁰

The conditional view still allows for some ascriptions of character traits to individuals to turn out to be true, and others false. How? How, in other words, does it turn out to be true on this view that Lincoln was honest, and Hitler was cruel? Not surprisingly, the answer has to do with understanding such trait ascriptions in terms of conditional (mental and physical) behavior. Here is an overly simplistic example of how the account might go in the case of Lincoln:

(CV) The ascription ‘Lincoln is honest’ is true if and only if (and because) if Lincoln were to be in situations where he has an opportunity to lie, cheat, or steal, he would typically attempt to do the honest thing and do so from a honest state of mind.

Crucial to the conditional view is that this account does not invoke the role of a dispositional property of compassion—only counterfactual mental and bodily activity is needed. Thus if they can come up with plausible analyses of trait ascriptions, advocates of the conditional view believe that they can avoid any further metaphysical commitments to trait dispositional properties.

It should be apparent that the conditional view avoids all three of the concerns that were raised for the summary view. But it is not without problems of its own. For instance, critics have pointed out numerous problems with the various attempts that have been made to get the conditional analyses of trait ascriptions to work out right.¹¹

Furthermore, advocates of the dispositional view will often allege that both the summary and conditional views leave out something important in our ordinary discourse about character. We often talk about character traits as if they have a *casual* role to play in our lives. For instance, it is common to hear such statements as

“He ran away because he’s a coward.”

“My wife’s a person of integrity; she would never take a bribe.”

“You shouldn’t hire him because he’s a dishonest person and will cheat your company.”

It seems that the speakers in all three cases are explaining actual or counterfactual behavior in terms of the causal powers of cowardice, integrity, and dishonesty, respectively. Bound up with this causal role is a predictive role, too. We can see this in the third example. The speaker is alleging that, because she knows this guy is dishonest, she can predict he will end up cheating the company in the future. In this example, his dishonesty is what would lead him to cheat, it serves as the basis for predicting that he would cheat, and it causally explains his behavior were he to cheat in the future.

But if there is no such character trait of honesty itself, and only relevant (actual or counterfactual) thoughts and behavior, then critics allege that both the summary and the conditional views do not capture our ordinary thinking about character traits. To adopt either of these views would require a significant revision to commonsense thinking about character.

iii. The Dispositional View

This takes us to the dispositional view, the leading approach among philosophers today to thinking about the nature of character traits. On the dispositional view, character traits are not reducible just to collections of actual or counterfactual states of mind and behavior.¹² Intuitively, when we find out that someone is having certain thoughts, it

does not follow that she has the relevant underlying character trait that might pertain to them. The dispositional view wants to talk instead about character traits being metaphysically prior to and bringing about the relevant mental states like beliefs and desires. But not all beliefs and desires have to depend on underlying character traits.¹³

To take an example, Fox might for the moment be experiencing a host of honest thoughts—he might be considering how important it is to tell the truth, he might care about not deceiving the people he is talking to, and he might intend to tell them the truth in a considerate and respectful manner. Fox has an honest mindset, I think we would all say. But now suppose this is one of the rare times during his life where he has ever thought this way. Mostly he is quite eager to tell a lie or cheat someone if it would be to his advantage. Then I think we would also say that while he has momentary honest thoughts, he does not have the character trait of honesty.

The same point applies even more straightforwardly when we distinguish between character traits and characteristic bodily actions. Suppose now that we see Fox a few months later on the witness stand. Given information that we are privy to, we can tell that Fox is indeed telling the truth, and in a considerate and respectful manner. Then we might say that his behavior is honest, in the sense that it is the kind of behavior that we would expect from an honest person. But clearly it would be a mistake to draw the conclusion, from this one event, that he is an honest person. Merely observing his behavior on the stand does not tell us nearly enough about either the thoughts behind the action or the character traits (if any) which led to it being performed. For all we know from watching him, Fox could be telling the truth out of guilt, or to save himself from punishment. Indeed, his actions could even be traced back to a trait like selfishness. So the upshot of these last few paragraphs is that an action that seems to be virtuous does not entail the possession of a virtuous trait. And neither does a temporary state of mind that seems to be virtuous.

As the dispositional view approaches these matters, for Fox to have the character trait of honesty, he has to have some enduring *tendency or disposition* to have honest thoughts and to act in honest ways. Furthermore, this disposition is, metaphysically speaking, a real property of Fox's character. It does not depend for its existence or instantiation in his psychology on anyone's ability to recognize or conceive of it, including Fox himself. Furthermore, as we have seen, the dispositional view construes such character trait dispositions as metaphysically distinct from and prior to the thoughts and actions to which they causally give rise.

While it should be obvious, it is worth stressing that on this view, whatever thoughts are produced by character traits need not be continually active all the time or in every situation. In other words, when Fox is alone reading a book or playing a computer game, he might not be having any causally active thoughts pertaining to honesty (or, to use a better example, heroism). Instead, it could be that it is only in situations relevant to the trait, such as the courtroom and the department meeting, that they tend to come alive in his mind and causally influence his subsequent behavior. To use some popular philosophical jargon, in these situations Fox's honest thoughts go from being merely *dispositional* thoughts to being *occurrent* thoughts.¹⁴

Similarly, and again it might be an obvious point not worth mentioning, the honest thoughts that Fox forms in these situations need not be precisely the same *particular* thoughts on each relevant occasion—they can be as diverse as wanting to keep a promise to a dying relative, or caring about the integrity of a game that he is playing, or believing that it is important to make an honest confession. These all belong to the same broad type of thoughts, namely honest thoughts, even though the kinds of mental states and the content of those states are highly divergent.

So generalizing from this example of Fox, we can see that for the dispositional approach a character trait is to be understood, at least roughly, as

- (1) A causal dispositional property to form beliefs and/or desires of a certain sort and (in many cases) to act in a certain way, when in conditions relevant to that disposition.¹⁵

A person who is honest is disposed to believe, desire, and act honestly, and can be expected (other things being equal) to have those thoughts and to act this way when, for instance, testifying under oath. Someone who is dishonest instead has a different causal disposition, which leads to the formation of quite different thoughts and behaviors in a variety of circumstances.

It is worth saying a bit more about these dispositions, both to clarify the dispositional view further and to better illustrate the contrast with its two rivals. We know that dispositions of all kinds are sensitive to certain *stimulus events* or *stimulus conditions* specific to the particular disposition. A vase has the disposition of being fragile, which makes it sensitive to being hit by a baseball, but not to the color of the baseball. Or take a properly functioning thermostat. It is sensitive to room temperature, but not to its smell. Because of the way dispositions work, certain events and facts about a situation or environment will end up being relevant to a given disposition, whereas others will not.

It is also common to talk of stimulus events *triggering* characteristic *manifestations* of dispositions. A soccer ball can break a flimsy window, and the temperature of an oven can lead to a certain reading on the oven thermostat. Without their stimuli, a disposition can be latent; in my case the belief that Garfield was a president of the United States is latent just about every day of the year. But if the right stimulus comes along, such as a Jeopardy question or an American history test, this disposition can become manifest in the form of the occurrent belief that Garfield was a US president. Note that there is nothing special about my Garfield belief. All dispositions that we have to believe or to desire certain things can, when triggered, become manifest directly in the form of occurrent mental states. In turn, these occurrent mental states can play an important role in dictating subsequent behavior.¹⁶

Character traits, on this way of thinking, follow a similar pattern. The trait of honesty can be triggered by a reminder of a promise made to a dying relative, and can lead directly to honest thoughts and ultimately to honest behavior aimed at keeping that promise, despite whatever benefits there might be to breaking it.¹⁷ Note that what triggers a character trait can just be a person's *impressions* of what is going on in her

environment, impressions that in some cases can be seriously mistaken and yet still activate the relevant trait. Thus Fox might have a faulty memory and may never have made a promise to his dying relative, even though he thinks he did.¹⁸

Returning to an earlier point raised in criticism of the conditional view, we can see that the dispositional view has no trouble accommodating the causal role that we tend to think character traits play. On this approach, traits are dispositions that are not causally inert features of a person's mental life; rather, they serve as *causal mediators* between their various stimuli and manifestation events. So if Fox has an honest character disposition whereas Thomas has a dishonest one, then there is more than a mere individual difference between them. There is also (and crucially) a difference in the possession of properties that (together with the relevant stimuli) play a significant causal role in leading to honest or dishonest thoughts and behavior.

Earlier we also mentioned predictions as well as causal powers. Because of their causal role, trait dispositions can ground predictions about what people will likely do in the future, as well as what they would do in various counterfactual situations. Given that George Washington was deeply courageous and Abraham Lincoln highly honest, we can make reasonable predictions about their counterfactual behavior in other circumstances they never encountered during the course of their lives. Similarly, for honest Fox it might be true that

- (2) If Fox were to make a promise to a dying relative, he would typically attempt to keep that promise, regardless of whether breaking the promise would be in his self-interest.

Whereas for dishonest Thomas

- (3) If Thomas were to make a promise to a dying relative, he would typically not attempt to keep that promise, unless he thought doing so were in his self-interest to a relevant degree.

Of course, we shouldn't rely too much on these predictions; they are much too simplistic as stated here. After all, as with any dispositions, background conditions can interfere—Fox might also be suffering from depression or mental illness, for instance, which could prevent him from keeping his promise.¹⁹ Nevertheless, because of the causal powers of trait dispositions, observers can form certain expectations about someone's behavior based upon believing that he or she has a given character trait.

To summarize, we know about dispositions in general that they can be stimulated in various ways, and so long as the background conditions are cooperative, dispositions can give rise to their relevant manifestations. In the case of character trait dispositions, if Fox has the trait of honesty, then Fox has an actually existing (instantiation of a) property that when triggered can causally lead to the formation of occurrent honest thoughts and, thereby, honest behavior. These dispositional properties also serve to ground the truth of conditionals about what a person would likely think and do in relevant

situations that are relevant to triggering the disposition. But even though patterns of actual and conditional thought and behavior are important on the dispositional view as well, they are crucially not what the character trait itself consists of.

We could stop here, but I think it is worthwhile to dig a bit deeper. If, according to the dispositional view, character traits are causal dispositions that can exist in our minds, then an important question is how they relate to the rest of our psychological dispositions. Fortunately, there is a widely accepted answer among philosophers working on the metaphysics of character traits. Character trait dispositions consist, at least to a large extent, of interrelated mental state dispositions.²⁰ Let me unpack what this means.

We said that a trait like honesty is, according to the dispositional view, a causal disposition. But a person like Fox has mental state dispositions in his mind as well that are relevant to honest behavior. Examples might include

- A disposition to form a belief that it is important to tell the truth.
- A disposition to form a desire to always keep one's important promises.
- A disposition to form a desire to never steal from others for selfish gain.

The question we are asking now is this: How do Fox's specific belief and desire dispositions relate to another disposition we said that he also has, namely,

The disposition of honesty.

Now one answer someone might give is—there is no relation. In other words, whether a person has the trait of honesty has no connection to whether he has dispositions to form honest beliefs and desires. But that is rather difficult to believe, and not surprisingly no one has ever seriously entertained such an answer (as far as I am aware).²¹

Instead, the standard answer is to say that the relationship between character trait dispositions and mental state dispositions is best understood along the lines of the following:

A character trait disposition which is had by a person *consists of* some cluster of her relevant interrelated²² mental state dispositions such that necessarily, if she has this cluster of dispositions, then she instantiates that character trait as well in virtue of having those dispositions.²³

To put this differently, if a person has the relevant mental state dispositions, that *enables* her to have the corresponding character trait. The trait is *anchored in* the specific dispositions to form relevant beliefs and desires.

Returning to Fox, his trait of honesty is, according to this way of thinking, directly grounded in the relevant underlying mental state dispositions in his mind. Which ones? The mental state dispositions that are *appropriate* to the virtue of honesty from an ethical perspective. Examples might include his disposition to *recognize* when it is important to tell the truth, to *want* to keep promises or not cheat others regardless of whether

doing so would benefit himself, to *weigh* different ways of keeping a promise appropriately, and so forth. But there are limits here. For instance, presumably not on the list of appropriate mental state dispositions would be something like a disposition to want to cheat whenever possible if it would be in his self-interest and there is little chance of getting caught. On any plausible ethical perspective, that disposition could not be a constituent of the virtue of honesty. Figure 1.1 offers an illustration of this emerging picture, where the arrows are meant to symbolize causal influence.

Suppose Fox is reminded of the important promise he made to his now deceased relative. And suppose the relevant background conditions are cooperative. His trait of honesty might then be activated. What this amounts to, on the preceding picture, is that some or all of the underlying dispositions to form mental states appropriate to the virtue of honesty are being activated. We have already said that since they are dispositions, they will have their own stimulus conditions. In this example, the primary stimulus is the reminder about the promise. Once activated, they go from being latent dispositions to bringing about all sorts of occurrent mental states as their manifestations—beliefs, wishes, hopes, intentions, and so on, of the relevant sort, in this case the honest sort. Those occurrent mental states can then, other things being equal, bring about honest actions.²⁴

We can now see that were it not for the appropriate mental state dispositions, Fox would not be able to even qualify as having the trait of honest in the first place. They serve as prerequisites for trait possession, and so they must be present in order for Fox to be a suitable candidate for instantiating an honest disposition.

Building on these ideas, the dispositional view can now make use of underlying mental state dispositions to provide deeper and much more informative explanations for

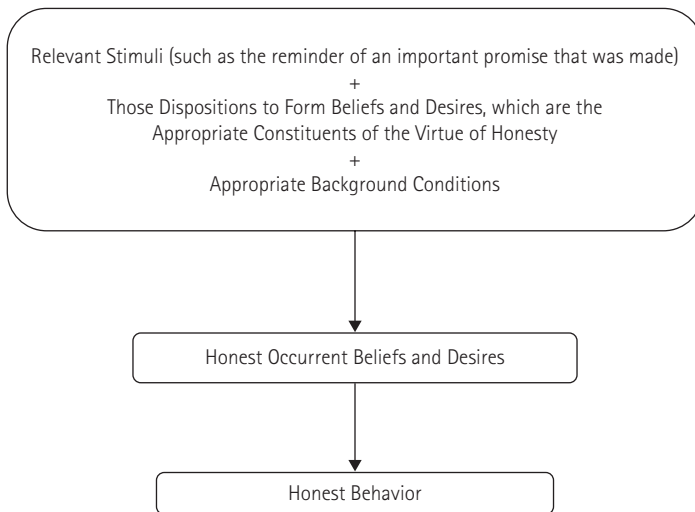


FIGURE 1.1. The character trait of honesty, honest thoughts, and honest behavior.

This figure is adapted from Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 27.

why someone like Fox acts in the relevant ways. Ordinarily, a particular act by an honest person can be explained (at least in part) by appealing to the causal work of the trait of honesty. We should accept that as a legitimate explanation and acknowledge that it does provide *something* informative. It tells us something we might not have known before about Fox, namely that he is an honest person, and we can now use that to predict how he might tend to behave in other relevant situations.

At the same time, we should also acknowledge that this is a fairly shallow explanation. We have explained Fox's honest actions by appealing to his trait of honesty, but we had better not turn around and explain his trait of honesty by appealing back to his honest actions.

Fortunately, we don't have to. Now we can take the explanatory story further by explaining the trait of honesty itself in terms of the more particular underlying dispositions to form specific beliefs and desires that are also found in Fox's psychology. This allows for a deeper and more psychologically satisfying explanation, while also making use of familiar mental categories like beliefs and desires that are already found to be illuminating by most people in explaining behavior.²⁵

Of course, the story does not end with the mental state dispositions. Just as we did with character trait dispositions, we can now ask about what underlies these dispositions as well. Ultimately such a question might take us to a discussion of properties at the neural or (even further) at the atomic or quantum levels. But this chapter is clearly not the place to engage in *that* discussion. The point for now is that we can be content with talking about dispositions to form occurrent mental states like beliefs or desires, as there is nothing unfamiliar about these dispositions from the perspective of philosophy; independent of anything having to do with character, these mental state dispositions are commonplace to anyone working in the philosophy of mind. So for our purposes here, I will not go any further than one level down from trait dispositions.

Even so, this is not to say that no important questions remain. Especially pressing is the following. Suppose we grant that a character trait disposition is grounded in a causal base that, as we have been saying, consists of mental state dispositions. What then is the work that would remain for the *traits themselves* to do? Put differently, wouldn't it follow that character trait dispositions can just be eliminated entirely, leaving researchers to conduct future work only on the underlying mental state dispositions?

Following the lead of familiar discussions from the philosophy of mind, we can proceed in one of two different directions at this point. One direction is to accept a version of a *property dualist* view. This would make trait dispositional properties metaphysically distinct from their causal bases; perhaps the former are constituted by, but not reducible to, the latter. What would ground the truth of statements about character traits, on this approach, would be the instantiation of trait dispositional properties, rather than, in the first instance, the causal bases of those trait dispositions.

The other way to go is even more straightforward. On a *property monist* view, the character trait dispositions would be simply identical to the mental state dispositions in the causal bases that underlie them.²⁶ Back to our example of Fox, his honesty would thereby be understood as nothing more than the various interrelated dispositions to form honest mental states.

It is important to note that property monism about character traits is a metaphysical position. It is not claiming, and in fact would simply deny, that people ordinarily tend to think of character traits and mental state dispositions as identical. By analogy, most people throughout history never realized that water = H₂O. Furthermore, even if word gets out about character traits and people do start to accept the identity claim, there can still be all kinds of pragmatic reasons why we might want to continue to describe character traits and their casual bases in different ways. The case of water is helpful here, too. Hence it is important to stress that the metaphysical identity claim offered by property monists about character traits is importantly distinct from identity claims about our concepts or our discourse pertaining to character traits. By way of summary, Figure 1.2 provides a rough guide to both the property monist and dualist approaches.²⁷

Naturally in the vast literature on dispositions in general, there are plenty of philosophers on both sides of the property dualism versus monism debate.²⁸ But it turns out, surprisingly perhaps, that in the character trait literature in philosophy, almost nothing has been said about such matters.

Which view should the advocate of the dispositional view of character traits adopt? There is nowhere near the space needed to investigate this issue properly. But I can at least register my own preference for a monist approach. Here briefly is one consideration in its favor.²⁹ We already said that

- (4) Each character trait disposition has a causal base of mental state dispositions.

The trait dualist approach claims that

- (5) Each character trait disposition is metaphysically distinct from its underlying mental state dispositions.

Together these claims seem to suggest that

- (6) Each character trait disposition is causally inert.³⁰

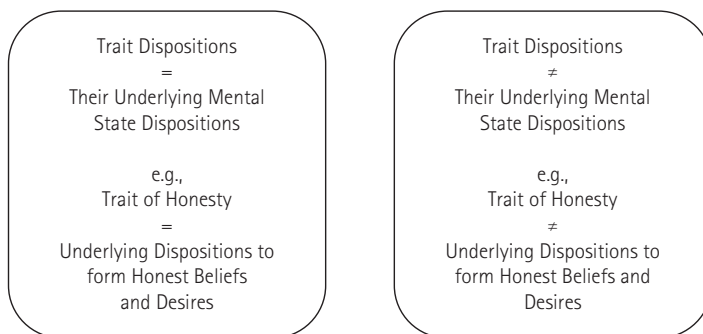


FIGURE 1.2. Character trait monism versus trait dualism.

This figure is adapted from Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 29.

But (6) is extremely implausible. If accepted, it would require that most people significantly change how they think and talk about character traits. Indeed, one of the main reasons (if not *the* main reason) for ascribing a character trait to someone in ordinary discourse is to attempt to causally explain that person's thoughts and behavior.

Now of course (4) and (5) do not logically entail (6). But it is not hard to see why someone who holds them could be saddled with (6) as well. Otherwise, if you maintain that character traits have their own distinct causal powers, then causal overdetermination looms in every case where occurrent thoughts and actions arise from character traits. In our example, this would be to say that, for property dualists, whenever Fox forms a desire to tell the truth to Smith, this is caused *both* by one or more mental state dispositions (such as, among others, a disposition to desire to tell the truth) *and* by his character trait of honesty. What is more, the mental state dispositions and the character trait in this example would each have been causally sufficient to do the job by themselves.³¹ Figure 1.3 provides an illustration of what is going on if one accepts property dualism and also wants to maintain that trait dispositions do causal work:³²

Causal overdetermination should be apparent from this figure. And most philosophers find causal overdetermination to be a bitter pill to swallow.³³ What can character trait dualists do to avoid it? The natural alternative is to accept (6) and maintain that character traits do not do any causal work of their own. They are causally epiphenomenal. But that, too, seems like a bitter pill to swallow, as we mentioned earlier. So dualism about the metaphysics of character traits can seem like a very costly view to accept no matter how you spell it out further.

This kind of argumentative strategy is familiar from the philosophy of mind literature on the relationship between the mental and the physical. It has also shown up more recently in other areas of philosophy, such as meta-ethics.³⁴ Of course there are philosophers in those areas who are not persuaded by the analogous arguments to reject property dualist views. So they will likely be unmoved here. Nevertheless, the preceding is still worth serious consideration.

For now I will leave things here in discussing the dispositional view of character traits. This view currently has the upper hand over rival summary and conditional views in the philosophy literature on character, but much more work is needed in developing and defending all three positions.

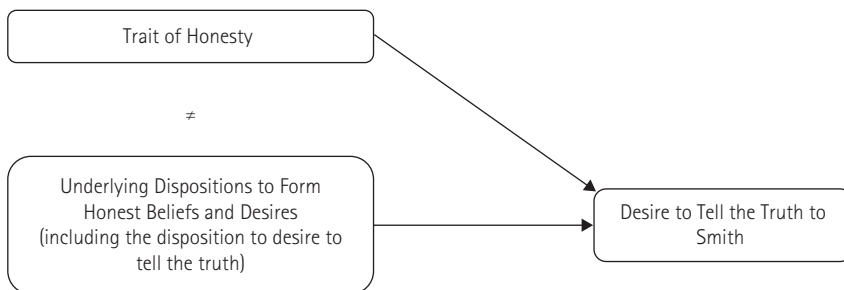


FIGURE 1.3. Character trait dualism and causal overdetermination.

This figure is adapted from Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 31

II. WHAT CHARACTER TRAITS DO WE ACTUALLY HAVE?

In the remainder of this chapter, I want to briefly turn from armchair metaphysics about the nature of character traits to recent empirical debates about character that are being informed by research in psychology.³⁵ These debates, it is important to stress, have *not* tended to be about whether people actually have any moral character traits. That is a question which has basically been put to rest by just about every philosopher and psychologist who works on character. Other than certain extreme versions of the situationist movement in psychology that appeared in the 1960s, the predominant view has been that people do in fact have character traits. This includes even the most prominent figures connected with situationism in psychology, such as Walter Mischel, and the most prominent figures connected with situationism in philosophy, such as John Doris. They do not deny the existence of character traits in general.³⁶

The interesting question, then, does not concern *whether* people have character traits. Rather, it concerns what our character traits *tend to look like*. And almost immediately we move from widespread agreement to widespread disagreement, both among philosophers and among psychologists. Again, I won't weigh in on this debate, but simply map out the leading positions.

To distinguish between these options, it is helpful to consider some of the various dimensions along which character traits might differ. The 'some' is important, as there are plenty of other dimensions that will not be mentioned here. Also, in an effort to make the discussion less abstract, I will focus on the part of our character that has to do with whether we cheat or refrain from cheating at something. So let us consider the following:

- (7) A person can have a particular character trait pertaining to cheating thoughts and behavior which
 - (i) *Is either a global or a local trait.* A global trait is one that is cross-situationally consistent, such that it tends to give rise to relevant thought and behavior in a variety of different trait-relevant situations. With regard to cheating, these could include, for instance, situations in which one could cheat on a test, cheat on one's spouse, or cheat on one's taxes. A local trait is one that is restricted to a particular narrowly understood situation. With regard to cheating, such a trait could, for instance, be one that prevents cheating just on one's taxes. Note that this trait is compatible with also having the distinct trait of being disposed to cheat on one's spouse.
 - (ii) *Tends to give rise to virtuous, vicious, or some other kind of motivation.* A trait pertaining to cheating could cause the formation of motives that are predominantly virtuous, such as a desire to not take advantage of innocent people. Or it could cause the formation of motives that are predominantly vicious, such as a desire to cheat others so as to advance a career. Or it could

give rise to a diverse array of motives, some of which are virtuous and some of which are not. For instance, it could in some situations lead to egoistic motives to cheat, and in other situations to virtuous motives to not cheat.

- (iii) *Tends to give rise to virtuous, vicious, or some other kind of behavior.* As in the preceding, except the focus is on patterns of behavior rather than patterns of motivation.
- (iv) *Is stable over time.* There is not much debate about this feature of a character trait. Whether the trait pertains to a variety of different situations (hence is global) or just one (local), it is expected to give rise to similar thoughts and actions in repeated instances of the same kind of situation.

Given this taxonomy of options, here are some of the leading positions in the philosophy literature on what our character traits tend to look like. Keep in mind, though, that this list is by no means exhaustive.

i. Most People Have the Traditional Aristotelian Virtues

These are character traits that (i) are global, (ii) tend to give rise to virtuous motivation, (iii) tend to give rise to virtuous action, and (iv) are stable over time. Aristotelians about character would typically consider these to be defining features of the virtues.³⁷ The view here claims that most people have all (or at least many) of the virtues, so understood.³⁸

Hence in our example, most people would be said to have the virtue of honesty, which, among other things, pertains to a variety of cheating-relevant situations, tends to give rise to motivation not to cheat unjustifiably, tends to prevent unjustified cheating from occurring, and is stable in these ways over time.

Is this view correct when it claims that most people actually have the virtues? One leading challenge in recent years has come from certain studies in psychology that are cited in discussions of situationism.³⁹ These studies tend to find that most people seem to be highly sensitive, in their thought and action, to morally irrelevant considerations, while being not nearly sensitive enough to the morally relevant considerations. The upshot is that there are many studies finding patterns of behavior by participants that are not virtuous, or so at least critics allege.⁴⁰

ii. Most People Have the Traditional Aristotelian Vices

These are character traits that (i) are global, (ii) tend to give rise to vicious motivation, (iii) tend to give rise to vicious action, and (iv) are stable over time. Aristotelians about character would typically consider these to be defining features of the vices.⁴¹ The view here claims that most people have all (or at least many) of the vices, so understood. In our example of cheating, this would be the vice of dishonesty.

Is this view correct when it claims that most people actually have the vices? It turns out that the studies cited in the literature on situationism can be used against this position,

too. Why is that? Because these studies also found *other* situations and contexts in which participants *are* appropriately sensitive to morally relevant considerations in their thought and actions, thereby leading to patterns of behavior that would not be expected of a vicious person.⁴² Hence some have claimed that there is also strong evidence against the widespread possession of the vices, too.⁴³

iii. Most People Have Local Virtues or Local Vices

These are character traits that (i) are local, (ii) tend to give rise to virtuous motivation (or vicious, for the vices), (iii) tend to give rise to virtuous action (or vicious), and (iv) are stable over time. The key point is that they are not cross-situationally consistent in their behavioral manifestation, and so are local (as opposed to global) traits. Examples include honesty just in the courtroom, or cruelty just at the office. One view, then, is that most people have local virtues that make up their characters. Another view is that most people have local vices that make up their characters.⁴⁴

A challenge for both of these views is that there is extensive evidence in psychology for the widespread possession of morally relevant psychological dispositions that function in a *variety* of situations, and not just in one situation, such as a courtroom or the office. Examples include desires to help others so as to maintain a good mood, or desires to not help others so as to avoid feeling empathy for the suffering of another person, or desires to hurt someone so as to protect one's self-esteem, and so forth.⁴⁵ If it is dispositions such as these which are widespread and are often causally efficacious in giving rise to moral thought and behavior, then since they function cross-situationally, they are a poor fit with a local trait picture.⁴⁶

iv. Most People Have Mixed Traits

These are character traits that (i) are global, (ii) tend to give rise to motivation that as a whole is neither predominantly virtuous nor predominantly vicious, (iii) tend to give rise to actions that as a whole are neither predominantly virtuous nor predominantly vicious, and (iv) are stable over time. In other words, they are global character traits that are a "mixed-bag" morally speaking, as they are neither good enough to count as virtues nor bad enough to count as vices. Hence they can be called mixed traits.⁴⁷ The view claims that most people have all (or mostly) mixed traits, so understood, as the constituents of their characters.

In the case of cheating, for instance, here are some of the mental state dispositions that constitute a mixed cheating trait:⁴⁸

- (a) Dispositions to form beliefs concerned with how cheating is wrong (in most cases).
- (b) Dispositions to form beliefs and desires concerned with cheating in order to avoid personal failure, embarrassment, and so forth.

- (c) Dispositions to form beliefs and desires concerned with not cheating in order to avoid getting caught, punished, and so forth.
- (d) Dispositions to form desires concerned with not cheating when the benefits of cheating do not (significantly) outweigh the costs.
- (e) Dispositions to form desires concerned with cheating when the benefits of cheating (significantly) outweigh the costs, while also desiring as much as possible to still be thought of as an honest person by oneself and others.

Three things are worth noting about this example. First, these dispositions would be expected to function cross-situationally, and not just, say, in the courtroom or at the office. Second, they are a mixed bag morally speaking. The first set is quite morally admirable, for instance, whereas the second set is not. Third, there is empirical evidence that they are widely possessed.⁴⁹

Is this view correct when it claims that most people actually have mixed traits? Here I will have to take a stand, since I have defended this position in a number of places.⁵⁰ But there are problems for the view, too. One is that it is hard to specify precisely what the borderline or threshold is that separates a mixed trait from either a virtue or a vice. In the case of cheating, for instance, what criteria would we employ in order to tell whether someone's character is honest, dishonest, or mixed?⁵¹

Before concluding, I need to mention one additional approach that is becoming increasingly popular in the philosophical literature on traits.⁵² It is to draw on the "cognitive-affective personality system" (CAPS) model from social psychology, which was formulated primarily by Walter Mischel, Yuichi Shoda, and Jack Wright over the past forty years. Some readers might be puzzled as to why it was not included as one of the preceding options. First let me briefly summarize the CAPS model, and then I will explain why I omitted it from the list.

To get a feel for the model, let's start with the basic building blocks, which are called "cognitive-affective units," but which just amount to a person's beliefs, desires, intentions, and other mental states. Next we can introduce "if-then situation-behavior contingencies." The "ifs" are the various situations that the person confronts, and the "thens" are what she does in response to those situations. To take a very simple example, she might agree to donate a dollar to a veterans group when checking out at the grocery store. The next person in line, however, may not donate, even though the situations look to be the same. So there are true conditional statements about what each person would do when in that kind of situation. What explains their divergent behavior are their cognitive-affective units. The first person may have a relative who fought in a war, for instance, which sparks various positive emotional associations in her mind with helping veterans groups. The second shopper might not have any of those associations.

So in one sense both shoppers confront the same situation, but in another sense they do not. Hence the CAPS model distinguishes between the "nominal" versus the "psychologically salient" features of situations. The nominal features are more objective and neutral—in the example, they include being in line at the grocery store and

being asked to donate to charity. The psychologically salient features are invested with personal meaning in virtue of each person's cognitive-affective units. In this case, they would have to do with the meaning attached to the veterans group in the first shopper's mind. Hence two people might be in the same nominal situation, but act in completely opposite ways given what is psychologically salient to them. Finally, let's end this very brief presentation with the concept of an "intra-individual behavioral signature." Our first shopper over time will exhibit a certain pattern of behavior that extends far beyond the grocery story. It might, for instance, include how she tends to act at the gym and the office as well. This distinctive pattern of behavior in a variety of situations is her behavioral signature, where these situations are to be understood using their psychologically salient features.⁵³

Back to character traits: How does the CAPS model understand them? There is no straightforward answer to be found in the psychology literature. Sometimes Mischel and his colleagues even want to avoid talking about traits altogether. Nevertheless, there is a straightforward application of the CAPS model to character that one could make. We can just understand individual character traits as clusters of causally interrelated cognitive-affective units.⁵⁴ For instance, the beliefs and desires having to do with cheating listed earlier in (a) through (e) could serve as one example of such a cluster, since they are naturally thought to be causally interrelated with each other.

So back to the question that arose when the CAPS model was first mentioned. Why was it not among the options for understanding what most people's character traits look like? Now we are in a better position to see the answer—the CAPS model doesn't actually offer us a competing position to the others on the list. Instead, it is compatible with *all* of these options. For instance, it might turn out on empirical grounds that our cognitive-affective units happen to constitute moral virtues. Or instead they happen to constitute moral vices. Or they could be local virtues or local vices. Mixed traits would be an option as well. By not specifying what the cognitive-affective units are in most people, the CAPS model is suitably general that it could fit with all these (and other) options.

So by way of summary, we have seen four different views about what the character traits of most people actually look like today. While I have indicated where my own sympathies lie, unfortunately at the time of writing this chapter I do not see any consensus emerging among philosophers about where the truth is to be found.

III. CONCLUSION

It has become commonplace to observe how much newfound interest and attention has been paid to issues about character and virtue in recent decades. But while many topics have by now been thoroughly discussed, in my view the metaphysical and empirical debates outlined in this chapter are not among them. I hope that this will change in the coming years.⁵⁵

NOTES

1. This section draws on material from Christian Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), Chap. 1, which has been revised for this chapter. I am grateful to Oxford University Press for permission to draw on this material.
2. A separate question is whether all personality traits are character traits. I give some arguments for saying no in Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, Chap. 1.
3. D. Buss and K. Craik, "The Act Frequency Approach to Personality," *Psychological Review* 90 (1983): 106.
4. J. Johnson, "Units of Analysis for the Description and Explanation of Personality," in *Handbook of Personality Psychology*, edited by Robert Hogan, John Johnson, and Stephen Briggs (San Diego: Academic Press, 1997), 74.
5. W. Mischel, "Toward a Cognitive Social Learning Reconceptualization of Personality," *Psychological Review* 80 (1973): 264, emphasis his. Note, though, that Mischel does not say in this quote that this is *all there is* to traits. However, that is what is suggested if we look at the surrounding context in his article.
6. J. Wiggins, "In Defense of Traits," in *Handbook of Personality Psychology*, edited by R. Hogan, J. Johnson, and S. Briggs (San Diego: Academic Press, 1997): 108. For extensive support for the summary view, see Buss and Craik, "The Act Frequency Approach to Personality"; and Wiggins, "In Defense of Traits," 102–108. For discussion that seems to suggest support for the summary view, see Stuart Hampshire, "Dispositions," *Analysis* 14 (1953): 9; W. Mischel, *Personality and Assessment* (New York: John J. Wiley and Sons, 1968), 42, 68–69, 1973: 262, 264; R. Hogan, C. DeSoto, and C. Solano, "Traits, Tests, and Personality Research," *American Psychologist* 32 (1977): 256–257; A. Buss, "Personality as Traits," *American Psychologist* 44 (1989): 1383, 1386; R. Hogan, "Personality and Personality Measurement," in *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 2nd edition, edited by M. D. Dunnette and L. M. Hough (Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1991), 875; R. Hogan, "A Socioanalytic Perspective on the Five-Factor Model," in *The Five Factor Model of Personality: Theoretical Perspectives*, edited by J. Wiggins (New York: The Guilford Press, 1996), 170–173; W. Revelle, "Personality Processes," *Annual Review of Psychology* 46 (1995): 315; D. Winter, O. John, A. Stewart, E. Klohnen, and L. Duncan, "Traits and Motives: Toward an Integration of Two Traditions in Personality Research," *Psychological Review* 105 (1998): 232–236; W. Fleeson, "Toward a Structure- and Process-Integrated View of Personality: Traits as Density Distributions of States," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 80 (2001): 1011–1027; W. Fleeson, "Situation-Based Contingencies Underlying Trait-Content Manifestation in Behavior," *Journal of Personality* 75 (2007): 825; W. Fleeson and E. Nofle, "Where Does Personality Have Its Influence? A Supermatrix of Consistency Concepts," *Journal of Personality* 76 (2008a): 1363; W. Fleeson and E. Nofle, "The End of the Person-Situation Debate: An Emerging Synthesis in the Answer to the Consistency Question," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 2 (2008b): 1667–1684; and D. Heller, W. Perunovic, and D. Reichman, "The Future of Person-Situation Integration in the Interface between Traits and Goals: A Bottom-Up Framework," *Journal of Research in Personality* 43 (2009): 171.
7. For similar remarks, see Richard Brandt, "Traits of Character: A Conceptual Analysis," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 7 (1970): 26; T. H. Irwin, "The Virtues: Theory and Common Sense in Greek Philosophy," in *How Should One Live? Essays on the Virtues*, edited by R. Crisp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 54; Stephen Mumford, *Dispositions* (Oxford:

- Oxford University Press, 1998), 8; and Joel Kupperman, *Character* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 15. For an opposing view, see Hampshire, "Dispositions," 6.
8. Hence critics would likely object to Wiggins's proposal that "the statement 'John is aggressive' conveys that John has been observed to engage in topographically dissimilar aggressive actions over a period of time" (Wiggins, "In Defense of Traits," 104, emphasis removed; see also 99). The statement that 'John is aggressive,' according to the objection in the text, could be true of him, even despite the fact that he either has never exhibited those actions or only did so in the distant past. Furthermore, we typically think that the statement can convey something in addition about the patterns of thought and behavior he *would* exhibit in certain future situations. But the summary view denies that personality traits ground true counterfactual conditionals (Wiggins, "In Defense of Traits," 107).
 9. For additional criticism of the summary view, see L. Newman and J. Uleman, "Spontaneous Trait Inference," in *Unintended Thought*, edited by J. Uleman and J. Bargh (New York: Guilford, 1989), 164.
 10. For relevant discussion, see J. Wright, and W. Mischel, "A Conditional Approach to Dispositional Constructs: The Local Predictability of Social Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 53 (1987): 1161–1162; and Newman and Uleman, "Spontaneous Trait Inference," 163–164.
 11. For relevant discussion, see Stephen Mumford, *Dispositions*, and Candace Upton, *Situational Traits of Character* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).
 12. For psychologists who adopt the dispositional approach to conceptualizing traits, see, e.g., G. Allport, "Traits Revisited," *American Psychologist* 21 (1966): 3; Mischel, *Personality and Assessment*, 6, 9; A. Tellegen, "Personality Traits: Issues of Definition, Evidence, and Assessment," in *Thinking Clearly about Psychology: Personality and Psychopathology*, edited by William Grove and Dante Cicchetti, Vol. 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 13; L. Pervin, "A Critical Analysis of Current Trait Theory," *Psychological Inquiry* 5 (1994): 108; S. Epstein, "The Stability of Behavior: I. On Predicting Most of the People Much of the Time," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37 (1979): 1097–1098, 1121; S. Epstein, "Trait Theory as Personality Theory: Can a Part Be as Great as the Whole?" *Psychological Inquiry* 5 (1994): 121; R. McCrae, and P. Costa, "Trait Explanations in Personality Psychology," *European Journal of Personality* 9 (1995): 231–252; and J. Johnson, "Persons in Situations: Distinguishing New Wine from Old Wine in New Bottles," *European Journal of Personality* 13 (1999): 444. For references to a large body of work in philosophy that adopts this approach, see Christian Miller, *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7 fn. 12; and John Doris, "Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics," *Noûs* 32 (1998): 509 fn. 20; John Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 15 fn. 2.
 13. For the distinction between traits and states in psychology, see, e.g., W. Mischel and Y. Shoda, "A Cognitive-Affective System Theory of Personality: Reconceptualizing Situations, Dispositions, Dynamics, and Invariance in Personality Structure," *Psychological Review* 102 (1995): 257; Fleeson and Nettle, *Where Does Personality Have Its Influence? A Supermatrix of Consistency Concepts*, 1358; Fleeson and Nettle, "The End of the Person-Situation Debate: An Emerging Synthesis in the Answer to the Consistency Question"; W. Fleeson and P. Gallagher, "The Implications of Big Five Standing for the Distribution of Trait Manifestation in Behavior: Fifteen Experience-Sampling Studies

and a Meta-Analysis,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 98 (2009): 1099; and B. Roberts, “Back to the Future: *Personality and Assessment* and Personality Development,” *Journal of Research in Personality* 43 (2009): 140 (and the references cited therein). The distinction is widespread in the philosophy literature on character.

14. To be clear, occurrent thoughts do not have to be conscious thoughts. People can have many occurrent desires that are subconscious, and yet which are having a significant causal impact on their behavior in various ways. In our example, Fox might be telling the truth on the stand in the courtroom, without realizing that an unconscious desire to avoid embarrassment is playing a major role in leading him to do so.
15. This characterization follows Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 6. It is important to stress that the dispositional view is not claiming that this is *all* there is to a character trait. Also, talk of ‘beliefs’ and ‘desires’ in this chapter is shorthand for a variety of mental phenomena including emotions and intentions as well.

The hedging remarks “and/or” and “in many cases” are needed since it is a matter of controversy whether all character traits pertain to beliefs, desires, and bodily actions. Given this controversy, the dispositional account should remain neutral in its understanding of character traits. For instance, irritability or general anxiousness might not have a belief component, whereas foresight or closed-mindedness might not have a desire component.

Finally, many psychologists require as part of their understanding of character traits that there be individual differences in how people are disposed to believe, desire, and act in order for there to be character traits. But (1) involves no such requirement. Rather, the dispositional view acknowledges that individual differences are important to *gathering evidence* for whether someone has a given trait. But in theory, at least, there might be a society or culture with no individual differences in character trait possession (e.g., where everyone has honesty or courage equally). That seems conceivable at least. But then it follows that individual differences are not a conceptual requirement on character traits. For a similar point, see Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, 19 fn. 23; Rachana Kamtekar, “Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of Our Character,” *Ethics* 114 (2004): 468; Neera Badhwar, “The Milgram Experiments, Learned Helplessness, and Character Traits,” *The Journal of Ethics* 13 (2009): 280; and Ernest Sosa, “Situations against Virtues: The Situationist Attack on Virtue Theory,” in *Philosophy of the Social Sciences: Philosophical Theory and Scientific Practice*, edited by C. Mantzavinos (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 287. For the opposing view, see Johnson, “Persons in Situations: Distinguishing New Wine from Old Wine in New Bottles,” 74, 87; D. Funder, “Persons, Situations, and Person-Situation Interactions,” in *Handbook of Personality: Theory and Research*, 3rd edition, edited by O. John., R. Robins, and L. Pervin (New York: The Guilford Press, 2008), 570; and W. Fleeson, and E. Nofle, “In Favor of the Synthetic Resolution to the Person-Situation Debate,” *Journal of Research in Personality* 43 (2009): 151.

16. The “can” is important in these statements, since background conditions also play an important role. To use familiar examples from the literature on dispositions, a match is flammable (disposition) and typically lights (manifestation) when struck (stimulus), but the background conditions need to be conducive. If the environment has no oxygen, then it won’t light. A vase is fragile (disposition) and typically breaks (manifestation) when knocked off a ledge (stimulus), but the background conditions need to be conducive. If gravity is much weaker than it normally is on Earth, then it won’t break. And so forth.
17. Note that this doesn’t imply that the honest behavior depends *only* on the trait of honesty—other character traits, for instance, may also play a partial causal role as well,

such as wisdom or thoughtfulness. Furthermore, following the previous note, the sequence from the trait of honesty to honest thoughts and then honest behavior can be interrupted if there are interfering background conditions. Serious depression or mental illness can serve to block the operation of the trait and prevent the formation of honest thoughts, even in the presence of considerations that overwhelmingly favor being honest. For general discussion of character traits and background conditions, see Brandt, "Traits of Character: A Conceptual Analysis," 35; and Candace Upton, "A Contextual Account of Character Traits," *Philosophical Studies* 122 (2005): 135–136; Candace Upton, *Situational Traits of Character*, 27–30.

18. For more on this last point, see William Alston, "Traits, Consistency and Conceptual Alternatives for Personality Theory," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 5 (1975): 21.

One omission from the preceding discussion is any specification of how *frequently* character traits are actually triggered. The reason for this omission is that it depends on so many different variables, including how strongly the trait is held, the situations the person is in, and even the nature of the particular trait itself. On this last point, a case could be made that certain traits, such as fairness or modesty, are going to be active quite frequently during the day by people who have them deeply. Other traits, such as, perhaps, bravery or integrity, may be much less frequently activated, especially if the person is rarely in situations that would trigger them. Indeed, as we said earlier when discussing the summary view, it even seems possible on conceptual grounds that a person could have a character trait that never gets triggered at all.

19. For a helpful overview of ways to refine these predictions, see Upton, *Situational Traits of Character*, Chap. 2.
20. For citations to the many philosophers who accept this idea, see Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 26 fn. 63. The qualification "at least to a large extent" is important, if one thinks that (i) certain abilities, faculties (e.g., willpower if it is a faculty), or skills (e.g., perceptual sensitivities) might also be involved in at least some cases in possessing a character trait, and (ii) these abilities, faculties, or skills do not themselves entirely consist of mental state dispositions but rather some additional psychological entities.
21. One obvious difficulty is that it is very implausible to think someone's possession of a trait like honesty is independent of what her specific desires with regard to truth-telling, cheating, and stealing are like, and so could be compatible in theory with having base desires for self-advancement through theft or duplicity.
22. The 'interrelated' is important. A random collection of mental state dispositions will not amount to a character trait like honesty; the contents of the mental states matter a great deal. But even having the right mental state dispositions needed for honesty is not enough, if they (or the occurrent states they give rise to) do not trigger each other when it is appropriate to do so. Fox's belief about an important promise he made should, in the relevant situations, be related to a desire to keep that promise. In other words, an unrelated bunch of mental states does not a character trait make. For relevant discussion, see Nancy Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory* (New York: Routledge Press, 2010), 20.
23. This proposal follows Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 31. For an important qualification of this claim, see footnote 20.
24. Nothing about this sequence or about Figure 1.1 is meant to imply that the process leading to honest behavior is a reflective or even conscious process. The behavior might be spontaneous, and could result from subconscious occurrent mental states which arose from dispositions that were triggered without the person in question realizing that they were.

25. For more on character traits, mental states, and explanation, see Tellegen, "Personality Traits: Issues of Definition, Evidence, and Assessment," 14; Johnson, "Units of Analysis for the Description and Explanation of Personality," 77–78; and Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of Our Character," 479. By connecting character traits and underlying mental state dispositions, the dispositional view also avoids the objection to traits raised by Lawrence Pervin, according to which a motive "is different from the trait concept, not a substitute for it and certainly not to be replaced by it!" (Pervin, "A Critical Analysis of Current Trait Theory," 110). The dispositional view would certainly agree.
26. See Brandt, "Traits of Character: A Conceptual Analysis," 30, which was one of the first papers to develop this position. To put things a bit more precisely, the claim is that *token* trait dispositional properties are identical to the cluster of *token* mental state dispositional properties that underlie them. So this allows the property monist about trait dispositional properties only to commit to a token identity position. That is still compatible with also denying type identity between the two kinds of dispositions. In addition, I acknowledge that it might be a bit confusing to talk about a 'causal base' for a character trait on the property monist view given that if two things are identical it is not clear what it means to say that one is the base for the other.
27. This figure is adapted from Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 29.
28. For examples, see David Armstrong, *Belief, Truth and Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); E. Prior, R. Pargetter, and F. Jackson, "Three Theses about Dispositions," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 19 (1982): 251–257; and Mumford, *Dispositions*. To avoid one potential source of confusion, my use of 'property dualism' and 'property monism' in this chapter differs from the standard usage in the larger disposition literature. There monists and dualists are often debating the nature of the relationship between dispositional and *categorical* properties. But here I have been concerned with the relationship between dispositional properties on one level (character traits) and dispositional properties on another, underlying level (mental states). Hence my discussion is, strictly speaking, orthogonal to the larger debate in the disposition literature, and also neutral on whether categorical properties *ultimately* underlie dispositional ones.
29. For similar discussion, see Prior et al., "Three Theses about Dispositions," 255–256; and Mumford, *Dispositions*, 114–117.
30. Prior et al., "Three Theses about Dispositions," argue much more generally that this is an implication of property dualism with respect to all dispositional properties.
31. As Prior et al. write, "It is relatively non-controversial that one event may have two distinct (antecedent) sufficient conditions. We deny, however, that one event ever has two distinct *operative* sufficient conditions. The classic examples of overdetermination are ones where one sufficient condition is operative, the other is not" (Prior et al., "Three Theses about Dispositions," 255, emphasis theirs).
32. This figure is adapted from Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 31.
33. Naturally the mere fact that most philosophers find something implausible doesn't constitute a very good argument against that thing. So in a longer discussion we would need to spell out what exactly it is about causal overdetermination that is supposed to be so problematic.
34. For a starting point in philosophy of mind, see Jaegwon Kim, *Philosophy of Mind* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), Chap. 6. For the same argument with respect to moral properties, see Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 105–114.

35. This section is a significantly expanded and revised version of a similar discussion in Christian Miller, "Character and Situationism: New Directions," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 20 (2017): 459–471. I am grateful to Springer for permission to draw on this material.
36. For more on situationism and character, see Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, Chap. 24.
37. This is not intended to be an exhaustive account of the features of a virtue on an Aristotelian approach. But they are each central features.
38. For a version of this view, see Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics and Social Psychology," *A Priori* (2003). <https://kb.osu.edu/dspace/handle/1811/32006?mode=full>.
39. For more on situationism, see Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, and Chap. 24 of this volume.
40. See in particular Doris, "Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics"; Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*.
41. Again, these are not intended to be all the features of a vice on an Aristotelian approach. But they are each central features.
42. Perhaps the best example of this is the work of Daniel Batson on empathy, altruism, and helping. See, in particular, C. Batson, *Altruism in Humans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). For a variety of other relevant studies, see Miller, *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory*.
43. See Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*; and Miller, *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory*.
44. See Doris, "Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics," 507–508; Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, 23–25, 64–66, for these options. Potentially one could have a view whereby most people have a variety of local virtues and vices together. Also, a different account of local virtues (and vices) would require just virtuous behavior, rather than both virtuous behavior and virtuous motivations. In the interest of space, and to avoid things becoming too tedious, I have omitted these options from the preceding.
45. For dozens of examples of such dispositions and some of the supporting psychological evidence for positing them, see Miller, *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory*.
46. For an extended version of this argument, see Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, Chap. 8.
47. For details see Miller, *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory*; Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*.
48. This list is adapted from Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 73.
49. For a review of some of this evidence, see Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, Chap. 3.
50. See especially Miller, *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory*; Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*.
51. I have tried to address this challenge in Miller, *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory*, Chap. 10; and Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, Chap. 3; but much more needs to be done.
52. See Christian Miller, "Social Psychology and Virtue Ethics," *The Journal of Ethics* 7 (2003): 392; Daniel Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009), Chap. 8–10; and Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory*, Chap. 1. For a brief connection, see also Robert Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 131–138.

53. For a thorough presentation of the central claims and supporting evidence for the CAPS model, see Mischel and Shoda, "A Cognitive-Affective System Theory of Personality: Reconceptualizing Situations, Dispositions, Dynamics, and Invariance in Personality Structure." For a review, see Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, Chap. 5.
54. For more details, see the works cited in note 53, as well as Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, Chap. 5.
55. I am very grateful to Nancy Snow for inviting me to contribute to this handbook. Support for working on the material in this chapter was funded in part by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation and by a grant from the Templeton World Charity Foundation. The opinions expressed are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of these Foundations.

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CHAPTER 2

VIRTUE AS A SENSITIVITY

BRIDGET CLARKE

Goodness appears to be both rare and hard to picture.¹

I. INTRODUCTION

THE period that gave rise to modern moral philosophy was, famously, a time of great upheaval. The breakdown of the Roman Catholic empire and the subsequent religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries meant that there was no common language with which people could explain their actions to one another. In this setting, and speaking very schematically, the idea of a *science* of morality came to seem compelling.² Such a science would equip one to distinguish right from wrong in the course of one's daily life, and it would justify the conduct so prescribed to others without appealing to any religious (or otherwise contentious) beliefs. The precepts propounded by such a science would be grounded in fundamental principles discovered by reason and accessible to all. Virtue was then seen as the disposition to act according to such precepts. Virtue, in other words, was identified with *willpower* and was separated from knowledge.³

The concept of virtue as a *sensitivity* emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century as a corrective to this picture of morality—a picture that ultimately encourages skepticism, for the principles that are supposed to definitively ground moral requirements have proven to be as elusive as the Holy Grail. This has made it easy for a thoughtful person to become skeptical about morality. Such a person might suppose that no science of morality is possible because there are no objective truths about what is right and wrong for such a science to be about. Moral skepticism of one form or another dominated the philosophical scene for much of the twentieth century and is alive and well in the popular culture.⁴

The sensitivity conception of virtue, which we may associate especially with the work of Iris Murdoch and John McDowell, articulates an alternative picture based on the writings of Plato and Aristotle and designed to deepen our confidence in the importance and objectivity of moral requirements.⁵ The idea, writ large, is that moral knowledge proceeds from good character, and that once we recognize this, virtue appears not as willpower, but as a sensitivity to moral requirements.⁶ The sensitivity ensures both that the virtuous agent discerns what is called for, case by case, and that she is appropriately moved by what she discerns. I shall designate this view VS for short (virtue as a sensitivity).⁷

My discussion divides into four parts. In the first three I sympathetically reconstruct what I take to be the core account of VS, focusing on how it represents virtue as a cognitive-cum-motivational excellence. In the final part of the chapter, I sketch one way to develop the core account. The writings of Murdoch and McDowell, which form my chief source material, are exceptionally rich. My reconstruction has therefore had to be highly selective. The aim is to elucidate—sympathetically—the principal contours and commitments of the view, to throw light on its future potential, and to spur direct engagement with this formidable body of work.

II. COGNITIVE EXCELLENCE

Occasion by occasion, one knows what to do, if one does, not by applying universal principles but by being a certain kind of person.⁸

§1. The term “sensitivity” is rooted in the Latin *sentire*, from which we also get the “senses.” One who is sensitive to a certain kind of stimulus, say light or sound, is one with a heightened response to it. VS identifies virtue with a heightened responsiveness to moral requirements. It conceives of that responsiveness, moreover, as a form of knowledge, and thus as a *cognitive* excellence. My aim in this part is to sketch the way VS conceives of such excellence and the knowledge it represents.⁹

To begin, one should note that there would be no need for a *sensitivity* to moral requirements if there were readily accessible principles to indicate how to act.¹⁰ It is a key presupposition of VS that there are no such principles. This presupposition, commonly known as the thesis of uncodifiability, involves two ideas, which shall form the basis of my sketch.¹¹ First is the idea that questions of how best to live are too variable and situation-specific for even the best set of principles to provide more than rough-and-ready guidance; there will always be exceptions and new situations not spoken for. Second is the idea that character supplies what principles alone cannot; it constitutes an indispensable source of moral understanding. Taken together, these ideas belie the possibility of principles that would furnish the non-virtuous agent with the same moral understanding as the virtuous agent. I shall consider them in turn, beginning with the variability of the ethical.

§2. As good a statement of the variability of the ethical as any appears in Plato's *Statesman*:

[L]aw could never accurately embrace what is best and most just for all at the same time, and so prescribe what is best. For the dissimilarities between human beings and their actions, and the fact that practically nothing in human affairs ever remains stable, prevent any sort of expertise whatsoever from making any simple decision in any sphere that covers all cases and will last for all time. (294b)¹²

Aristotle elaborates the point in this celebrated passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

[T]he whole account of matters of conduct must be given in outline and not precisely . . . matters concerned with conduct and questions of what is good for us have no fixity The general account being of this nature, the account of particular cases is yet more lacking in exactness; for they do not fall under any art or set of precepts, but the agents themselves must in each case consider what is appropriate to the occasion. (II 2, 1104a1–9)¹³

Murdoch and McDowell each reformulate the point in their own terms without altering its substance.¹⁴ To get a better view of that substance, it is helpful to go back to Socrates' exchange with Cephalus at the outset of Plato's *Republic*. Cephalus has just proposed a common-sense definition of justice as telling the truth and paying one's debts. Socrates replies:

A fine sentiment, Cephalus, but . . . are we to say unconditionally that [justice] is speaking the truth and paying whatever debts one has incurred? Or is doing those things sometimes just, sometimes unjust? I mean this sort of thing, for example: Everyone would surely agree that if a sane man lends weapons to a friend and then asks for them back when he is out of his mind, the friend shouldn't return them, and wouldn't be acting justly if he did. Nor should anyone be willing to tell the whole truth to someone who is out of his mind. (331c)¹⁵

This exchange will strike some as a beautiful indication of why any attempt to develop a comprehensive set of principles is doomed. To others, it is bound to invite the thought that there must be a further set of principles that would indicate when exceptions should be made to one's first-order principles. There are two problems with this attempted solution. First, as Nussbaum notes, a truly comprehensive set of principles would have to be "vast and infinitely extensible" and therefore of limited practical use.¹⁶ Second, principles can generate apt judgments only insofar as one has come up with the appropriate description of the particulars of one's situation. And the process whereby one arrives at an appropriate description of particulars is not itself rule-governed in any strict sense. Simply put, there seem to be no hard and fast criteria for when a remark should be described as "cowardly" rather than "tactful," or "cruel" rather than "frank." By the lights

of VS, and for reasons that shall emerge in part two of the chapter, the open-texture of moral concepts represents a basic feature of our life with values.

§3. One could grant the variability of the ethical without concluding that *character* supplies what principles cannot. One could hold that nothing makes up for the difference. Or one could hold that something other than character—say, a sophisticated form of purely intellectual discretion—takes up the slack.¹⁷ Importantly, and unequivocally, VS gives this role to character. “Occasion by occasion,” McDowell says in the remark cited earlier, “one knows what to do, if one does, not by applying universal principles but by *being a certain kind of person*.”¹⁸

But how are we to understand this? In general, it is harder to say how character might supply understanding than it is to urge the limitations of principles, and the idea that character does so takes us to the very heart of VS. We can elucidate the basic idea by breaking it into two smaller ideas. First, one’s character works at a very fundamental level to shape one’s conception of the situations that confront one. Second, it is immensely difficult to achieve a clear and judicious conception of moral situations.

§4. As a point of entry to the first idea, consider Marcia Homiak’s suggestion, in her reading of Hume, that character causes one to take pleasure (or not) in deliberating from an impartial point of view. The person of good character will enjoy the challenges that such reflection presents, and because she enjoys it, she will develop skill at it. The same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for the person of bad character.¹⁹ On this view, as I understand it, character supplies moral understanding by enriching one’s powers of deliberation. If, for instance, one must determine what kind of punishment a brutal crime merits, good character helps one to consider the question in a careful and unprejudiced way.

On VS, character constitutes a more robust source of understanding. It influences, for better or worse, how things *appear* to one, how one conceives of the situations confronting one, and thus what one takes there to be to deliberate about.²⁰ Take, for instance, the frequent attempts of slaves in antebellum America to escape their condition by fleeing. There were more or less accurate ways to conceive of such attempts. One could view them, perversely, as moral offenses; or, dubiously, as family squabbles; or, more accurately, as attempts by the oppressed to become less so. (I do not mean to imply that these descriptions are necessarily inconsistent.) One’s deliberations would have differed accordingly. The VS claim is that here, at the most fundamental level of *how one conceives situations*, what Wiggins terms “situational appreciation,” character is decisive.²¹ McDowell: “In moral upbringing what one learns is not to behave in conformity with rules of conduct, but *to see situations* in a special light.”²² Murdoch: “[t]he selfish self-interestedly casual or callous man *sees* a different world from that which the careful scrupulous benevolent just man sees.”²³ Not only that, it must be emphasized, but the world the latter sees is, as we say, the *real* world. His virtues issue in “a refined and honest perception of what is really the case.”²⁴

To this way of thinking, good character does not simply assist the agent in deliberating about facts that are available to any rational agent, nor is its cognitive assistance confined to episodes of deliberation. Rather, character functions pervasively to ensure that the agent’s conception of the facts, on any given occasion, is sound. The excellence

of an agent's deliberations is a byproduct of this prior, and frequently tacit, appreciation. One might say, somewhat figuratively, that all apt deliberations and judgments rest on a substratum of understanding. On VS, it is character that furnishes (or constitutes) this substratum.

§5. It would be a serious mistake to conclude from the preceding that the virtuous person "just sees" what to do on this account.²⁵ In fact, VS is deeply committed to the idea that moral reality is—for all agents—immensely difficult to see clearly.

There are, on VS, multiple sources of this difficulty. First, and serving as a kind of ground for the variability of the ethical, is the confounding nature of human beings. We are at once unique individuals and pervasively social creatures; we are minded and embodied; we form deep and often irrational attachments based on early life experience; we change over time. We are not fully surveyable, then, even in principle. Seen this way, the claims, conflicts, and possibilities that flow from our condition are bound to defy ready understanding, no matter how illuminating our moral theories might be.

This difficulty is compounded, on VS, by the fact that we are naturally subject to forces that blind us to these complexities and encourage self-deception. Murdoch particularly stresses egotism, which predisposes us to damaging forms of self-absorption and wishful thinking: "objectivity and unselfishness are not natural to human beings."²⁶ Then, too, there are social forces that encourage false pictures of ourselves and others (here again, the antebellum American South is instructive, if not as exceptional as we might like to think). We are, one might say, continually subject to forces within and without that make it difficult for us to see an exceedingly complicated reality—principally, *other* human individuals and the claims they make upon us—clearly. "Perpetual effort" is therefore required in even the best of moral agents.²⁷ Situational appreciation is hard-won.

§6. It is essential to VS as I have described it that the conclusions reached by the possessor of virtue are *objectively* correct and, more generally, that there is a secure place for the distinction between being right and merely seeming right with respect to ethical questions.²⁸ One might therefore wonder how beliefs are justified on this account, including beliefs about who is virtuous.

The VS answer to this question is significant and revealing. It maintains that there need be no single form such justification must take and that such justification need not derive from considerations that are themselves non-evaluative.²⁹ In short, it disputes the need for a moral "science" in the sense discussed earlier. Murdoch and McDowell suggest, rather, that developing tests of correctness for one's moral beliefs is an *ongoing* task, and one that inevitably takes place *within* an evaluative outlook. The agent must exploit "whatever materials for critical reflection are available" at a given time to the best of her abilities.³⁰ The idea that there is nothing external to one's evaluative outlook and no single thing within it to validate its deliverances is corollary to the idea that there are no principles that can furnish the non-virtuous agent with the same understanding as the virtuous agent. It is a natural way to gloss Aristotle's claim that the ultimate "standard and measure" of things ethical is the virtuous person himself.³¹ And it implies that even

the best agents must learn to live with the possibility that their judgments may turn out to be wrong.

In these terms, one might sum up the VS conception of cognitive excellence by saying, first, that nothing short of good character suffices to meet these difficulties, and second, that meeting them consists principally in the achievement of a clear conception of one's circumstances.

In the next part of the chapter, I shore up this vision of cognitive excellence and begin to show how it shades into motivational excellence by considering what VS has to say about moral concepts.

III. MORAL CONCEPTS

I fault this president for not knowing what death is.³²

§7. As noted, VS is concerned to defend the ordinary understanding of moral judgments as *cognitive*, as admitting of truth or falsehood, and it maintains that veridical moral judgment rests on good character in a particularly fundamental way. This position suggests an intimate association—verging on identification—between character, on the one hand, and conceptual capacities, on the other. In this part I identify four features of moral concepts, as conceived by VS, that sustain and elucidate this association.

The first such feature, which I shall call *inseparability*, presupposes the so-called thickness of moral concepts: the way that they involve descriptive *and* evaluative elements.³³ In his influential mid-century account, R. M. Hare maintained that these elements of moral concepts can be cleanly separated from one another, with the descriptive element supplying straightforward criteria for the application of the concept and the evaluative element supplying a non-cognitive attitude toward things that meet these criteria.³⁴ This helped to support a broader non-cognitivist picture, according to which moral judgment is a matter of superimposing (non-cognitive) attitudes onto readily discernible natural properties. So conceived, moral judgments admit of no substantial truth-conditions.

Against this picture, Murdoch and McDowell maintain that it is not always possible to disentangle the descriptive and evaluative elements of moral concepts in the way that Hare supposes. This, then, is the feature of inseparability. It means that one cannot isolate, for every moral concept, a natural property corresponding to it (upon which one then superimposes something purely attitudinal).³⁵ There seems to be no such property, or set of properties, for instance, that all and only things courageous share; one is hard pressed to say what the descriptive meaning of “courage” is without using the term itself.

The feature of inseparability implies something quite important about the accessibility of moral concepts. Namely, *one may need to occupy an evaluative point of view, to take a felt interest in the subject matter of a thick concept, in order to grasp its extension*. One who has no propensity to feel (or at least to understand why others feel) admiration

for acts of courage, in other words, may well be unable to recognize routine instances of it.³⁶ Call this the feature of *limited access*. It goes with the idea that the validation of moral beliefs takes place within an evaluative outlook (§6). And it grounds and helps to explain the VS commitment to the uncodifiability of moral judgments.

The third pertinent feature of moral concepts is their *perfectibility*. Moral concepts are perfectible, according to VS, in that their meaning is not exhausted by what one grasps as a competent user of the language and can *always* be more fully grasped.³⁷ So even one who can readily identify instances of courage can, by these lights, improve his grasp *indefinitely*. Murdoch puts this point by saying that moral concepts are the kind of thing to be understood *in depth*, over time, and in relation to an “ideal limit.”³⁸

The feature of perfectibility helps us to interpret the feature of limited access (i.e., the idea that one may only be able to grasp the extension of a term from within an evaluative point of view). For many purposes, it is natural to gloss that as the idea that one must be initiated into a given culture, with its norms, if one is to understand at least some of the evaluative terms that its members use. This is surely correct. But perfectibility invites us to distinguish between ordinary competence (whereby one’s application of a term is perfectly intelligible to other initiates) and something revealing superior (if never complete) understanding. We can then see the evaluative outlook imparted by cultural initiation as sufficient to furnish one with competence, while maintaining that good character is needed to achieve the superior understanding. The point is just that the evaluative outlook that underwrites *superior* understanding is not necessarily available to all initiates of a given form of life. It represents an individual (as well as cultural) achievement.

One can see this way of thinking about moral concepts in familiar forms of criticism, as when we say, “You don’t know what justice means,” or “You haven’t a clue about loyalty.” The phrases are charging someone with a conceptual defect, where it is implied that the agent needs not just cultural training, or sharper logical abilities, but a thoroughgoing shift in his sense of what matters in life. It is a criticism of his character. This is the intended force of E. L. Doctorow’s criticism of (then President) Bush, quoted earlier, for “not knowing what death is.” Doctorow links what he sees as Bush’s failure of understanding to his failure to *mourn*, to “feel in the depths of his being” the sacrifices made by American soldiers and their families in the Iraq War.

Of course Doctorow is not charging Bush with a failure to grasp the extension of the term (i.e., with an inability to identify corpses). He is supposing that “death” is not a purely biological concept (and, perhaps, that there is more to mastering a term than grasping its extension).³⁹ This calls attention to the fourth and, for our purposes, final feature of moral concepts: VS does not view “moral” or “value” concepts as a fixed or clearly defined set. It allows that concepts that are in no way evaluative on their face could nevertheless figure deeply in moral understanding, and so be perfectible and character dependent in the senses indicated.⁴⁰ I shall say, for short, that moral concepts form an *open set* on VS. §8. To summarize, good character expresses itself in an ability to see clearly the situations that confront one. This “seeing” involves capacities for feeling and for thought that are conceptual in nature. These capacities can always be improved

because the relevant concepts are infinitely perfectible, and because we are prone, in any event, to see through a glass darkly. In McDowell's words,

[T]he ethical is a domain of rational requirements, which are there in any case, whether or not we are responsive to them. We are alerted to these demands by acquiring appropriate conceptual capacities Thereafter our appreciation of its detailed layout is indefinitely subject to refinement.⁴¹

To get the measure of these capacities in their perfected form—as virtue—one must appreciate the sense in which they are not only capacities to discern what is morally required (or significant) but *at the same time* capacities to be appropriately moved by this understanding. That is the topic of the following section.

IV. MOTIVATIONAL EXCELLENCE

[T]he relevant conceptions are not so much as possessed except by those whose wills are influenced appropriately.⁴²

§9. As a cognitive excellence, virtue *discloses*. Specifically, according to VS, it gives an agent access to moral requirements by furnishing him with “a refined and honest perception of what is really the case.”⁴³ This perception is grounded in his superior grasp of a good set of moral concepts. What is more, it must now be underlined, it incites an appropriate response.

We are already part of the way to seeing how this could be. For we have seen that one must be suitably motivated to achieve an apt perception of one's situation. This follows from the idea that we grasp (at least some) moral concepts from within an evaluative—motivationally rich—outlook. So on this view, the agent who discerns moral requirements stands to be somewhat motivated by them.

But here we must avoid a misunderstanding: it is not *merely* because we already care about certain things that we stand, on VS, to be moved by a correct understanding of our situation. That would miss the point. The idea is rather that the facts or features of situations we discern on the strength of our felt concerns are *themselves* motivationally efficacious, “*response-invoking*,” as Broackes puts it.⁴⁴ Agents are motivationally led, that is, both by their evaluative sensibility and by the features of the world to which this sensibility provides access.⁴⁵ Humor, as we ordinarily experience it, provides a ready analogy. One needs a *sense of humor* to detect features of situations that *themselves* call forth response. Similarly, one might say, one needs an “ear” for music in order to discern patterns, colors, and textures that, once discerned, compel response.⁴⁶

§10. One obstacle to thinking about virtue in this way stems from questions about whether objective features of the world, which VS supposes moral requirements to be, can *have* motivational force. Can *values*—which are intrinsically practical—be *objective*? (To answer in the affirmative appears to commit the naturalistic fallacy, i.e., to

derive an “ought” from an “is” and, more generally, to conflict with the worldview of modern science.) So prominently has this question figured in recent meta-ethics that Michael Smith titled his investigation of it, simply, *The Moral Problem*.⁴⁷ The sensitivity account would have us pause over the question. What makes it pressing? McDowell traces its stature, for us, to a conception of objectivity that is quite appropriate to the natural sciences, but damaging when taken as a model for reality as such. On this conception, a property is objective only if we can form a satisfactory conception of what it would be for an object to possess the property without appealing to the responses the object elicits in us.⁴⁸ So the property of “being funny” or “being creepy” would obviously fail to be objective in these terms. The thing to note is that this way of thinking of objectivity precludes the possibility of properties that are both objective and intrinsically practical. For what qualifies a property as objective, on this conception, is precisely its independence from human subjectivity. We know a property is “really there” (if we do) *because* we can conceptualize it without any reference to our responses to it. Such a property cannot be intrinsically practical.

The sensitivity account is committed to the idea that objectivity need not be limited to properties, such as shape and mass, that fit this description. It can also include properties—like (on its account) colors or values—that cannot be fully described absent our sensitivity to them and so form no part of the world that the natural sciences aim to disclose.⁴⁹ It is then no longer a problem how values could be objective.⁵⁰

§11. This less restrictive conception of objectivity clears the way for supposing that (for instance) the fact that accepting a promotion would be unjust in these circumstances may *itself* constitute a source of motivation. But, one might note, such facts do not always appear to be motivating to the agent who perceives them. It certainly seems as if agents can be weak-willed or indifferent. And this threatens the VS picture, for it suggests that cognitive and motivational excellence are independent achievements.

The VS response to this challenge is to submit that the weak-willed or indifferent agent does not, however much she herself might think otherwise, possess the same perception, or conception of the facts, as the virtuous agent.⁵¹ She possesses at best an approximation to it. She lacks the “singleness of motivational focus” that, on VS, distinguishes the virtuous person’s perception of the facts.⁵² McDowell speaks of “silencing” in this connection. For the virtuous person, considerations that compete with ethical considerations (specifically, those that mark out an action as *required* by virtue) carry *no* cognitive or motivational weight; “they are not reasons at all.”⁵³ Murdoch speaks similarly: “If I attend properly I will have no choices and this is the ultimate condition to be aimed at.”⁵⁴ In short, to grasp the facts as the virtuous person grasps them is, on this picture, to be appropriately moved by them.

This line of response might appear question-begging. In fact, it rejects the assumption that there is nothing amiss in the weak-willed and indifferent agents’ grasp of their situation, and thereby offers what is arguably a more convincing description of the phenomena. The perfectibility of moral concepts helps to bring this out. Recall that on VS moral concepts are perfectible in that while one never grasps them completely, one may nevertheless have a superior grasp of them, a grasp that goes beyond what makes for ordinary competence. This enables us to say that only *full* (in the sense of superior) possession of

moral concepts guarantees appropriate motivation because it alone entails the requisite focused conception of the facts. We can then credit the weak-willed person and the indifferent person with a less than full but nevertheless (potentially) considerable possession of the moral concepts in question. Such possession, continuing the thought, goes with ordinary competence and issues in a conception of the facts that is *basically* correct, that is *in line with* the virtuous person's conception but somehow lacks its depth, refinement, and reach. This lesser conception of the facts may also carry a motivational charge, but not enough to guarantee appropriate action. In this way the VS account can recognize affinities between the understandings of agents who are weak-willed or indifferent, on the one hand, and agents who are virtuous, on the other, without granting identity or equivalence. It enables us to say, plausibly, that when we don't act as we "know" we should, we don't actually "know" as well as we might, or as well as we may suppose.⁵⁵

A final point concerning the motivational dimension of virtue follows from the way that moral concepts form an open-set on VS (as noted in §7). Simply: intrinsically motivating facts need not be explicitly evaluative. Simone Weil, whose influence on Murdoch was profound, says: "To know that this man, who is cold and hungry, really exists as much as I do myself, and is really cold and hungry—that is enough, the rest follows of itself."⁵⁶ Murdoch: "The more the separateness and differentness of other people is realized, and the fact seen that another man has needs and wishes as demanding as one's own, the harder it becomes to treat a person as a thing."⁵⁷ Cold, hunger, the separateness of others, the intricacy of their mental lives—these too can have motivational force. Virtue then concerns "the whole of our mode of living and the quality of our relations with the world."⁵⁸ It is a sensitivity to any and all of the features of reality that figure in the claims others make upon us, a sensitivity in which thought, feeling, and action are seamlessly interconnected. This is the ideal.

The renewal of this ancient and imposing ideal has quietly helped to reshape contemporary moral philosophy, opening for question views that seemed commonsense or inescapable and quite generally shifting the burden of proof where moral psychology is concerned. Above all, VS has enabled us to rethink objectivity at a time when objectivity has seemed, to many, unavailable to the ethical. In conclusion, I sketch one way to develop this critical facet of the account.

V. DEVELOPMENT

[O]nce the historical individual is "let in" a number of things have to be said with a difference.⁵⁹

§12. At the heart of VS is the prospect that a judgment may be at once robustly subjective and robustly objective—shaped by contingent sensibilities *and* answerable to the world. To this way of thinking, the cultural and historical specificity of our moral vocabularies

in no way precludes our achievement of objectivity, nor does it guarantee it; it makes it possible. In what follows I shall extend this line of thought and urge the possibility that our moral vocabularies are not only culturally specific, but also, in an important sense, *individually* specific. I argue that incorporating this possibility into the sensitivity account strengthens it in two ways. It illuminates how an understanding of one's responsibilities could be motivationally compelling—even necessitating—for the agent whose understanding it is. In the process, it generates a credible interpretation of what it means for the virtuous person to serve as the “standard” of the good.

§13. The possibility I have in mind depends on a further feature of moral concepts as Murdoch conceives them, closely related to their perfectibility. “Moral concepts must be treated,” Murdoch says, “as concrete universals.”⁶⁰ She means by this that they are grasped and realized differently by different individuals.⁶¹ What you mean and what I mean by “courage” will not—cannot—be the same, on Murdoch's view, any more than our respective conceptions of courage will be the same at age forty as they were at twenty.

Consider for instance the case of a man trying privately to determine whether something which he “feels” is repentance or not. Of course this investigation is subject to some public rules. [. . .] But these apart, the activity in question must remain a highly personal one upon which the *prise* of “the impersonal world of language” is to say the least problematic. [. . .] Here an individual is making a specialised personal *use* of a concept.⁶²

Murdoch's claim is not that the meanings of moral concepts are independent of a general system or in any way arbitrary. It is rather that such meanings are inflected in the light of each agent's distinctive and evolving life experience. They are *individualized*. As such, while they are in principle shareable, they may not be readily accessible to others.

We may take an example, very briefly, from Katherine Boo's *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, which chronicles daily life in one of Mumbai's shantytowns.⁶³ Boo's account centers on an adolescent named Abdul who has been unjustly imprisoned. We learn that Abdul comes to think of goodness in terms of water and ice.⁶⁴ He conceptualizes others in these terms; he comes to worry about the ice inside him melting, and so on.⁶⁵ This is *Abdul's* way of conceiving goodness, and one needs to know such details of his history and circumstances as Boo provides in order to make sense of it. Or consider the term “phony” in *Catcher in the Rye*.⁶⁶ What Holden Caulfield means by it is specific to him, evolving, and gradually revealed. Murdoch's point is that, when it comes to moral concepts, we are all in this situation—our conceptions of moral terms are partial, inseparable from our lives, in formation, and not necessarily accessible to others unless they know us.

This is not, in Murdoch's view, a situation to be deplored or overcome. It is a function of the fact that we are “human historical individuals.”⁶⁷ And it leads to the following paradox: we have to appropriate concepts, give them our own inflection, if they are to give us the orientation and correction we need. As one's understanding moves in the direction of the ideal-limit, that is, it becomes *increasingly*, not *decreasingly*, “private,” one's

own.⁶⁸ In short, Murdoch “puts in question the assumption that to be objective is to represent the world impersonally.”⁶⁹

This may sound strange. It is certainly unorthodox. But consider, by analogy, how an accomplished jazz musician puts a personal stamp on the tunes he covers and *thereby* illuminates those tunes. Teddy Wilson speaks of “the lesson of individuality, how a man can write his name on his music”; this is a way—in jazz, *the way*—of realizing the music itself.⁷⁰ Coltrane’s inimitable rendition of “My Favorite Things” taught us about the song, extended our sense of its possibilities and emotional reach. He lit up the song precisely by making it his own.⁷¹

There is a reciprocity here between the expression of what is individual and the illumination of what is general. Each supports and depends upon the other. To see moral concepts as concrete universals, in the relevant sense, is to see them as akin to established tunes that we must realize in our own special way if we are to successfully realize them at all. Far from being strange, one might think this rings true to the perfectly familiar challenge of reconciling “being good” with being authentically oneself.⁷²

§14. Let me consider how this line of thought stands to strengthen the VS account. Recall that on VS, the agent is motivationally led both by his desiderative sensibility and by the “response-invoking” facts he discerns by means of it. In short, he comes to apprehend motivationally charged features of the world by means of a medium—a “sensibility”—that is itself motivationally charged. And there may be no way to identify these features without appealing to the sensibility, and vice versa (§9).

Following a thread in Murdoch, I have added to this picture the idea that the deliverances of the sensibility are individualized, that is, the judgments that issue from it are formed and framed by the penumbra of images, associations, aspirations, and memories of the agent, as well as his more fully conscious commitments. This is because moral concepts are concrete universals. It follows that while moral judgments may be quite *reflective* on this (expanded) picture, they are not made in *detachment* from the agent’s deepest sense of self.⁷³

This would seem to make it easier to see how moral understanding can have intrinsic motivational force. But does it? Here we must tread carefully. The virtuous person must be motivated not simply because she has employed concepts in an individualized manner—and more generally, not simply because of her makeup—but because she has grasped features of her situation that themselves possess motivational force. (That is what it is to be motivated by *understanding*.) So we must suppose that the agent could not have grasped these features had she not succeeded in appropriating, or “making her own,” the concepts at her disposal; we must see individualization as part of understanding if it is to provide the right kind of support for VS. Fortunately, this is not an ad hoc stipulation. It follows from the concreteness of moral concepts. And it reinscribes the idea that it may take a motivationally charged condition to apprehend features of reality that are themselves motivationally charged by inviting us to see the agent’s having “written her name” on the concepts she uses as part of the requisite condition. As before, we can say that the more clearly the facts are grasped—the greater one’s understanding—the more powerful their resonance. It is just that now the grasping involves imagery

and the like that are, in a sense, indigenous to the individual agent, in just the way that associating goodness with ice is indigenous to Abdul.⁷⁴ Surely this throws light on how understanding how things are in the world might itself move one to action.

§15. One might wonder how such a view allows the virtuous person to serve as a standard—an exemplar—for others. Murdoch saw the problem and put it this way:

We ordinarily conceive of and apprehend goodness in terms of virtues which belong to a continuous fabric of being. And it is just the historical, individual, nature of the virtues as actually exemplified which makes it difficult to learn goodness from another person. It is all very well to say that “to copy a right action is to act rightly” [...] but what is the form I am supposed to copy?⁷⁵

Having thus formulated the problem, Murdoch effectively lets it stand. In addressing it, we might again find the aesthetic analogy helpful. A mature musician treats Coltrane as a standard not so much by *copying* his works, but by seeking to bring its qualities (courage, dedication, finesse, honesty) to her own.⁷⁶ Likewise, one might say, the virtuous person constitutes a standard with respect to the qualities evinced in her thinking about moral questions, and in her wider responses. The task is to bring these qualities to one's own thinking and living. Insofar as moral concepts are concrete universals, this cannot be a matter of copying anyone else.

Seen this way, the virtuous person and the virtuoso embody standards that cannot be definitively embodied any more than they can be codified. The standards have got to be individually appropriated (and they can never be appropriated once and for all).⁷⁷ This seems right: my colleague exhibits many virtues as a teacher, but (alas) I can't be a wonderful teacher by doing just what he does. And it helps to explain why most artists and agents need not one teacher, but many.

In the next section I draw attention to what I take to be a critical feature of virtue conceived in this way before concluding the chapter as a whole.

§16. Murdoch emphasized the inner world of the moral agent in part because she believed that this emphasis helped us to see the sense in which morality involves “commerce with the transcendent.”⁷⁸ “Transcendent” for Murdoch, and as I shall use the term, refers simply to things that we are never finished understanding, things of endless depth and complexity. Other individuals are, for Murdoch, a paradigm case of the transcendent. On the picture I have suggested, we could say that our capacity to approach an understanding of the ordinary transcendent depends on our ability to creatively appropriate evaluative norms. This gives us a fresh way of interpreting the general idea that our appreciation of moral requirements depends on our inner condition. The appropriate inner condition, on this picture, is not one in which we have insulated ourselves from the influence of our individual history and nature, but one in which we have made the most of these influences. The virtuous person is one who has linked his inner life to open, ordinary life. His reasoning bears his signature *and* it extends our understanding of such things as courage and justice. That is the picture I elicited from the comparison to the jazz musician.

I take it to be implicit in this picture that the inner world *itself* transcends the agent whose world it is, and that respect for this is a critical part of the virtues. In other words, the inner condition that gives us access to the outer world depends on respecting that one's inner world is itself, in an important sense, beyond one.

What do I mean by this? In a perceptive essay, the novelist John Fowles describes the inner world as "a place . . . beyond daily reality, never fully comprehensible or explicable, always more potential than realized; yet where no one will ever penetrate as far as we have."⁷⁹ This is precisely what I have in mind. A place, Murdoch says, "so immense, so personal . . . seething with arcane imagery and shadowy intuitions."⁸⁰ Consider the ordinary fact of dreams, how they are entirely of us and beyond us. Consider Montaigne's observation that we are "somehow double creatures, with the result that what we believe we do not believe, what we condemn we cannot rid ourselves of."⁸¹ Consider, in short, the apparent vastness of our unconscious and how it enters into the minutiae of our lives. For better and worse, our inner lives have a life of their own. Abdul did not decide to conceive of goodness as "ice"; Holden Caulfield did not decide to be stirred by the image of the catcher in the rye.⁸² Such images come unbidden. They may leave in the same way, to be replaced by new images or tropes whose resonance is equally spontaneous, or perhaps by nothing at all. These are not matters that the agent decides.

It stands to reason that respect for this world, one's inner world, is part of what gives us the imaginative resources to come to terms with everyday moral problems, to conceptualize them in a way that is at once judicious and compelling. What this kind of respect involves is importantly open-ended, but I have in mind things that don't typically figure in contemporary discussions of the virtues, such things as cultivating a rich dream life, attending to things that strike or attract us for no good reason (what the poet William Stafford describes as "devotion to whim"), and more generally, listening for one's *daimon*.⁸³ On this picture, our inner world *and* the outer world transcend us, and we need thoughtful commerce with both if we are to have an appreciation of either. And the virtuous person knows this; that is part of what makes him a standard for the rest of us.

§17. I have built on the core account of virtue as a sensitivity, developed in the first three sections of this chapter, to suggest that where morality is concerned, we cannot escape having a deeply personal point of view, but that such a point of view need not be arbitrary or egocentric. It can in fact be revelatory.

Such a prospect would have been nearly unthinkable for much of the twentieth century, for it has no place in a science of morality, seen as the heroic effort to definitively specify and justify moral requirements in the absence of a religious foundation. Nor, of course, does it belong with skepticism. By carefully reviving the ideas of Plato and Aristotle, the sensitivity account of virtue has worked to free us from thinking that these are our only options. If VS has not made goodness any easier to attain or to picture, it has helped—in an inescapably diverse and divided world—to secure a space for our dedicated efforts on both fronts.⁸⁴

NOTES

1. Iris Murdoch, "The Idea of Perfection," in *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge Classics 2001 [1970]), 51. Hereafter abbreviated "IP."
2. J. B. Schneewind provides a detailed treatment of the emergence and development of modern philosophy in works including *Moral Philosophy from Montaigne to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and *Essays on the History of Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
3. Rawls's (Kantian) formulation is a frequently cited example: the virtues represent "sentiments and habitual attitudes leading us to act on certain principles of right" (*A Theory of Justice* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971], 437). Kant defines virtue as "the moral strength of a *human being's* will in fulfilling his *duty*," *The Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6:405.
4. See Justin McBrayer, "Why Our Children Don't Think There Are Moral Facts," *New York Times*, March 1, 2015. <http://nyti.ms/1DIJVCb>.
5. For Murdoch's deep influence on McDowell and his singular importance for the influence of her views, see Justin Broackes's magnificent "Introduction" in *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7–12 and 17–18. As he puts it, McDowell gave Murdoch's views "a new frame and support, in a philosophical context of his own, and showed in sustained and visible debate their power in a philosophical market-place" (18).
6. The ordinary notion of character has recently come under pressure. For citations and an excellent overview, see Marcia Homiak, "Moral Character," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/moral-character/>. I shall assume for the purposes of exposition that the ordinary notion is sound, as I in fact believe it to be.
7. The phrase "virtue as a sensitivity" is a label. McDowell explicitly likens virtue to a sensitivity; Murdoch, to my knowledge, does not. Martha Nussbaum and David Wiggins develop accounts that are also well captured by the phrase. Nussbaum, "The Discernment of Perception: An Aristotelian Conception of Private and Public Rationality," in *Love's Knowledge* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 54–105; Wiggins, "Truth, Invention and the Meaning of Life"; "Truth, and Truth as Predicated of Moral Judgments"; "A Sensible Subjectivism" and "Deliberation and Practical Reason," all of which are collected in *Needs, Values, Truth*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 [1987]).
8. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," as reprinted in *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 73.
9. I am not in this chapter distinguishing between "knowledge" and "understanding."
10. David Heyd, "Tact: Sense, Sensitivity, and Virtue," *Inquiry* 38 (1995): 217–231.
11. "Uncodifiability" and its cognates "codifiable" and "codification" are used frequently by McDowell in the papers I cite. Most of these papers are collected in *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). Codifiable principles, in McDowell's terms, are such that "there would be no problem what it would be to apply them correctly, as it were by their own lights; that would be a matter of deduction" ("Some Issues in Aristotle's Moral Psychology," as reprinted in *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 27).
12. Translation by C. J. Rowe in *Plato Complete Works*, edited by John Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett: 1997).

13. Hereafter abbreviated "NE." Translation by W. D. Ross in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Revised Oxford Translation, edited by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994). Also NE I 3, 1094b11–27.
14. McDowell: "As Aristotle consistently says, the best generalizations about how one should behave hold only for the most part. If one attempted to reduce one's conception of what virtue requires to a set of rules, then, however subtle and thoughtful one was in drawing up the code, cases would inevitably turn up in which a mechanical application of the rules would strike one as wrong—and not necessarily because one had changed one's mind; rather one's mind on the matter was not susceptible of capture in any universal formula" ("Virtue and Reason," 58). And on a more general note: "[W]e need a conception of rationality in evaluation that will cohere with the possibility that particular cases may stubbornly resist capture in any general net" ("Values and Secondary Qualities," as reprinted in *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 149). Murdoch, who takes her inspiration from Plato, does not place as much stress on the variability of the ethical, but her recognition of it is implicit in the indefinability of Good. "[I]t is in its nature," she says, "that we cannot get it taped" ("On 'God' and 'Good,'" in *The Sovereignty of Good*, 61; hereafter abbreviated "OGG"). She connects this feature of Good to "the unsystematic and *inexhaustible* variety of the world" ("On the Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts," in *The Sovereignty of Good*, 96); italics added. Hereafter abbreviated "SGC."
15. Translation by Grube in *Plato Complete Works*.
16. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 72.
17. T. H. Irwin (quite improbably) attributes such a view to Aristotle himself. "Ethics as an Inexact Science," in *Moral Particularism*, edited by Brad Hooker and Margaret Little (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 100–129.
18. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 73; italics added. For Murdoch, see especially OGG and SGC.
19. Marcia Homiak, "Hume's Ethics: Ancient or Modern?" *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 81 (2000): 215–236, esp. §6.
20. This is one way to understand Aristotle's claim that "virtue makes the goal right" (NE VI 12, 1144a7; relatedly NE VII 8, 1151a15–19). McDowell ("Deliberation and Moral Development in Aristotle's Ethics," as reprinted in *The Engaged Intellect* [Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2009], 41–58) and Wiggins ("Deliberation and Practical Reason") develop readings of Aristotle's ethics according to which "deliberation" [*boulêsis*] just is a more or less reflective conceptualization of one's situation within which narrower and more overt episodes of reasoning (or "deliberation") take place. I am using the narrower, and more familiar, sense of deliberation in the main text.
21. Wiggins, "Deliberation and Practical Reason," 231.
22. McDowell, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" as reprinted in *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 85; italics added.
23. Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (Allen Lane, Penguin 1992), 177. Murdoch continues: "and the largely explicable ambiguity of the word 'see' here conveys the essence of the concept of the moral. The connection between ethics and epistemology is something which we are intuitively grasping all the time in our non-philosophical lives." Similarly, from the same work, "The progressive result for an individual of not lying is that he lives in a particular sort of scene, his patterns of cognition and sensibility are different from those (most of us) who are less careful in this respect" (380).
24. IP, 37.

25. As I argue in "Virtue and Disagreement," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 13 (2010): 273–291.
26. OGG, 50, and OGG and SGC *passim*.
27. Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 268.
28. In "Truth, and Truth as Predicated of Moral Judgments," Wiggins distinguishes between "practical judgments" (of the form "I should *x*") and "evaluations" (of the form "*x* is wicked") and concludes that it is far more difficult to apply the notion of objective truth to the former.
29. The latter point is an unremitting theme of McDowell's. He considers the notion of a non-evaluative (or "external") validation of ethics "a philosophical fantasy" that wrongly undermines our confidence in the objectivity of morality by holding it to an ill-conceived standard; he traces the standard, in part, to the "dazzlingly impressive and easily mis-conceived" achievements of modern science ("Critical Notice of *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*," *Mind* 95 [1986]: 379–386). The quoted passages appear on pages 383 and 385.
30. "Two Sorts of Naturalism," as reprinted in *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 194. I discuss concerns one might have about this position in "The Prospects for Critical Moral Perception," in *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher*, 227–253.
31. NE III 4, 1113a29–31; NE X 4, 1166a12–13.
32. E. L. Doctorow, "Our Unfeeling President," published in the wake of the US invasion of Iraq. *East Hampton Star*, September 9, 2004, and available at <http://www.commondreams.org/views/2004/09/09/unfeeling-president>.
33. As Bernard Williams puts it, thick concepts "seem to express a union of fact and value. The way the notions are applied is determined by what the world is like (for instance, by how someone has behaved), and yet, at the same time, their application usually involves a certain valuation of a situation," *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 129; and see 140–142. Murdoch, writing before Williams, called the concepts in question "normative-descriptive," "specialized," or "secondary" value words (IP, 31; 22). A wonderful example of a thick concept is the word "common" as explained by Margaret Jones Bolsterli in *Born in the Delta: Reflections on the Making of a Southern White Sensibility* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 12–14. The virtues and vices are paradigms of thick concepts.
34. R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970 [1952]); "Descriptivism," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 49 (1963); *Freedom and Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).
35. Murdoch, "Vision and Choice in Morality," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Suppl. Volume 30 (1956): 32–58. Hereafter abbreviated "VC." (An abridged version of this important paper appears in Murdoch's *Existentialists and Mystics*, edited by Peter Conradi [New York: Allen Lane, Penguin, 1989], 76–98); *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, ch. 2; McDowell, "Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following," §§1–2 and reprinted in *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 198–218. See also Wiggins, "A Sensible Subjectivism?" and Cora Diamond, "We Are Perpetually Moralists": Iris Murdoch, Fact, and Value," in *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, edited by Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 79–109.
36. McDowell, "Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following," 201–202. Williams claims he first heard the idea that one must occupy an evaluative standpoint in order to pick up an evaluative concept in a seminar by Murdoch and Philippa Foot (*Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 218, n. 7). See Broackes, "Introduction," note 37.

37. This crucial point is developed in IP, 21ff., and finely appreciated in Kieran Setiya, "Murdoch on the Sovereignty of Good," *Philosophers' Imprint* 13 (2013): 1–21.
38. IP, 27–28. This is, presumably, because the moral reality they aim to reveal—persons, preeminently—always admits of greater understanding. Murdoch's most famous example shows a mother-in-law revising her moral concepts (improving them, as it turns out) as she tries to reach an accurate appraisal of her daughter-in-law (IP, 16–41). The mother-in-law, says Murdoch, is engaged in "an endless task" (IP, 27). It is endless, I am suggesting, for two reasons.
39. Compare Cora Diamond's discussion of the concept "human being" in "The Importance of Being Human," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 29 (1991): 35–62. And see next note.
40. "[T]he language used to describe a special reason-constituting conception of a situation need not be explicitly evaluative" (McDowell, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" 86). The ramifications of this point are wide-ranging and perceptively discussed in Diamond, "Murdoch the Explorer," *Philosophical Topics*, 38(2010): 51, 85; and Setiya, "Murdoch on the Sovereignty of Good."
41. John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1996), 82.
42. McDowell, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?," 87.
43. IP, 37.
44. Broackes, "Introduction," 11. Original italics.
45. Wiggins and McDowell stress that the features and the sensibility are paired, neither intelligible independently of the other. Wiggins, "A Sensible Subjectivism"; McDowell, "Projection and Truth in Ethics," reprinted in *Mind, Value and Reality*, 151–166. For discussion, see Darwall, Gibbard, and Railton, "Toward *Fin de siècle* Ethics: Some Trends," in *Moral Discourse and Moral Practice*, edited by Darwall, Gibbard, and Railton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19–24.
46. It seems to be true of many musical phenomena (e.g., "swing" and "groove") that to perceive them is to be quite literally moved by them.
47. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.
48. McDowell, "Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World," §2, and reprinted in *Mind, Value, and Reality*.
49. McDowell draws the analogy with colors, and secondary properties more generally, in "Values and Secondary Qualities," *Mind, Value and Reality*, 131–150, and in "Non Cognitivism and Rule-Following," §1.
50. For fuller discussion of this feature of the view, see Alice Crary, *Beyond Moral Judgment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 19–29, and Maximilian de Gaynesford, *John McDowell* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 163–176.
51. See particularly McDowell, "Incontinence and Practical Wisdom in Aristotle," in *Essays for David Wiggins: Identity, Truth, and Value*, edited by Sabina Lovibond and S. G. Williams (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 95–112.
52. McDowell, "Some Issues in Aristotle's Moral Psychology," 47.
53. McDowell, "The Role of *Eudaimonia* in Aristotle's Ethics," as reprinted in *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 17. And see "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" 90–94, and "Virtue and Reason," 53–56.
54. IP, 38. The idea that the virtuous person's conception of a given situation cannot fail to compel action (where appropriate) does not obviously entail that the attractions of

- competing conceptions carry no weight for her, but McDowell and Murdoch definitely pair these ideas. One advantage of so doing is that it makes clear what distinguishes virtue from continence ("Virtue and Reason," 55–56). Cf. David Wiggins, "Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle's Ethics: A Reply to John McDowell," in *Aristotle and Moral Realism*, edited by Robert Heinaman (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 219–231.
55. Heda Segvic emphasizes, in a beautiful paper, that from a Socratic point of view "the akratic agent not only lacks knowledge of what is better or best; he also wrongly believes that he possesses this knowledge." "No One Errs Willingly: The Meaning of Socratic Intellectualism," in *From Protagoras to Aristotle*, edited by Myles Burnyeat (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 73.
 56. Simone Weil, *The Notebooks of Simone Weil*, Vol. I (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956), 449. Broackes discusses Weil's influence in "Introduction," 19–21.
 57. OGG, 64.
 58. SGC, 95.
 59. IP, 25.
 60. IP, 29. Not much has been made of this element of Murdoch's view. Carla Bagnoli, "The Exploration of Morality," in *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher*, 197–226, is a notable and illuminating exception.
 61. Bagnoli, "The Exploration of Morality," 222–224; Broackes, "Introduction," 43, n. 85.
 62. IP, 25.
 63. New York: Random House, 2012.
 64. Boo, *Beyond the Beautiful Forever*s, 218–220.
 65. Boo, *Beyond the Beautiful Forever*s, 241.
 66. J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (New York: Little, Brown, 1951).
 67. IP, 28.
 68. "We do not simply, through being rational and knowing ordinary language, 'know' the meaning of all necessary moral words. We may have to learn the meaning; and since we are *human historical individuals*, the movement of understanding is onward into increasing *privacy*, in the direction of the ideal limit, and not back towards [. . .] the rulings of an impersonal public language" (IP, 28); italics added.
 69. Bagnoli, "The Exploration of Morality," 224. There are contexts where we expressly seek to eliminate any "specialized" rendering of concepts, as when we ask judges to decide cases wholly on the basis of precedent. Murdoch's point, as I understand it, is not to query the existence or importance of such contexts, but to remind us that many contexts are not like this.
 70. Len Lyons, *The Great Jazz Pianists* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1983), 65.
 71. Similarly, Dan Tepfer speaks of improvising on the Goldberg Variations *in order to better understand them*. Corinna da Fonseca Wollheim, "Improvised Variations," *Wall Street Journal*, December 14, 2011.
 72. As Robert Adams observes, the aspiration for virtue "is not just for conformity of the self with itself, essential as that is. It is an aspiration for excellent relationship with goods whose nature and demands are objective and not wholly or mainly determined by our preferences. This aspiration has an effect on our self-integration that is both destabilizing and creative . . ." *A Theory of Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 209.
 73. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, ch. 4, esp. 68–69.
 74. This is only the beginning of an account. Murdoch suggests that *all* agents, vicious as well as virtuous (and everything in between) individualize the moral concepts they deploy. Her

view is that we interpret the world as we operate within it and this interpretation will magnetize us to some things and not others, quite independently of the correctness of our conceptions. (See, for instance, “The Darkness of Practical Reason,” reprinted in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 193–202, and IP, 33–39.) This raises acute questions about how to conceive the difference between virtue and vice (seen as a highly motivated state), which I cannot here explore.

75. IP, 29.
76. As Julia Annas notes in a paper to which I am indebted, “The person who succeeds in playing like Alfred Brendel ends up performing in a way which sounds rather different.” “Being Virtuous and Doing the Right Thing,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 78 (2004): 69.
77. Coltrane famously says something resembling this: “There is never any end. There are always new sounds to imagine, new feelings to get at. And always, there is the need to keep purifying these feelings and sounds so that we can really see what we’ve discovered in its pure state. So that we can give to those who listen the essence, the best of what we are” (CD liner notes, *Meditations* [1965] Impulse! [A-9110]).
78. Murdoch, “Vision and Choice,” 38.
79. John Fowles, *The Tree* (Ecco Press, 2010 [1979]), 76.
80. Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 275.
81. “On Glory,” *The Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, translated and edited by M. A. Screech (New York: Allen Lane, Penguin Press, 1991), 704.
82. It is interesting that Holden’s image is, in a sense, misbegotten—based on his misremembering a line from a Robert Burns poem.
83. William Stafford, *You Must Revise Your Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2006), 15.
84. I am beholden to Paul Muench for many trenchant comments on earlier drafts of this essay and to Nancy Snow for expert advice at the end. I also benefited from presenting a version of the fourth section at the University of Tennessee’s Value and Agency conference in November 2015. I would especially like to thank Amélie Rorty, Maura Tumulty, and Kristina Gehrman for their comments and conversation.

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CHAPTER 3

VIRTUE AS A SKILL

MATT STICHTER

I. INTRODUCTION

ONE approach to conceptualizing virtue has been to compare and contrast virtues with practical skills, since both involve knowing how to act well in particular situations. The “virtue as skill” thesis can be found in many ancient Greek discussions of virtue. It is an example of Aristotle’s suggestion that “we should use as evidence what is apparent for the sake of what is obscure.”¹ One central aspect of this thesis is that the moral knowledge of the virtuous person is analogous to the practical knowledge of the expert in a skill.² Learning a skill is a process of acquiring practical knowledge, that is, the knowledge of how to do something, like building a house or driving a car. With virtue, the practical knowledge is the knowledge of how to act well, like acting honestly.

The study of expertise is focused on the highest levels of performance in a skill domain. Experts are thus a good analogue for the virtuous person, given that the virtuous person consistently brings about the highest level of moral behavior. In addition, the study of expertise is also concerned with understanding the development of expertise, from the stages of novice to expert. The process for acquiring skills has the potential then to shed light on the acquisition of virtue, as both are acquired in stages. As Julia Annas notes,

this is an important analogy, because ethical development displays something that we can see more clearly in these more limited contexts: there is a progress from the mechanical rule- or model-following of the learner to the greater understanding of the expert, whose responses are sensitive to the particularities of situations as well as expressing learning and general reflection.³

This view finds support in the work on moral development by psychologists Daniel Lapsley and Darcia Narvaez, who claim that “the expertise literature can provide rich insights into the psychological development of moral character and conduct.”⁴ Part of

the payoff of the “virtue as skill” approach, which Paul Bloomfield points out, is that the skill analogy can yield “a viable epistemology in which moral knowledge is shown to be a species of a general kind of knowledge that is not philosophically suspect.”⁵ These and other potential benefits of the “virtue as skill” approach should be of interest to anyone working in virtue theory.

This ancient Greek thesis has gained some traction in contemporary accounts of virtue, both in virtue ethics (moral virtues) and virtue epistemology (intellectual virtues).⁶ In both literatures, however, it is important to note that this thesis takes different forms. We can broadly classify the forms as weak, moderate, and strong. On the weak form, virtues have some connection to skills, but the virtues themselves are not to be understood along the lines of a skill. Linda Zagzebski, for example, says that while virtues are not themselves skills, they are associated with skills that provide the knowledge of how best to accomplish the goals of virtue.⁷ The moderate form, endorsed by Aristotle, claims that there are structural similarities between virtue and skill, such that we can gain insight into how virtues are developed by looking at how skills are acquired. However, this is not an admission that virtues are skills—just that there are important parallels. Finally, on the strong form, the claim is that virtues should be conceptualized as a type of skill. This still leaves room for noting some differences between skills and virtues. Julia Annas, for example, argues that virtues are the kind of skills that involve the ability to explain one’s reasons for action, without claiming that all skills are like this.⁸ The framework for this chapter is to see how far we can run with the strong form of the “virtue as skill” thesis.⁹

If the thesis that a virtue is a type of practical skill is correct, then it will have a significant impact on our conceptions of virtue and moral knowledge. Determining whether this thesis is plausible requires answering three central questions. First, what is the nature of skills and expertise? Second, what characteristics would virtues and the virtuous person have if they are modeled on skills and expertise? Third, do we have evidence that moral development tracks skill acquisition? So, as we canvas the various positions people have staked out in regard to virtue as skill, we need to question the assumptions being made about skills and expertise.

Furthermore, in defending the strong form of the thesis, we need to keep in mind how arguments need to be structured in order to deny the identification of virtues as skills. It will not be sufficient to point to just any feature of our conception of virtue that is not also found in skills, or vice versa. For example, take James Wallace’s argument that virtues are not skills because all virtues are valuable, but not all skills are valuable.¹⁰ As Zagzebski rightly points out in response,

This argument does not support the conclusion that virtues are not skills, however, but only that the class of virtues is not coextensive with the class of skills. On Wallace’s reasoning it might be the case that every virtue is a skill, although not every skill is a virtue.¹¹

The “virtue as skill” approach cannot be undermined merely by pointing to a unique feature of virtue, as there had better be some unique feature of virtue in order to distinguish it from everything that is not a virtue. Similarly, any skill domain is going to have unique

features to it that distinguish it from other skill domains. Not every skill involves music, but it doesn't follow that musical performances are not a matter of skill. On the other hand, there is a caveat to this type of defense of the "virtue as skill" thesis, which is that whatever is unique to moral virtue needs to be there because of its connection to morality.¹² Otherwise, there is the danger of making merely ad hoc moves to save the "virtue as skill" thesis. So, consistent with Zagzebski's response to Wallace, one could claim that not every skill is a virtue because not every skill deals with matters of morality. In short, it is to be expected that there are some features that are found in virtue but not in other skills, due to virtues being specifically moral skills. But if the difference between virtues and skills is not due to morality—for example, if virtues are traits you are born with or that you acquire by luck—then that kind of difference would undermine the idea that virtues are skills.

In the following sections, important analogies between virtues and skills will be highlighted. After briefly discussing in the next section some work in virtue epistemology that sheds light on the general structure of skills and virtues, I will then focus on the moral virtues and return later to the intellectual virtues. Some putative disanalogies will be discussed in these sections as well, though the most significant disanalogies will appear toward the end. Finally, I conclude with thoughts about where more research is needed to fully explore the "virtue as skill" approach.

II. VIRTUE AS A TERM OF SUCCESS, AND AS AN ACQUIRED COMPETENCY

One key draw of the "virtue as skill" thesis, which is prominent in discussions of virtue epistemology but which can be generalized to include moral virtues, is specifically the idea that virtue is a term that implies success. According to Zagzebski, a virtue is "a deep and enduring acquired excellence of a person, involving a characteristic motivation to produce a certain desired end and reliable success in bringing about that end."¹³ The element of reliable success is what leads Zagzebski to claim that virtues are associated with skills, because skills supply the knowledge of how to achieve success with the goals of virtue. Ernest Sosa also centrally draws on a skill analogy in his analysis of the concept of knowledge. Sosa says that there are three questions we can raise about any practice with a characteristic aim:

Performances with an aim, in any case, admit assessment in respect of our three attainments: accuracy: reaching the aim; adroitness: manifesting skill or competence; and aptness: reaching the aim *through* the adroitness manifest.¹⁴

In explaining this, Sosa uses the example of an archer trying to hit a bull's-eye. We can ask if the target was hit, and whether the shot manifested the archer's skill. The two can come apart, because a novice can get lucky, and an expert might get unlucky (say from

a gust of wind). The goal is not just to hit the target and manifest one's skill, but also that the target is hit *because* of one's skill, which makes it an apt performance. As this example also highlights, virtue is not only a success term, but success due to an acquired competency. The success an archer has in hitting a target through skill represents an achievement for which the archer deserves credit, which wouldn't be the case if she hit the target merely by luck.

Sosa argues that this "AAA" structure can be applied to any performance with an aim, such as skilled behavior and moral behavior. Furthermore, he argues that you can extend this to epistemology, where the fundamental value (or aim) to be realized is truth. The goal is not merely to attain true belief (i.e., hitting the target), but also for true belief to be attained *because* of the exercise of cognitive skills (i.e., epistemic or intellectual virtues). One of the implications of this that Sosa notes is that "epistemic virtues enter constitutively in the attainment of fundamental value, not just instrumentally. Virtues are thus constitutive because the aptness of belief is constituted by its being accurate because competent."¹⁵ If the goal was merely truth, then virtues would be viewed as just instrumental to attaining truth. But the goal is really aptness, which shows the virtues to be of constitutive value, and likewise for moral virtues.¹⁶ Drawing on another skill analogy to explain this, Sosa says of a ballerina that what we really value is not just her performance, but that it was also the "product" of the ballerina's skill. If the performance was "produced" in some other way, say by her performing those moves by accident, then we wouldn't value it as much. Sosa refers to this in terms of a "performance-immanent value,"¹⁷ which is to be contrasted with the value a separable product might have independent of how it was produced (such as in the value of a good cup of coffee). In this respect, Sosa undermines one argument Aristotle presented against the "virtue as skill" thesis: that skills only concern "making" things with a value that is independent of its production, while virtues are concerned with "doing," as in activities where the value is in the activity itself.¹⁸ The "virtue as skill" thesis is thus best understood in terms of acquired performance, rather than productive, skills.

Some acquired competencies, however, may not prove analogous to virtues. For example, tying one's shoelaces is an acquired competence, but one seemingly too simplistic to be analogous to virtue. To handle this difference, Plato distinguished between skills and knacks, where knacks can be acquired without any specialized training. It's something you can learn how to do merely by trying to do it yourself, or by watching someone else do it. Annas, following Plato, claims that there is an intellectual component in skills that is not found in knacks, such that there's no theory to teach when it comes to knacks.¹⁹ This way of marking the distinction implies that if putative experts in a field can't really articulate any theoretical principles supporting their practice, then that field represents a knack rather than a skill.

The articulation requirement, though, is controversial, but this is not the only way of cashing out the distinction.²⁰ In Ryle's well-known discussions of "knowing how,"²¹ he marks a difference between "single-track" and "multi-track" dispositions.²² Single-track dispositions are simplistic operations, "the actualisations of which are nearly uniform."²³

Multi-track dispositions, by contrast, are defined as “dispositions the exercises of which are indefinitely-heterogeneous.”²⁴ He goes on to argue that

[k]nowing *how*, then, is a disposition, but not a single-track disposition like a reflex or a habit. Its exercises are observances of rules or canons or the applications of criteria, but they are not tandem operations of theoretically avowing maxims and then putting them into practice.²⁵

So instead of the knack–skill difference being based on the possibility of offering articulate justifications, the distinction could be based on the difference between activities whose expressions are simple and uniform, versus those which are “indefinitely-heterogeneous.”²⁶ In this sense, virtues would clearly be classified as multi-track dispositions.

III. SKILLS AND VIRTUES: DELIBERATE PRACTICE

When it comes to how virtuous competencies are acquired, the skill analogy plays a significant role. In his well-known discussion of moral virtues, Aristotle claims that

we acquire them as a result of prior activities; and this is like the case of the arts, for that which we are to perform by art after learning, we first learn by performing, e.g., we become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre. Similarly, we become just by doing what is just, temperate by doing what is temperate, and brave by doing brave deeds.²⁷

Since ancient times, one of the defining roles of the skill analogy is to illuminate the acquisition of virtue by showing how it is acquired in ways similar to that of practical skills. Annas highlights the importance of this when she claims that “[w]e cannot understand what virtue is without coming to understand how we acquire it.”²⁸

Probably one of the most commonly understood aspects of skill acquisition is that acquiring a skill takes “practice, practice, practice.” Estimates place the amount of experience necessary to achieve expertise in any field at ten years or 10,000 hours.²⁹ However, mere experience isn’t sufficient for achieving expertise. People reach a certain level of acceptable performance, after which further experience does not necessarily lead to any improvement in performance. Research indicates that a particular kind of practice is necessary for expertise, as improving your level of skill requires continually striving to do things that you currently cannot do. This kind of experience is referred to as “deliberate practice,” and roughly 10,000 hours of deliberate practice are needed for expertise. As you engage in deliberate practice, you seek out feedback about your performance, in the hopes of identifying and correcting errors. There need to be specific aspects of

your performance that you go about planning how to improve, which then structures the kind of deliberate practice you engage in.³⁰

Someone might object here that all the deliberate practice and self-regulating behavior that goes into acquiring expertise is a point of departure from morality, for it might be that one does not need to do such extensive practice to be moral. Narvaez addresses this point in an instructive way, stating,

As a result of my studies with groups differing in expertise, I believe that moral judgment is a domain that is similar to that of music. Most people have some knowledge of music. For example they can sing songs, having learned from general experience how to carry a tune. Yet general experience does not lead to expertise in music Likewise, although one can learn a great deal about moral reasoning in everyday life, in order to reach the highest levels one must undergo deliberative, focused study.³¹

This leads us to an interesting implication of expertise for ethics. It is fairly difficult to attain expertise in a field, since the process is challenging and requires dedicated practice for at least ten years on average. If we can only expect a select few to achieve expertise, then we would expect the same of becoming a fully virtuous person. Of course it would still be the case that we could expect a lot of people to have partially acquired some virtues, even though that falls short of full virtue. If virtues represent an expert-level skill, that implies that full virtue possession is rare, though without implying that it is rare because it is an unattainable ideal.

While it might appear to be a drawback that an expertise model of moral development makes the possession of virtue out to be rare, rather than commonplace, it can be seen as an important advantage of the model. Much has been made recently of the “situationist” challenge to the widespread possession of virtues as cross-situationally consistent character traits. Christian Miller argues that the best response to the situationist critique will have to accept that the possession of virtue is rare. “Thus, virtue ethicists can readily agree that experiments in psychology justify the belief that there currently is not widespread possession of the virtues—there was never any expectation otherwise.”³² Furthermore, this isn’t merely an ad hoc move to save the “virtue as skill” thesis, precisely because expertise is rare.

A further implication of this is that once you start recognizing different levels of performance, you then have to start asking questions about what levels of performance are going to be expected of people. It might help to think here of a skill example, say driving a car. Most people can attain a competent (or mid-way) level of proficiency in driving, such that they can obtain a driver’s license and be (for the most part) safe drivers. Only a relatively few people, though, become expert drivers. Obviously our traffic laws expect people to be able to drive at a competent level, rather than at the level of expertise. But then, what kind of expectations should we have about moral behavior, on an expertise model? We might legitimately expect all adults to be competent with respect to morality, but expertise may be expecting too much.

In any case, we can leave this discussion for now, because it remains an open question on an account of ethical expertise what standards we hold people accountable to in their moral behavior. Thus, if someone were to object to the model of ethical expertise being presented here that “expertise is just too much to expect of a person, thus the model fails,” then the response is that it’s just a reason not to hold people to expert-level standards, rather than a reason to reject the model itself. After all, just because we hold people to a particular standard, it doesn’t follow that we can’t recognize going above and beyond that standard.

IV. SKILLS AND VIRTUES: SELF-REGULATING BEHAVIOR

Engaging in deliberate practice requires a great deal of self-regulating behavior, and this has formed another parallel with virtue. Self-regulating behavior is important in acquiring expertise because feedback cannot come merely from others, as crucial as that is in the early stages of skill acquisition.³³ Often there won’t be a coach around when you are exercising your skill, and so you need to learn how to provide feedback on your own performance. Therefore, it is important for deliberate practice that you are able to monitor your own behavior during such sessions. Experts also must monitor the environment that they are working in for changes.³⁴ This is especially relevant when experts face situations that contain features with which they have little prior experience. Because expertise develops out of concrete experience, experts will be at their best when facing relatively familiar situations. Thus, experts also need to be aware of when they are facing situations that include unique features, so as to adjust their performance. While they may not perform as well in truly unique situations, they will usually fare better than novices, for situations are unlikely to be unfamiliar in all respects.

Roberts argues that these kinds of self-regulating behaviors and strategies are fundamental to at least some of the virtues, specifically what he refers to as the virtues of willpower.³⁵ He claims that these virtues are skills, and his main argument for this is that he thinks such virtues are inherently “strategic,” in the sense that they involve figuring out various techniques for managing one’s impulses and emotions. Support for this can be found in Ryle, who argues that “performances in which strength of will is exerted may be performances of almost any sort, intellectual or manual, imaginative or administrative. It is not a single-track disposition.”³⁶

Roberts thinks that the virtues of willpower have a different target from other virtues. That is, the goal of the virtues of willpower is self-control, rather than specifically the pursuit of morally good ends. Furthermore, Roberts claims that “[p]eople can be more or less skilled in the management of their own inclinations, and these skills are an important part of the virtues of will power.”³⁷ Roberts’s suggestion here is that some virtues seem to be centrally about managing our own inclinations, so that we don’t act

in ways contrary to the more substantive virtues. In this respect, the moral value of the virtues of willpower is derived from the values those virtues support. That is, courage is valuable insofar as it helps us to act honestly or justly when doing so is dangerous, but courage could be similarly displayed in carrying out immoral actions.³⁸

In laying out his view, Roberts rebuts a number of arguments presented by Wallace that virtues cannot be skills. One argument by Wallace, which is later repeated by Zagzebski,³⁹ is that virtues involve resisting inclinations to do the wrong thing, but that resisting these inclinations does not require practice in solving technical difficulties, as in skills.⁴⁰ However, as Roberts points out, while virtues involve overcoming contrary inclinations, it doesn't follow that doing so doesn't involve techniques. Information of a technical sort may be needed in overcoming inclinations:

if somebody already has a moral motive, and then finds that bad habits and adverse emotions are getting in the way of acting lovingly, the psychologist has a potential role, and though we would not normally call this role "technical," what the psychologist may supply here is precisely information and training of a "how to" sort.⁴¹

Thus, virtues and skills cannot be contrasted merely on the grounds that the difficulties involved in each are entirely distinct. Furthermore, it does not make sense to think of acting virtuously as not involving difficulties other than ones of inclination. That would imply that knowing what honesty requires is always simple, but always knowing the requirements of honesty is especially difficult.⁴²

V. SKILLS AND VIRTUES: AUTOMATICITY AND FLOW

Other aspects of skill acquisition have been drawn on to explain qualities associated with virtue—such as virtuous behavior being understood as habitual, or how virtuous behavior need not be accompanied by self-conscious thoughts about virtue.⁴³ A defining feature of expert performance is the ability of experts to act in a way that seems (and usually is) almost effortless. Experts do not need to devote much conscious attention to what they are doing, and this lack of conscious attention does not lead to any reduction in their performance. This phenomenon is referred to as automaticity in the psychological literature.⁴⁴ While automaticity is a defining feature of expert performance, it starts to appear at earlier stages of skill development. With practice, tasks can be accomplished more effectively and more efficiently. This allows a person to devote less attention to the tasks at hand without any reduction in performance, and to shift that attention to other matters. Being able to improve one's performance requires that the initial tasks become effortless, so one can devote attention and energy to more difficult tasks.

Of special interest for virtue is what is referred to as goal-dependent automaticity. The idea is that our goals have mental representations, and while we often think

consciously about our goals (which can then lead to behavior to accomplish those goals), these goals (and their corresponding goal-directed behavior) can be triggered nonconsciously. Stimuli in one's environment can activate the mental representation of our goals and corresponding behavior without our awareness. If this happens repeatedly, the goal is said to be "chronically accessible," as in easily activated.⁴⁵ Importantly, as Nancy Snow notes, "Automaticity researchers are clear that nonconsciously activated goal-directed behaviors are not reflex reactions to stimuli, but are intelligent, flexible responses to unfolding situational cues."⁴⁶ Finally, as a result of repetition, an association is made between these situational cues and goal-directed behavior. So this is how behavior can become automatic, without it being unthinking or simple rote behavior. When it comes to virtue, Snow claims that we should understand habitual virtuous action on this model, where the goal is specifically related to virtue.⁴⁷

Another relevant aspect of automaticity can be found in Csikszentmihalyi's work on "flow," which helps us to understand the state of mind of the ethical expert in action.⁴⁸ When one is in a state of flow, one is immersed in the experience of the activity itself, and is not thinking self-consciously about one's performance of it. Being in this state means that you do not need to exert self-control to keep yourself from being distracted. Furthermore, as Annas points out, "the point that 'flow' experience is not self-conscious answers well to the point that the mature virtuous person, unlike the learner, responds to the situation in a way unmediated by thoughts that represent oneself as somebody trying to do the virtuous thing, or trying to be like the virtuous person."⁴⁹ Expert performance at the time of action need not be self-conscious, and we shouldn't require that genuinely virtuous behavior is always accompanied by self-conscious thoughts about one's own virtue.⁵⁰

Building on this, automaticity enables effortless expert performance that allows the expert to operate well on the basis of intuitive (rather than deliberative) judgments, as intuitions are experienced as immediate and not as the result of any conscious deliberation.⁵¹ This intuitiveness is central to expert performance because it allows the expert to react quickly to situations. One important thing to keep in mind about the talk of intuition in expertise is that the ability of the expert to reliably act well on an intuitive level is due to having an immense amount of experience and practice.⁵² Expertise, however, is not the only source of intuitive judgment. Intuitions can also arise from the use of mental heuristics, which are basically shortcuts in reasoning, where you simplify a complex problem in order to come to a decision more easily. Since there are multiple sources of intuitive judgments, and they vary with respect to reliability, it's important to note what Daniel Kahneman (who pointed out the unreliability of many forms of heuristics) has to say on the different sources:

the accurate intuitions of experts are better explained by the effects of prolonged practice than by heuristics. We can now draw a richer and more balanced picture, in which skill and heuristics are alternative sources of intuitive judgments and choices.⁵³

So we should expect the fully virtuous person to generally act on moral judgments that are arrived at in an intuitive manner.⁵⁴

The talk of intuitions, however, is often met with a fair amount of skepticism. It may remind one of ethical intuitionism, where moral knowledge is arrived at independent of experience (*a priori*), but there is a relevant difference in the concept of intuition in expertise. The intuitive response of an expert is possible only because of the depth of experience the expert has accumulated (*a posteriori*).⁵⁵

The importance of intuitive judgment leads to some debate between those advancing the “virtue as skill” thesis. Because the expertise literature reveals that expert performance relies on numerous nonconscious processes, there is evidence that experts frequently cannot articulate how they knew to act in a particular situation. A chess master, for example, might say something no more illuminating than “I saw it was the right move to make.”⁵⁶ While experts might be able to articulate some of their mental processes, they cannot necessarily explain why they saw situations in a particular light, or why a particular course of action occurred to them.⁵⁷ Even when experts are able to articulate an explanation, the explanations are often inconsistent with their observed behavior. It’s important to note that this occurs with experts who are clearly not working in fields anyone would label as a mere “knack.”

However, for some working with the “virtue as skill” approach, being an expert means being able to give an account of one’s actions. Giving an account, according to Annas, means “that the person with a skill be able explicitly to explain and justify her particular decisions and judgements, and to do so in terms of some general grasp of the principles which define that skill.”⁵⁸ So the question becomes whether or not to view articulation as something necessary for expertise and virtue.⁵⁹ One aspect that complicates this is that there is ambiguity about what counts as a sufficient explanation or justification. Presumably, what the chess master says in the preceding is not sufficient. But does a sufficient explanation need to involve discussing all the other possible moves and why they would be ruled out? In addition, if expertise does not go hand in hand with the ability to sufficiently give an account of one’s actions, how does that affect the “virtue as skill” thesis? Is it a point of disanalogy, but one where we should keep the expectation of articulation in virtue? Or should we instead get rid of the articulation requirement altogether?⁶⁰

Finally, there is another reason to be concerned about the role of articulation in expertise. When Patricia Benner studied nurses with a track record of life-saving decisions in emergency situations, she found that often the nurses could not fully articulate how they knew what to do.⁶¹ One of the most serious problems for the nurses was that their judgments were not taken as seriously as those made by doctors because of an assumption that their lack of articulation signaled a lack of knowledge, and so they were accorded less power and status within the hospital, despite their expertise.⁶² So it matters that we get an accurate picture of what really goes into acquiring skills and expertise. There are important intuitive and deliberative aspects to both skill acquisition and expert performance. The psychological research helps to correct those philosophical accounts of expertise that overemphasize one aspect over the other.⁶³

VI. SKILLS IN VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

Further issues regarding the “virtue as skill” thesis arise with respect to the intellectual virtues, for skills have frequently been discussed by the two main groups within virtue epistemology—virtue reliabilism and virtue responsibilism.⁶⁴ One context where skills are referenced is in attempts to explain how knowledge requires some reference to features of the knower (such as her faculties, skills, or traits), instead of just focusing on properties of beliefs.⁶⁵ This is reflected in Sosa’s “AAA” structure of evaluating practices with a characteristic aim. One way in which these two groups distinguish themselves is what kind of feature of the knower is picked out as relevant—faculties or character traits. Virtue reliabilists argue that knowledge consists in true beliefs that are generated by reliable and stable faculties, which would include faculties such as perception. The exercise of these faculties can be done in a tacit manner, without the knower actively reflecting on the basis for one’s belief. Virtue responsibilists require more than this, as they argue that knowledge also requires a more active contribution from the knower, such as someone being open-minded (a character trait) in arriving at her beliefs. So for the responsibilist, mere faculties, such as perception, are too passive and do not require the cultivation of a trait, and so the person is essentially less responsible (or accountable) for beliefs that arise only from reliable faculties.⁶⁶

Where do skills fall in this debate? Skill-based approaches have so far found themselves put into both camps.⁶⁷ Sosa’s form of virtue reliabilism understands virtues in terms of skills, while Zagzebski’s virtue responsibilism claims that virtues are associated with skills, as skills provide the knowledge of how to reach the aim of virtue. The acquisition of skills is certainly voluntary, unlike faculties, but the exercise of skills can occur tacitly, which is similar to other faculties mentioned by reliabilists. I won’t get into further debates between these two groups, though, because both make room for skills in epistemology, and further I agree with Heather Battaly and others⁶⁸ who have argued that the distinction between reliabilists and responsibilists is itself problematic, mainly on the ground that there seems little reason that both views can’t be embraced. That is, it appears that both are needed to fully explain how we come to have knowledge, since we acquire knowledge in a variety of ways.

VII. MOTIVATION OBJECTION

There is, however, an important objection to the “virtue as skill” thesis that comes up quite noticeably in differences between virtue reliabilism and virtue responsibilism. In summarizing the two groups, Battaly notes that

[t]he rift between Zagzebski’s and Sosa’s views is exacerbated by their disagreement over whether the virtues are skills . . . But, skills are not habits. While skills need

not be exercised, habits will not exist unless they are exercised on the appropriate occasions.⁶⁹

Given that habitual virtuous action is understood on a model of skills, the skill–habit distinction is hard to maintain. However, the real problem seems to be that the possession of a skill does not require exercising it on (almost) every appropriate occasion. Skills only represent what you can do, while virtues require that you are actually motivated to exercise them on appropriate occasions. This is the reason Zagzebski rejects virtues as skills, since she thinks virtue centrally involves motivation in a way absent in skill.⁷⁰

This objection arises too with respect to moral virtue, such as in Gary Watson’s discussion of the differences in how we evaluate skilled versus moral behavior. Certainly the performance of a skilled act will be judged according to whether it meets the end pursued (e.g., in tennis, whether you won the game).⁷¹ But when assessing one’s level of virtue, it also seems to matter to what extent a person is motivated or committed to act effectively (unlike skills). Watson, for example, notes how a half-hearted tennis performance would not count against your level of skill, while a half-hearted attempt at kindness would count against your level of virtue.⁷²

The psychological research on expertise, however, calls this contrast into question. Given the overall difficulty of achieving expertise discussed earlier, one of the most important factors for determining whether someone can attain that level of performance is motivation.⁷³ Expertise cannot be achieved without a serious commitment to high levels of performance. Furthermore, expertise cannot be maintained without this kind of commitment, as otherwise one’s level of skill degrades over time. Research on age and expertise reveals that maintaining expertise requires the same kind of deliberate effort that went into achieving it in the first place.⁷⁴ Thus, skills are not accurately characterized as capacities that one could have regardless of whether one is motivated to act skillfully. Hubert Dreyfus makes a similar point when he discusses, in a way reminiscent of Ryle’s distinction between single and multi-track dispositions, how we should distinguish between two kinds of skills:

Acquiring simple skills requires only that one face risks and uncertainty without falling back on rules or fleeing into detachment, whereas acquiring hard skills requires, in addition, a motivation continually to improve—then, one needs both the willingness to take risks and a commitment to excellence that manifests itself in persistence and in high standards for what counts as having done something right.⁷⁵

An activity like safely crossing a busy street is an acquired competence, but simple enough not to involve variable expressions across a variety of situations (i.e., it’s single-track in Ryle’s sense). There’s no need for a strong motivation to improve with single-track competencies such as tying one’s shoes. But with “hard” skills, Dreyfus draws our attention to the importance of a particular kind of motivation for achieving and maintaining expertise, which is the motivation to continually improve.

However, it might be objected at this point that it's unclear whether virtue actually requires motivation in the sense displayed in expertise of having a drive to improve one's performance and to continue to engage in practice. For example, Robert Johnson critiques virtue ethicists for failing to "make room for a genuine moral obligation to improve your character and to act in other ways that are appropriate only because you could be a better person than you are."⁷⁶ A defense of the "virtue as skill" thesis on this point can be found with Annas's concept of "the drive to aspire," which she argues is fundamental to both skill and virtue. Both skills and virtues are teachable, and Annas points out that "aspiration leads the learner to strive to *improve*, to do what he is doing better rather than taking it over by rote from the teacher."⁷⁷ Virtue, while considered to involve habitual actions, is not mere mindless or rote repetition. It takes purposeful effort and experience to acquire virtue. As Annas further argues,

The drive to aspire stresses the equally important aspect of coming to understand what we are learning, the move to self-direction, and the point that we are always improving (or at least sustaining) virtue. Virtue is not a state you achieve and then sit back, with nothing further to do.⁷⁸

The possession of virtue is considered to be a matter of degree, and so for anyone there is always the possibility of improvement. Likewise, once expertise has been achieved in a skill, the same kind of deliberate practice and self-monitoring is necessary to retain expert performance. It's an advantage of the "virtue as skill" approach that it can ground an obligation for self-improvement, based on its necessity for achieving expertise.⁷⁹

VIII. VIRTUE, SKILL, AND COMMITMENT

Despite this, one might still object that motivation does not seem to play a role in evaluating performances in quite the same way it would for virtue. It might seem as though a strong motivation for achieving high standards of performance is merely instrumental to achieving expertise, and doesn't address the kind of commitment expressed by virtue.⁸⁰ As Abrol Fairweather remarks, "To have an excellence of character requires a normative commitment to the end one reliably attains, whereas to have a skill simply requires that the end attained is due to a competence involving training, understanding and discipline."⁸¹

Although this points to an important distinction between virtues and skills, there is a way to bring our views about skills more in line with that of virtues. If we switch our evaluations from the performance to the performer, then it looks like we can evaluate the performer in a way that brings in concerns about motivational commitments. To return to the example of less than wholehearted performances, Watson suggests,

My half-hearted effort on the tennis court would not support a negative evaluation of my proficiencies at that sport. Nevertheless, it might bear negatively on me as a tennis player. One can be “good at” playing tennis without being overall a good tennis player. A good tennis player, overall, possesses not only a high level of skill but, among other things, a commitment to the game, a responsibility to its distinctive demands. (In this way, ‘good tennis player’ functions rather like ‘good human being.’)⁸²

A good performer, as distinguished from a good performance, not only displays a “feel for the game” but also a “commitment to the game.” As another example of criticizing less than wholehearted performances, we would likely regard a doctor who gives half-hearted attempts at surgery as a bad doctor, even if she can wholeheartedly perform surgery with expertise. The doctor is not being responsive to the distinctive demands of medicine, and so we could criticize her for her lack of commitment, as we would if someone acted half-heartedly with respect to a virtue like kindness.⁸³ Watson’s suggestion closes the gap between judgments of expertise and virtue, as the expert can also be assessed in aretaic terms, where a failure of motivation does count against one being a good performer.

In taking this step, we need to reject both viewing skills as mere capacities and viewing virtues as merely motivational states. Being virtuous requires both knowing how to act well and being motivated to do so,⁸⁴ and this can be captured with the “virtue as skill” approach. The ends of a practice can be used not only to judge the skillfulness of a performance, but also the commitment of the performer. Importantly, we do not need to reach beyond a discussion of skills and expertise to incorporate a concern for responsiveness to the demands of a practice. As Watson noted, thinking in terms of what it is to be a good tennis player brings in evaluations both of one’s skillfulness in, and one’s commitment to, playing tennis. We might, therefore, add another level to Sosa’s “AAA” structure for practices with a characteristic aim, which seems restricted to evaluations of performances. To move our evaluation to performers, we might also ask of a particular performance whether the person in so acting was responsive to the distinctive demands of the practice. Perhaps what we want is an *assurance* that someone has a normative commitment to the end of a practice, in which case we end up with an “AAAA” structure for evaluating performers.⁸⁵

The incorporation of motivational commitment into an account of expertise is also reflected in the approach Narvaez takes in arguing that moral behavior should be understood as skilled behavior.⁸⁶ The view of expertise that she is working with includes the idea of an expert being committed to the ends of her practice. As she points out, “an expert desires excellence in the domain. Similarly, the virtuous person desires excellence in virtue, so much so that the desire is reflected not only in behavior but in preferences and choices, it is what the person likes to do.”⁸⁷ As mentioned earlier, to develop expertise in a domain requires a strong commitment to achieving high levels of performance and a perseverance to engage in a long and difficult acquisition process. This shapes people in ways often overlooked when skills are thought of as mere capacities. As Narvaez goes on to explain,

Learning the skill means changing oneself to be the kind of person who fully embodies the skill, consciously and intuitively. The skill flavors and modifies one's perceptions, attention, desires, and intuitions, as well as semantic, procedural, and conditional knowledge.⁸⁸

In this sense, expertise does capture the motivational aspects of virtue that gave rise to the putative disanalogy between virtues and skills in the case of half-hearted performances.

IX. FUTURE AVENUES OF RESEARCH

One area, though, where the “virtue as skill” approach might not capture our views about virtues is with respect to practical wisdom. Virtues require being practically wise about what is good and bad for people, and how various practices fit into an overall conception of the good life. In contrast, skills do not require making these kinds of value judgments. The end to be pursued in any particular skill is essentially fixed, as in chess it's winning the game, and even being a committed expert in a skill does not require reflection on how the practice of that skill integrates into a well-lived life.

It may be, though, that we should instead understand practical wisdom to be itself a skill, as Jason Swartwood has argued.⁸⁹ While such an argument might seem to strengthen the “virtue as skill” thesis, what Swartwood discusses as practical wisdom seems to be already captured by the notion of expertise, as can be seen in Hursthouse's discussion of the “mundane” aspects of practical wisdom.⁹⁰ What remains central to practical wisdom, in terms of a broad knowledge of what is good and bad for people, does not seem to fit the model of a skill, even if that knowledge is gained through experience.⁹¹

Even if this is a relevant difference between virtues and skills, it would not undermine the “virtue as skill” approach. Virtues of character can be understood as specifically moral skills, and it's this connection to morality that brings in the need for practical wisdom. In any case, more work needs to be done to understand the role of practical wisdom in the “virtue as skill” approach.⁹²

Overall, the preceding discussions present a strong case for viewing virtuous behavior as skilled behavior—in which case, what would be helpful now is further research on whether moral development is like skill acquisition. Fortunately, some work is already being done in this area. Narvaez and Lapsley have done extensive work in applying an expertise model to moral development. In regard to the importance of practice and feedback in skill and virtue acquisition, Narvaez claims, “as Aristotle pointed out and modern research confirms, virtuous character takes a lot of immersed *practice* in an environment that provides good, rather than poor, information on performance.”⁹³ Also, in discussing the relationship between moral virtue and practical wisdom, Narvaez, Gleason, and Mitchell have studied the differences in comprehension between moral and prudential themes, and found empirical support for moral motivations developing before practical wisdom.⁹⁴

Another pressing issue is to figure out how to individuate the virtuous skills. For example, Annas says that virtue is a skill, a kind of “global skill,” which is the skill of living your life well.⁹⁵ Is virtue therefore to be understood as a singular skill? A potential problem with this, as noted by Daniel Jacobson, is that “[t]he plausibility of a skill-based epistemology was earned by arguments focusing on discrete virtues such as courage and kindness.”⁹⁶ It is with these more discrete virtues that we can get more immediate feedback about how we’re doing, as well as figuring out how to structure deliberate practice to improve them.⁹⁷ But if that’s the case, will the moral skills map on to the traditional individual virtues such as honesty, courage, kindness, temperance, and so on?

Perhaps when we take the “virtue as skill” thesis seriously, moral skills appear to be more fine-grained than traditional virtue categories admit to. Narvaez, in arguing that expertise is a model for virtue development, claims,

Through the course of building perceptual skills (sensibilities), motivational skills (focus), reasoning skills (judgment) and action skills (implementation), individuals move towards expertise. There are many kinds of skills necessary for moral or ethical expertise, including procedural and conditional knowledge that can be employed automatically when needed (doing the right thing at the right time in the right way).⁹⁸

She goes on to claim that these four main types of ethical skills can be broken down into 84 separate ethical skills—many more than found on traditional lists of virtues. Is this too many skills to acquire for moral development? A related issue in individuating the skills is whether, for example, overcoming strong inclinations is the focus of a particular moral skill, like temperance, or whether that aspect is found more generally as part of any moral skill, as in the need for self-regulating behavior. This is another area where experimental research may prove insightful. Furthermore, can we conceptualize vice in the same way? As Annas notes, people do not seem to aim intentionally at cultivating vice, in the way in which people aim at acquiring virtue.⁹⁹ Also, being a good liar certainly seems to take skill, but this is not obviously the case with respect to cowardice.¹⁰⁰

Finally, embracing the idea of virtue as a skill requires us to take seriously the possibility of ethical expertise. The idea of ethical expertise, though, is fairly controversial, especially in the bioethics literature.¹⁰¹ Additionally, a number of social and political problems arise since experts have a great deal of power, status, and influence in society. Despite the common view that a virtuous person would be an expert in ethical matters, the controversies surrounding ethical expertise are a surprisingly neglected topic in the virtue literature. More generally, discussions of virtue and practical wisdom have tended to neglect larger issues of power, which are more explicitly recognized in the expertise literature.¹⁰² Neither skills nor virtues will be acquired in a political or social vacuum, and more work needs to be done to accommodate this point.¹⁰³

NOTES

1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Grinnell: The Peripatetic Press, 1984), 1104a, 14–15.
2. For example, see Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Paul Bloomfield, *Moral Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Matt Stichter, “Ethical Expertise,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 10 (2007), 183–194.
3. Julia Annas, “Virtue Ethics,” in David Copp (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 515–536, 518.
4. Daniel Narvaez and Daniel Lapsley, “The psychological foundations of everyday morality and moral expertise,” in *Character Psychology and Character Education*, edited by Daniel K. Lapsley and F. Clark Power (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 140–165, 143.
5. Paul Bloomfield, “Virtue Epistemology and the Epistemology of Virtue,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 60(1) (2000): 23–43, 23.
6. Despite the influence of the ancient Greeks on contemporary discussions of virtue as skill, I will not be giving a historical reconstruction of their views. The focus of this chapter is instead on how the “virtue as skill” thesis plays out in contemporary debates in virtue ethics and epistemology. But for differing perspectives on the “virtue as skill” thesis in ancient Greek thought, see Tom Angier, *Techne in Aristotle’s Ethics: Crafting the Moral Life* (New York: Continuum, 2010); Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*; D. S. Hutchinson, “Doctrines of the Mean and the Debate Concerning Skills in Fourth-Century Medicine, Rhetoric, and Ethics,” *Apeiron* 21 (1988): 17–52; and Stichter, “Ethical Expertise.”
7. Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
8. Julia Annas, “Virtue as a Skill,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 3(2) (1995): 227–243.
9. It is important to note that while I endorse the strong form of the “virtue as skill” thesis, I will still continue to discuss the weaker forms of it that are endorsed by others, as they have insights worth building upon. I do this in part to avoid giving the appearance that everyone I discuss from here on out also endorses the strong form. I note this here so it’s clear which form of the thesis I am defending, since the strong form basically incorporates the insights of the weaker forms. In other words, the strong form claims that the reason the weak and moderate forms find associations and structural similarities between virtue and skill just is that virtues are skills.
10. James Wallace, *Virtues and Vices* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978).
11. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 107.
12. Or in the case of intellectual virtue, a connection to truth or understanding.
13. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 137.
14. Ernest Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23.
15. Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology*, 88.
16. At this point, I will focus primarily on the moral virtues, and return in a later section to the intellectual virtues.
17. Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology*, 88.
18. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*.
19. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, 20.
20. Sosa denies that reasons always need to be articulable, see *A Virtue Epistemology*, 84–85. Problems with articulation will be raised in a later section.

21. Gilbert Ryle is credited with pushing the distinction between “knowing how” and “knowing that,” with skills being a primary example of know-how, in *The Concept of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949). For critiques of this distinction, see Jason Stanley, *Know How* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). For responses to Stanley, see Ellen Fridland, “Knowing How: Problems and Considerations,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 25(3) (2015): 703–727; and Ellen Fridland, “Problems with Intellectualism,” *Philosophical Studies* 165(3) (2013): 879–891.
22. Ryle doesn’t use the phrase “multi-track,” it appears instead in the foreword: Julia Tanney, “Rethinking Ryle: A Critical Discussion of *The Concept of Mind*,” in Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2009), xxviii.
23. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 31.
24. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 32.
25. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 34.
26. This leaves it open to what extent articulation is required in expertise and virtue.
27. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a32–1103b3.
28. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, 21.
29. K. Anders Ericsson, *The Road to Excellence* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996).
30. John Horn and Hiromi Masunaga, “A Merging Theory of Expertise and Intelligence,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, edited by K. Anders Ericsson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 587–612, 601.
31. Darcia Narvaez, “The Neo-Kohlbergian Tradition and Beyond: Schemas, Expertise and Character,” in *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, Vol. 51: Moral Motivation through the Lifespan*, edited by Gustav Carlo and Carolyn Pope-Edwards (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 119–163.
32. Christian Miller, “The Problem of Character,” in *The Handbook of Virtue Ethics*, edited by Stan Van Hooft (New York: Routledge, 2014), 418–429, 421. Though, when it comes to virtue epistemology, it might be problematic if the standard for knowledge is having developed intellectual skills to the level of expertise. This point is raised by Lauren Olin and John M. Doris, “Vicious Minds: Virtue Epistemology, Cognition, and Skepticism,” *Philosophical Studies* 168 (2014): 665–692, 676.
33. “Because high levels of skill must be practiced and adapted personally to dynamic contexts, aspiring experts need to develop a self-disciplined approach to learning and practice to gain consistency.” Barry J. Zimmerman, “Development and Adaptation of Expertise: The Role of Self-Regulatory Processes and Beliefs,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, edited by K. Anders Ericsson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 705–722, 706.
34. See Paul J. Feltovich, Michael J. Prietula, and K. Anders Ericsson, “Studies of Expertise from Psychological Perspectives,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, edited by K. Anders Ericsson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 41–68, 56.
35. Bob Roberts, “Will Power and the Virtues,” *The Philosophical Review* 93(2) (1984): 227–247.
36. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 60.
37. Roberts, “Will Power and the Virtues,” 238.
38. This is a controversial view of courage. It may be that instead of identifying the self-regulating behavior that defines some virtues, he has identified the importance of self-regulating behavior in all virtues.
39. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 108.
40. Wallace, *Virtues and Vices*, 44.

41. Roberts, "Will Power and the Virtues," 239.
42. There is, for example, a fair amount of literature in business ethics on what honesty requires in business negotiations. The medical ethics literature also presents many difficult cases that would seem to fall under honesty, such as issues regarding informed consent and confidentiality in the doctor-patient relationship.
43. Respectively, Nancy E. Snow, "Habitual Virtuous Actions and Automaticity," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 9 (2006): 545–561; and Julia Annas, "The Phenomenology of Virtue," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 7 (2008): 21–34.
44. Feltovich, Prietula, and Ericsson, "Studies of Expertise from Psychological Perspectives," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, edited by K. Anders Ericsson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 41–68.
45. Lapsley and Narvaez take a similar approach in Daniel K. Lapsley and Darcia Narvaez, "A Social-Cognitive Approach to the Moral Personality," in *Moral Development, Self and Identity: Essays in Honor of Augusto Blasi*, edited by Daniel K. Lapsley and Darcia Narvaez (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2004), 189–212. Though they put the reference to mental representations of goals in the language of "schemas," claiming that "[w]e argue that the moral personality is better understood in terms of the chronic accessibility of moral schemas for construing social events" (see page 18).
46. Nancy E. Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 43.
47. Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence*, 52.
48. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991).
49. Annas, "The Phenomenology of Virtue," 30.
50. Annas also notes how the "flow" experience can vindicate Aristotle's claim that virtuous activity should be in some sense pleasant. See Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, Chap. 5.
51. Dual-processing theory in cognitive science is especially helpful for understanding the contrast between our automatic/intuitive and controlled/deliberative mental processes. See Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011); and Matt Stichter, "Philosophical and Psychological Accounts of Expertise and Experts," *Humana.Mente—Journal of Philosophical Studies* 28: Experts and Expertise. Interdisciplinary Issues (2015): 105–128.
52. The psychological research "locates automaticity on the backend of development. It is the outcome of repeated experience, of instruction, intentional coaching and socialisation." Daniel Lapsley and Patrick Hill, "On Dual Processing and Heuristic Approaches to Moral Cognition," *Journal of Moral Education* 37(3) (2008): 313–332, 324–325.
53. Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 11.
54. So from here on out, when I refer to intuitions, I intend specifically the kind of intuitions that arise from expertise.
55. As Bloomfield notes, "The sense of 'intuition' here is quite different from the a priori intuitions posited by moral intuitions like Sidgwick, Moore, Ross, and Prichard. The relevant intuitions for virtue epistemology and moral epistemology are a posteriori." Bloomfield, "Virtue Epistemology and the Epistemology of Virtue," 39. As another example of moral intuitionism, see Robert Audi, *The Good in the Right: A Theory of Intuition and Intrinsic Value* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).
56. The research shows that "experts often cannot articulate their knowledge because much of their knowledge is tacit and their overt intuitions can be flawed." See Michelene T. H. Chi,

- “Two Approaches to the Study of Experts’ Characteristics,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, edited by K. Anders Ericsson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 21–30, 24.
57. Ericsson points out that “they cannot report why only one of several logically possible thoughts entered their attention, they must make inferences or confabulate answers to such questions.” K. Anders Ericsson, “Protocol Analysis and Expert Thought: Concurrent Verbalizations of Thinking during Experts’ Performance on Representative Tasks,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, edited by K. Anders Ericsson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 223–241, 230.
 58. Annas, “Virtue as a Skill,” 233.
 59. Connected to this is the issue of whether moral knowledge is codifiable, since the lack of articulation would make it more difficult to codify the knowledge of the virtuous person.
 60. For contrasting points of view, see Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*; and Stichter, “Philosophical and Psychological Accounts of Expertise and Experts.”
 61. Patricia Benner, *From Novice to Expert* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall Health, 2001), 32. Benner was applying the Dreyfus account of skill acquisition; see Hubert Dreyfus and Stuart Dreyfus, “Towards a Phenomenology of Ethical Expertise,” *Human Studies* 14 (1991): 229–250.
 62. Of course another reason is due to gender discrimination, since the doctors tend to be male and the nurses female.
 63. For example, Dreyfus seems to underestimate the role of deliberation in expertise, while Annas seems to overstate it.
 64. Sosa is representative of reliabilism, while Zagzebski is representative of responsibilism.
 65. Though this is by no means the only thing that virtue epistemologists focus on in applying virtue concepts to epistemological debates.
 66. A related debate about skills in virtue epistemology concerns whether the relevant kind of success in epistemology (truth) allows intellectual virtues to be modeled on ethical virtues. Annas, contra Zagzebski, argues that there are different kinds of success, which prevents the intellectual to be modeled on the ethical. See Julia Annas, “The Structure of Virtue,” in *Intellectual Virtue*, edited by Michael DePaul and Linda Zagzebski (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 15–33. For a reply, see Matt Stichter, “Virtues as Skills in Virtue Epistemology,” *Journal of Philosophical Research* 38 (2013): 331–346.
 67. See Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology*; Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*; and John Greco, “Virtues and Vices of Virtue Epistemology,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 23 (1993): 413–432.
 68. See Heather Battaly, “Epistemic Self-Indulgence,” *Metaphilosophy* 41 (2010): 214–234.; and Abrol Fairweather, “Duhem-Quine Virtue Epistemology,” *Synthese* 187 (2012): 673–692, 678–679.
 69. Heather Battaly, “What Is Virtue Epistemology?” *Proceedings of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy*, www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Valu/ValuBatt.htm.
 70. As she puts it, “the motivational component of a virtue defines it more than external effectiveness does, whereas it is the reverse in the case of skills. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 115.
 71. Though I do not mean to suggest that is the only way a performance is judged. One could play poorly but still win due to facing a much less experienced opponent, in which case having won the game will not exhaust the factors relevant to assessing the performance.
 72. Gary Watson, “Two Faces of Responsibility,” in Watson, *Agency and Answerability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Appendix.

73. See Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Kevin Rathunde, and Samuel Whalen, *Talented Teenagers: The Roots of Success and Failure* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 31–32.
74. Ralf Krampe and Neil Charness, “Aging and Expertise,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, edited by K. Anders Ericsson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 723–742.
75. Hubert Dreyfus, “Could Anything Be More Intelligible Than Everyday Intelligibility? Reinterpreting Division I of Being and Time in the light of Division II,” in *Appropriating Heidegger*, edited by James E. Faulconer and Mark A. Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), note vii.
76. Robert Johnson, “Virtue and Right,” *Ethics* 113 (2003): 810–834, 811. For responses to his challenge, see Annas, 2011, 42–43; and Matt Stichter, “Virtues, Skills, and Right Action,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 14 (2011): 73–86.
77. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, 18 [her emphasis].
78. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, 25.
79. Annas’s focus on the “drive to aspire” also helps rebut another objection to the “virtue as skill” thesis. Ryle and Wallace both view the regular practice involved with skills as signaling a disanalogy between skills and virtues. Skills might be forgotten if not exercised over time, whereas virtues are more firmly entrenched and are in no danger of being forgotten if a person does not exercise the virtue over time. But Annas is clear that Ryle is mistaken in regard to his views about virtue, as he implies that virtue is a static state in that once you achieve it, no further practice is necessary.
80. That is to say, with respect to virtue, being motivated to be just is not viewed as merely instrumentally necessary to being able to act justly; rather, the commitment to justice is part of what it is to be just. Whereas with skill, it might be thought that the motivation discussed earlier is merely instrumentally necessary to overcoming all the obstacles to achieving expertise, but otherwise expresses no further commitments.
81. Fairweather, “Duhem-Quine Virtue Epistemology,” 678. See also Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology*, 73–74.
82. Watson, “Two Faces of Responsibility,” Appendix.
83. See Angier, *Techne in Aristotle’s Ethics*, 7, 40.
84. This isn’t to deny that we can assess whether an act is virtuous or instead vicious without knowing the actor’s motivations (e.g., whether she is doing the right thing but for the wrong reason).
85. This would also cover how we think there is something of value to those who are committed to good ends, even when they fail in practice to achieve them.
86. By “moral behavior,” I intended the idea of not only doing the right thing, but also going about it in the right way; that is, one can do the right thing by accident, in which case the moral behavior would not be a product of a skill.
87. Darcia Narvaez, “Integrative Ethical Education,” in *Handbook of Moral Development*, edited by Melanie Killen and Judith Smetana (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006), 703–733, 719.
88. Narvaez, “Integrative Ethical Education,” 722.
89. Jason Swartwood, “Wisdom as an Expert Skill,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 16 (2013): 511–528.
90. Rosalind Hursthouse, “Practical Wisdom: A Mundane Account,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 106 (2006): 285–309.

91. For more detail, see Matt Stichter, "Practical Skills and Practical Wisdom in Virtue," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 94(3) (2016): 435–448. See also Angier, *Techne in Aristotle's Ethics*, 48–56.
92. Whether practical wisdom is involved with the intellectual virtues is another issue worthy of more attention.
93. Darcia Narvaez, "Wisdom as Mature Moral Functioning: Insights from Developmental Psychology and Neurobiology," in *Toward Human Flourishing: Character, Practical Wisdom and Professional Formation*, edited by Mark Jones, Paul Lewis, and Kelly Reffitt (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2013) [her emphasis], 24–40.
94. Darcia Narvaez, Tracy Gleason, and Christyan Mitchell, "Moral Virtue and Practical Wisdom: Theme Comprehension in Children, Youth and Adults," *Journal of Genetic Psychology* 171(4) (2010): 1–26.
95. Annas, "The Structure of Virtue," 15–33.
96. Daniel Jacobson, "Seeing by Feeling," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 8 (2005): 401.
97. Though Jacobson also notes how the virtues need to be unified in some respect, so that the virtuous person can come to an all-things-considered judgment about how to act. One way to try to meet both of these demands is to claim that while virtue does aim at the overall end of living well, we cannot do this without thinking in terms of constitutive ends that make up living well (*eudaimonia*). This would be a role for practical wisdom to play, since practical wisdom is centrally about how various ends fit into an overall picture of the good life. These constitutive ends would give us more concrete ends to aim at relative to just aiming at living well (which would help with knowing what counts as success, how to structure deliberate practice, providing for better feedback, etc.), without giving up the idea of an overall unity that binds these ends together.
98. Narvaez, "Wisdom as Mature Moral Functioning: Insights from Developmental Psychology and Neurobiology."
99. Julia Annas, "Virtue, Skill and Vice," Presented at Virtue and Skill workshop, Centre for the Study of Mind in Nature, University of Oslo, Norway (June 1–2, 2015).
100. If we cannot model vice on skill, does this undermine the "virtue as skill" thesis? As noted earlier, the "virtue as skill" thesis will likely require us to rethink traditional virtue categories, and we may need to do the same with vice. Furthermore, it takes skill to reliably act rightly, because as Aristotle noted, there's only one way to hit a bullseye, but there are countless ways to miss it. Vices might pick out instead a fairly diverse set of factors that can lead one to reliably act wrongly, in which case we need not think that vices would have to be conceptualized as skills on this approach.
101. See Norbert L. Steinkamp, Bert Gordijn, and Henk A. M. J. ten Have, "Debating Ethical Expertise," *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* 18(2) (2008): 173–192; and Sarah McGrath, "Moral Disagreement and Moral Expertise," in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 3, edited by R. Shafer-Landau (2008): 87–107, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
102. Bent Flyvbjerg helpfully brings to our attention what has been left out of such discussions: "the classical interpretation of *phronesis* is strong on values but weak on issues of power . . . practical wisdom involves not only appreciative judgements in terms of values but also an understanding of the practical political realities of any situation as part of an integrated judgement in terms of power." Bent Flyvbjerg, "Phronetic Planning Research: Theoretical and Methodological Reflections," *Planning Theory & Practice* 5(3) (2004): 283–306, 284. Flyvbjerg's point is that reflections on our conceptions of the good life, and the value of the activities we are engaged in, cannot be carried out in complete isolation

from the social, political, legal, and economic circumstances in which we find ourselves. It is not that one is merely asking questions about power alongside the questions about value, but that there are power dynamics in our own thinking about morality, what is valuable, and what the good life consists in. The context of capitalism, for example, problematically leads us to overestimate the value of money, material goods, and competitive practices.

103. My thanks to Nancy Snow and Christian Miller for very helpful feedback on this chapter.

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PART II

HISTORICAL
AND RELIGIOUS
ACCOUNTS
OF VIRTUE

CHAPTER 4

PLATO

FRANCO V. TRIVIGNO

IN this chapter, I aim to foreground aspects of Plato's virtue ethics that set him apart from Aristotle in order that he may be an independent resource for contemporary virtue ethicists. In the contemporary revival of ancient virtue ethics, Aristotle has overshadowed Plato, partly because of the interpretive difficulty of finding a clear, unambiguous statement of Plato's virtue ethics. Plato is hard to interpret for two general reasons. First, Plato wrote dramatic dialogues whose central philosophical protagonists (Socrates, the Eleatic Stranger, and the Athenian) do not simply state or articulate Plato's views. Further, it is not clear whether or not the character Socrates is meant to be articulating the views of the historical Socrates.¹ Thus, interpreting Plato's texts is complicated work.² Second, some dialogues or groups of dialogues seem to support contrary positions on key issues. For example, different dialogues characterize the emotions very differently: in some, emotions are governed and controlled by beliefs, whereas in others, they are psychologically independent. It is not obvious how to deal with these seeming contradictions.³ In this chapter, I will permit myself a number of interpretive shortcuts. First, I will only cite the relevant philosophical protagonist in passages that support my interpretations of Plato and take no stand on what the historical Socrates might have thought. Second, though I take no stand on the unity of Plato's dialogues, I will *not*, in this chapter, be articulating a single unified view on Plato's behalf. Though my emphasis will be more on articulating the philosophical positions discoverable in the dialogues than on the larger interpretive questions, I will nevertheless be taking several controversial stands on matters of interpretation. (I will not, however, directly engage the vast literature on Plato.)

The chapter will be divided into five parts. First, I will give an interpretation of Socratic self-knowledge as a kind of moral epistemic humility that motivates a life-long pursuit of virtue. Then, in §2, I will turn to Plato's views on the individual virtues and the overall structure of virtue, and show how the pursuit of virtue essentially involves trying to attain knowledge of the nature of virtue. Next (§3) I will address Plato's position regarding the relationship between virtue and happiness—Plato is a *eudaimonist*, but he has a distinctive view on the contribution of external goods to happiness. In the next section, §4, I will give an account of the moral psychology of *eros*, love or passionate desire, in the development and maintenance of the proper attitude toward virtue. Finally, I will

discuss moral education and the politics of virtue, focusing in particular on the nature of law and mechanisms whereby states tend to the virtue and happiness of their citizens. All of these sections share a focus on how best to live one's life.

I. SOCRATIC SELF-KNOWLEDGE AS MORAL EPISTEMIC HUMILITY

In the *Apology*, Socrates is on trial for impiety and corrupting the youth, and his defense speech aims not only to rebut the charges, but also to justify the way he lives his entire life, that is, in conversations with his fellow citizens about the nature of virtue and the good life. As Socrates tells the story, after being informed of the Delphic oracle's proclamation that "no one is wiser" than he is, Socrates—who "is very conscious that [he] is not wise"—searches for a counterexample and thereby discovers that he is in fact wiser than, and superior to, everyone else.⁴ However, the peculiar content of that wisdom restrains any cause he might have for pride or arrogance. As I hope to show in this section, this wisdom consists in the virtue of what we might call "moral epistemic humility."

Socrates describes the wisdom he has as "human wisdom."⁵ In comparing himself to one of the politicians, Socrates describes this wisdom in the following way:

I am wiser than this man; it is likely that neither of us knows anything worthwhile, but he thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas when I do not know, neither do I think I know; so I am likely to be wiser than he to this small extent, that I do not think I know what I do not know.⁶

In his attempts to find a truly wise human being, Socrates only finds a series of self-ignorant impostors—those who wrongly believe themselves to possess moral knowledge, often on the basis of having a certain reputation or high status in the community. Those who do possess some non-moral knowledge—the craftsmen, for example—mistakenly think themselves to be wise in moral matters, either because they simply infer this from their non-moral knowledge, or because they conceive of their non-moral knowledge as encompassing or ranging over moral matters.⁷ The moral epistemology that Socrates is working with seems to have three levels: *human ignorance*, *human wisdom*, and *divine wisdom*. We might define these as follows:

Human wisdom is self-knowledge, that is, knowledge of one's (moral) knowledge and ignorance.

Human ignorance is self-ignorance, that is, ignorance of one's (moral) knowledge and ignorance.

Divine wisdom simply is wisdom, or complete moral knowledge.

Given the gap between human wisdom and divine wisdom, it is clear that human wisdom is not a virtue properly speaking. It is, however, a *second-best* sort of virtue, that is, a virtue for those who do not possess divine wisdom and are thus not virtuous. One might think that human wisdom is a more broadly *epistemic virtue*, rather than a moral virtue, since it involves *inter alia* an ability to distinguish between moral and non-moral knowledge. I would not deny its epistemic character, but this wisdom has clear *practical* implications, its *content* refers essentially to moral knowledge, and it approximates a particular ethical virtue, namely, *temperance* (*sophrosune*), or what we might anachronistically call *humility*—Socrates elsewhere claims that to be temperate is “to know oneself,” that is, to know “what one knows and does not know.”⁸ Socrates also claims that the sort of self-ignorance characteristic of his fellow citizens is ethically blameworthy, despite the fact that it is widespread and easy to fall prey to.⁹ Socrates is appropriately humble about his wisdom because he realizes that the relevant comparison set is not the self-ignorance of his fellow-citizens, but the wisdom of the god, who knows literally everything about virtue and goodness.

Though ignorance is at the heart of this account, it is by no means a skeptical view—for the humanly wise, the core practical and motivational consequence is that one should spend one’s life seeking divine wisdom. To show appropriate humility, then, is to orient oneself toward and strive after the proper ideal, even if this ideal is out of reach for most, if not all, human beings. A second and related task is to encourage the self-ignorant to abandon other pursuits and to reorient their lives around the pursuit of wisdom.¹⁰ Socrates accomplishes this task by finding someone who claims to be wise, examining his views about human virtue and goodness, and refuting him. This refutation is meant to serve the double purpose of showing that certain views—for example, “pleasure is the good”—cannot be consistently maintained and of showing that the purported ethical expert lacks moral knowledge and thus should endeavor to obtain it. Thus, the reorienting work is itself a way to pursue wisdom; and, if successful, it would provide a great benefit—indeed, the greatest benefit—one can bestow on another.

Given this moral epistemology and the strict limitations it seems to set on what we can know, how can one *act* in the world in an ethically defensible way? It might seem that moral epistemic humility dooms one to a life of ethical inactivity or quietism. Two sorts of responses may be appropriate here: the first concerns the *kinds of actions* that most appropriately reflect one’s aims, and the second concerns the *avoidance* of certain otherwise tempting actions and ways of thinking. First, the overall aim of one’s life is the development and promotion of virtue, and the *kinds of actions* that most appropriately reflect these aims are discursive (or philosophical) actions, what we might call speech-acts. Thus, this view makes ethical analysis and argumentation the central sort of action, and it makes the promotion of the life of virtue one’s central aim regarding others. Second, by giving virtue the proper place in one’s life, one will both *refrain from* acting in certain ways and refrain from thinking in certain ways. For example, one will not be tempted by, and thus refrain from, committing an injustice in order to attain wealth or power, or to prolong one’s life. Nor will one be tempted to commit cowardly or unjust

actions due to fear of death.¹¹ This is, at the very least, to make considerations of justice and virtue primary in one's life.

In sum, if one has a demanding moral epistemology, that is, if one sets quite high standards for what it would mean to possess moral knowledge, then the virtue of moral epistemic humility will play an important role in one's virtue ethics. If, on the other hand, one makes virtue more or less obtainable for everyone, then it seems that such humility will be less important. The role and value of this second-best virtue will depend on how high one sets the bar for full virtue. On the picture in the *Apology*, this second-best virtue may very well be the best that most, if not all, of us can obtain. One might contrast this with the prominence of "greatness of soul" in Aristotle—the virtue appropriate to one who has all the virtues, deserves great honors, and is well aware of this.¹² Such a virtue will only find a place within a much more optimistic picture of the attainability of virtue.

II. THE INDIVIDUAL VIRTUES, THE UNITY OF VIRTUE, AND THE STRUCTURE OF VIRTUE

For Plato, central to the task of becoming a virtuous individual is attaining knowledge of the cardinal virtues: these are initially piety, courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom, though in the *Republic* (and for large parts of the *Laws*), piety is left out. Socrates asks his famous "what is it?" question regarding piety (*Euthyphro*), courage (*Laches*), temperance (*Charmides*), and justice (*Republic*); as well as for virtue itself (*Meno*) and virtue-relevant terms like beauty (*Hippias Major*). Further, he explicitly considers how to formulate the unity of the virtues, especially in the *Protagoras* and the *Meno*, where wisdom plays a special and crucial role, and the structure of virtue in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, where justice plays a special role.

The assumption underpinning this way of pursuing virtue is that knowledge of the essence, or what-it-is, of a given virtue is at least necessary for being virtuous, such that if one is, for example, pious, or is performing a pious action, one should know and thus be able to say what it is to be pious.¹³ This is sometimes referred to as the priority of definition. Plato thus has a *cognitivist* or *intellectualist* picture of virtue that makes a certain kind of abstract knowledge, that is, definitional knowledge, at least necessary for the possession of virtue. When Socrates asks Euthyphro, "What is the pious?" he is not asking for a dictionary definition of the word "pious," or a characterization of its various uses. He is not, in short, asking for the *meaning* of "pious" but rather about the nature of its *reference*, piety.¹⁴ Various definitions are put forth for each of the virtues in these dialogues: piety is defined as "what is dear to the gods" (*Euthyphr.* 6e–7a) and the part of justice concerned with "care for the gods";¹⁵ courage is defined as "wisdom about what is and is not to be feared,"¹⁶ "wise endurance,"¹⁷ and "knowledge of what is to inspire

fear and confidence”;¹⁸ temperance is defined as “orderliness and quietness,”¹⁹ “modesty,”²⁰ “self-knowledge”²¹ and “knowledge of what one knows and does not know”;²² and justice is defined as “care for others,”²³ “helping friends and harming enemies,”²⁴ “the advantage of the stronger,”²⁵ and “doing one’s own work.”²⁶ I do not have space here to pursue the various definitions in detail, but it is clear that Plato considers work on individual virtues both to be an indispensable part of ethical theory and to contribute essentially to an individual’s cultivation of virtue. A common theme in these discussions is that, on the basis of a series of analogies with practical skill, or *techne*,²⁷ the virtues are to be understood as kinds of practical *knowledge*—hence the Socratic slogan, “virtue is knowledge”—that cause and explain virtuous action, and that virtue is the health and good condition of the soul that decisively contributes to human happiness, or *eudaimonia* (see next section). In understanding virtue primarily in terms of the epistemic state of the agent rather than in terms of particular action-types, Plato is establishing the primacy of character that is so central to virtue ethics in general. Further, in two key passages, it is suggested that virtue, in its entirety, is knowledge of good and evil.²⁸

To make headway in finding out more about the content of the knowledge that is constitutive of the virtues requires dealing with the question of the relationship among the virtues. Plato has a strong view on the unity of virtue, and clearly thinks that one virtue, wisdom, is key to understanding this unity. At minimum, we might attribute to Plato the following:

Bi-Conditionality Thesis (BT):

To have one virtue entails having all of the others.

There is a controversy concerning *why* Plato thinks that BT is true and exactly how tight the connection among the virtues is intended to be. In the *Protagoras*, Socrates formulates three possibilities: (1) either virtue is a single entity, and “wisdom, temperance, courage, justice, and piety . . . are . . . five names for the same thing”; or the virtues are parts of a whole, in which the parts are (2) like “the parts of gold, which are similar to each other and to the whole of which they are parts”; or (3) like “the parts of a face, dissimilar to the whole of which they are parts and to each other, each one having its own unique power or function.”²⁹ I formulate the positions thus, in descending order of strength:

Strict Identity Thesis (SI):

The various names of the individual virtues all refer to the same thing, that is, wisdom.

Kind Identity Thesis (KI):

The various names of the virtues do refer to the distinct parts of virtue, but they are all constituted by the same kind, that is, wisdom.

Dissimilarity Thesis (DT):

The various names of the virtues do refer to the distinct parts of virtue, and each virtue has its own unique power or function.

Three points are noteworthy: first, SI stands alone in denying that virtue has parts. Second, KI and DT are logically compatible; that is, one can endorse both at once. Third, according to SI, the Socratic practice of asking what is courage is at best seriously misleading, since courage fails to have independent unity conditions and therefore lacks a definition.

In my view, Plato rejects SI and endorses both KI and DT: on this picture, virtue is *structured* in such a way that wisdom, understood as *knowledge of good and evil* in general,³⁰ is central to all of them, but that the (1) *sphere of action* and (2) *emotional state* can differentiate them. The individual parts of virtue are thus distinguished both externally, by their proper function within a particular sphere of action, and internally, by the relevant emotion(s) that the virtue governs. When Socrates discusses courage, for example, he makes fear the emotion governed by wisdom, claiming that “wisdom about what is and is not to be feared is courage,”³¹ and it is clear that war is the primary, if not exclusive, sphere. It is worth noting that (1) does not necessarily mark a real difference by itself, whereas (2) does, since (1) is compatible with SI—virtue appearing in different circumstances might cause us to mistakenly think that there are several. On (2), the what-it-is of piety and justice are different, even though they are constituted by the same kind, wisdom. But the virtues are distinct and functionally complementary, exhausting (it is implied) both the human spheres of action and the motivational states of human agents. The emotions are governed and determined by beliefs, such that the emotional or dispositional part of each virtue is ensured by the possession of wisdom.³² If wisdom gives one correct beliefs about good and evil, then the wise person will feel the proper emotions appropriate to each virtue, and thus one cannot have one virtue without the others. This picture is also compatible with some virtues being more general than others: it may be that piety, as suggested by the *Euthyphro*, is a part of justice: on this view, justice is care for others, and piety is the part of justice concerned with care for the gods. Thus, the subordinate virtue is a further specification of the sphere of action of a cardinal virtue, and this might provide a model for thinking about the relationship between some virtues.³³ If the emotional component in piety differs from that of justice—a plausible thought—then piety will be a genuinely independent psychological unity, a different though subordinate virtue.

In the *Republic*, we are given a more complex psychology whereby the parts of the soul—namely, reason, spirit and appetite—structure the parts of virtue. In addition, spirit and appetite, roughly corresponding to emotion and desire for bodily pleasure, respectively, are given a more independent role in motivating action. Based on this tripartite picture, Plato reconfigures the structure of the virtue: wisdom is the virtue proper to reason, and courage is the virtue proper to spirit, while justice and temperance are conceived of as being distributed throughout the soul.³⁴ These latter are virtues that have primarily to do with how the different motivational parts interact with each other: justice consists in each part of the soul doing its own work, such that reason, the best part,

rules over appetite and spirit; and moderation consists in the parts of the soul all recognizing reason's right to rule the whole soul, thus making the soul a kind of harmony. On this picture, justice and moderation play special roles, since they are virtues that range over other virtues: being just and moderate seems to require already being courageous. In the *Laws*, Plato also gives justice a special role, since it is said to be the combination of wisdom, moderation, and courage.³⁵ Here Plato also provides a rank ordering of the virtues: wisdom, moderation, justice, and courage. With wisdom—necessary for all the virtues—in first place, the ranking of the others is based on the relative importance to a good life of the different spheres of possible conflict: that between cities (courage), that within a city (justice), and that within a soul (moderation). Reconciliation is the aim in all cases, and reconciliation among the parts of the soul is primary, followed by that among the citizens and that among cities. In this context, we get a harsh critique of militaristic regimes that greatly overvalue courage, which is “only a part of virtue and the most trivial part.”³⁶

In sum, for Plato, in contrast to contemporary virtue ethics, the investigation of the individual virtues is basic both to the theoretical task of formulating and defending a virtue ethics and to the practical task of becoming a better person. Though the question of the unity of virtue is often discussed in contemporary contexts, virtue theorists have given little attention to the individual virtues, but, as Russell has argued, this is a potentially grave mistake.³⁷ Without a clear account of the number of virtues and their relationship to one another, the task of specifying what virtue in general is and thus what the good life will look like is hopeless. If there are indefinitely many virtues, or some unknown number of them, how can we proceed in a systematic way to develop them? If, on the other hand, there is a determinate set of virtues, then it is of the utmost importance to find out what they are like and how to develop them.

III. VIRTUE, HAPPINESS AND CONVENTIONAL GOODS

Plato, like Aristotle, was a *eudaimonist*; that is, he made *eudaimonia*, or happiness, a central notion in his virtue ethics. The final end, or goal—the *telos*—of human life is *eudaimonia*—it is that which all humans want and at which all human action ultimately aims.³⁸ The concept of *eudaimonia* is used interchangeably with “living well” and “doing well,” connotes a state of the person's whole life, and may be translated as “happiness” or “flourishing.” On any interpretation, virtue is the most important component of happiness, but it is a matter of controversy exactly how strongly to formulate the relationship. I focus my analysis on the *Euthydemus* and the *Laws*, where we find Plato's most developed account of the relationship between wisdom and other goods,³⁹ and I defend a view according to which virtue is sufficient for happiness, though other goods may play an indirect role in contributing to one's level of happiness. In short, I will be claiming that Plato has a *threshold* and *scalar* view of happiness.

In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates is giving a demonstration of what he calls a *protreptic* argument, one that aims at turning the soul of one's interlocutor toward virtue. This argument begins with a claim about "what all humans want," namely happiness, or to "do well."⁴⁰ Socrates then asks his interlocutor, Clinias, whether "we wish to do well . . . through having many good things,"⁴¹ and they list a series of conventional goods: wealth, health, good looks, noble birth, power, and honor. Socrates then adds temperance, justice, courage, and wisdom. Socrates argues that it is only through *using* these goods *appropriately*—and not merely possessing them—that they benefit us (i.e., make a contribution to happiness), and that it is through wisdom that "every action and possession" is used appropriately.⁴² They conclude that "there is no benefit in other possessions without *phronesis* and wisdom."⁴³ The most basic and core claim is a key thesis about wisdom:

Uniqueness of Wisdom (UW):

Wisdom is the only real or genuine good for human beings.

Socrates describes the "result" of the argument thus: among the initial list of goods, "no one of them is either good or bad, but of these two, wisdom is good and ignorance bad."⁴⁴ Since goodness has been taken in this argument to involve benefit, or the contribution to happiness, this looks like an expression of the claim that virtue is sufficient for happiness, and vice for misery. Scholars have been hesitant to attribute this claim to Plato because it is thought to conflict with a second thesis that *the very same texts* seem to endorse.⁴⁵ This second thesis picks out the *relationship* between wisdom and other alleged "goods."

Priority of Wisdom (PW):

All actions and possessions (apart from wisdom) are good if and only if they are guided by wisdom.

PW is in tension with UW, since PW seems to claim that conventional goods *really are* goods when guided by wisdom. If they are goods, then they would seem to make a contribution to happiness. However, PW, just by itself, leaves undetermined *exactly how* those goods contribute to happiness. There are broadly two possibilities: either these conditional goods add something of *independent value* to a happy life, such that a rich virtuous person is happier than a poor virtuous person because she has more money, or these conditional goods *enable action*, such that the difference between a rich and a poor virtuous person comes down to the extent to which the richer one is enabled to exercise her wisdom (i.e., to act virtuously). Only the first possibility forces a choice between UW and PW. However, we need not make the choice on purely philosophical grounds, since the second possibility, what I will call the Enabling Action thesis (EA), has clear textual support:

Enabling Action thesis (EA):

Conventional goods enable action, or expand one's possibilities for action, whereas conventional evils disable action, or restrict one's possibilities for action.

EA is a thesis about the role of conventional goods and evils in life, and this thesis comes out most clearly in this view's most radical feature, the idea that the possession of conventional goods is worse for wicked people.

The wicked are better off "possessing and doing little" since if they did less, they would make fewer mistakes and do less badly (or do less evil), and thus be less miserable.⁴⁶ Socrates asks whether one would "do more" if one possessed wealth or poverty; strength or weakness; honor or dishonor; courage or cowardice; industriousness or laziness, quickness or slowness; perceptiveness or imperceptiveness; and "all things of this sort."⁴⁷ In short, the reason that conventional goods are bad for the vicious agent is that they enable more ignorant and vicious activity. In the *Laws*, the Athenian formulates the conditions under which action is maximally enabled: one has all of the physical, psychological, and external goods, including "health and wealth and permanent absolute power," and immortality in addition, and thus one can do whatever one likes for eternity.⁴⁸ About such a person, if he is vicious, the Athenian claims, "[i]t is obvious . . . that his life is wretchedly unhappy."⁴⁹ The vicious immortal tyrant represents the most wretched person possible because the maximal possession of conventional goods enables maximal vicious activity. It would have been better for such a person to die. Indeed, death is not, in itself, an evil—it is a conventional evil, and a positive good for a vicious person because it permanently disables the ability to engage in vicious activity.

For the wise person, conventional goods enable her to exercise her wisdom, while conventional evils hinder her from exercising her wisdom. These "goods" and "evils" do this by opening up and closing off possibilities for wise action, respectively. Thus, if EA is correct, we have a clear way to make UW and PW consistent. Even though wisdom is sufficient for happiness, the wise can be more or less happy, depending on the extent to which their exercise of wisdom is enabled by conventional goods. On my view, wisdom is sufficient for its own exercise; that is, anyone who possesses wisdom will be able to exercise it. Beyond that, the one with conventional goods will have more opportunities to exercise wisdom in a wider variety of circumstances, whereas the one with conventional evils may have only limited opportunities. We may understand this "freedom" of opportunity in broadly two ways, one negative, one positive: the one with conventional goods will have fewer distractions and so more leisure to engage in virtuous activity, and, in addition, she will have greater means with which to benefit others. Thus, the former may be counted as happier than the latter, though, in the end, this difference is much less important than their similarity. One might wonder where pleasure fits into this picture: in brief, the happy life of wisdom will also be the most pleasurable life, but, as Socrates argues in the *Philebus*, what causes it to be most happy, or explains why it is most happy, is not the pleasure of the life but its wisdom. Pleasure, like conventional

goods, is only conditionally good, and pleasures associated with the body and conventional goods always involve an admixture of pain. By contrast, exercises of knowledge involve pure or true pleasures.⁵⁰

The tradition seems to regard Plato's view on the relationship between virtue and happiness as unstable in the sense that it seems amenable to both weaker and stronger formulations and thus leaves some basic questions unanswered. I have presented a strong version of the view. After Plato, Aristotle clearly endorses the idea that virtue is only necessary for happiness because other goods are needed in addition, while the Stoics defended the sufficiency thesis, making external goods into "preferred indifferents," which the Stoic sage may prefer even though they make no contribution whatsoever to happiness. Contemporary scholars have mainly leaned on Aristotle or the Stoics, but Plato's position, as I have sketched, is in between these two positions and represents, I hope, a viable alternative to them.

IV. THE ROLE OF *EROS*, OR LOVE, IN VIRTUE

In this section, I discuss Plato's theory of *eros*, or love, and the prominent role that he assigns love in the virtuous life. This account of love is both a descriptive account of human moral psychology and a normative account of what, in the end, warrants and satisfies the demands of our desires. Plato has Socrates claim to be an expert in the art of love,⁵¹ and thereby foregrounds love as the appropriate psychological orientation toward what is *kalos*, that is, beautiful and good. I divide this section into two: the first will provide the formal account of love from the *Symposium*, and the second, the phenomenology of love from the *Phaedrus*. Together, they present a coherent and interesting picture of the power and moral psychology of love.

In *Symposium*, Socrates provides what I am calling the "formal account" of *eros*.⁵² Socrates first argues that (1) *love requires an intentional object*. In short, love must be "of some thing." Socrates thinks that the conceptual grammar of "love" parallels that of "father"—a father is always a father "of some child"—in that both require an object.⁵³ The second claim specifies the attitude of love toward its object: (2) *love desires (the possession of) its object*. Socrates does not argue at all for this claim, but simply asserts that "love desire[s] that of which it is the love."⁵⁴ On the basis of (2), Socrates argues for the third feature: (3) *love needs (or does not possess) its object*. He claims that "it is necessary" that "a thing that desires desires something of which it is in need; otherwise, if it were not in need, it would not desire it."⁵⁵ Socrates makes a distinction between two ways of needing an object: by not possessing it now, or by possessing it now and wanting to continue to possess it in the future. On Socrates' analysis, we ought to understand claims like "I want what I already have" as meaning "I want the things I have now to be mine in the future as well."⁵⁶

To this formal account, a robust premise is added: love aims at beauty, or beautiful things.⁵⁷ Since "all good things are beautiful,"⁵⁸ it is determined that love is itself neither

good nor beautiful, but always strives to possess what is good and beautiful. Love is the condition of “wanting to possess the good forever,”⁵⁹ and it is “common to all human beings.”⁶⁰ It is thus an intermediate state, in which one strives after a kind of completeness or fullness. To possess what is good and beautiful is just to attain happiness or *eudaimonia*.⁶¹ Using the metaphor of a ladder, Socrates describes the appropriate order in which one ascends from one beautiful object of love to a higher and more adequate object: “from one body to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, then from beautiful bodies to beautiful customs, and from customs to learning beautiful things, and from these lessons he arrives in the end at this lesson, which is learning of this very Beauty, so that in the end he comes to know just what it is to be beautiful.”⁶² The best and most beautiful of all things is wisdom,⁶³ which consists in knowledge of beauty itself, or the form of the beautiful.⁶⁴ This account of love is a picture of the human condition—everyone wants the good and the beautiful, and indeed loves and desires it, many without realizing that the only path to it, and thus happiness, is wisdom.

In the central speech of the *Phaedrus*, Socrates provides a spirited defense of love as a “form of madness . . . given to [humans] by the gods to ensure [their] greatest good fortune.”⁶⁵ In one of several stirring passages on its emotional depth and complexity, Socrates describes the phenomenology of love and the kind of single-minded devotion it inspires in the lover:

From the outlandish mix of these two feelings—pain and joy—comes anguish and helpless raving: in its madness the lover’s soul cannot sleep at night or stay put by day; it rushes, yearning, wherever it expects to see the person who has [such] beauty. When it does see him, it opens the sluiceways of desire and sets free the parts that were blocked up before.⁶⁶

The experience of love is, first and foremost, characterized by *emotional intensity*. This intense desire to behold and be with one’s beloved is coupled with an indifference to all other concerns:

[N]o one is more important to [the lover’s soul] than the beautiful [beloved]. It forgets mother and brothers and friends entirely and doesn’t care at all if it loses its wealth through neglect. And as for proper and decorous behavior, in which it used to take pride, the soul despises the whole business. Why, it is even willing to sleep like a slave, anywhere, as near to the object of its longing as it is allowed to get!⁶⁷

The second characteristic of the experience of love is *exclusive concern*. The lover becomes so bound up with the beloved that he neglects all those matters that typically concern human beings—family, wealth, reputation, and so on.

The phenomenology may seem remote from philosophical concerns—indeed, the lover seems to be obsessively focused on an individual. However, both the basis for the intensity and ultimate aim of love reveals yet another feature of love, namely, its *transcendent orientation*. This feature is not built into the phenomenology of love per se, but it is meant to explain it. In short, the lover is inspired by a transcendent vision that

is provoked by the beloved's beauty and thus treats the beloved as a god and attempts to make him as godlike as possible. The lover does this by ensuring that "[the beloved] has a talent for philosophy" and spends time with him in the pursuit of wisdom.⁶⁸ Wisdom, Socrates suggests, would be the most beautiful sight, if only it were visible in the way that beauty is.⁶⁹ By helping to make the beloved wise, the lover tries to match the beautiful body with a beautiful soul. The key to this process is attaining knowledge of forms, especially the form of the beautiful. Once the relationship becomes reciprocal, that is, they begin to love each other, they hold to "the assigned regimen of philosophy" and live a "life of bliss and shared understanding."⁷⁰ The appropriate development of the relationship dampens the emotional intensity but not the exclusive concern.

Love is thus a basic motivational force of enormous power that can be harnessed into the service of wisdom and virtue and, indeed, must be if humans are to achieve the ultimate aim of happiness. The account is both descriptive and normative, in that it provides an account of human psychology that has the standards or norms by which one achieves the best kind of life already built into it. Thus, to the extent that anyone loves and passionately desires anything at all, she *really* loves and passionately desires wisdom, whether or not this is the overt object of her passion. The account also contains a recursive element, in that properly oriented love will involve wanting to inspire properly oriented love in others: to genuinely love another person involves wanting what is best for them, and that, we have seen, is virtue. Thus, the lover wants, to use the metaphor of the *Symposium*, to "procreate in beauty,"⁷¹ that is, to reproduce the love of the beauty of wisdom in the beloved so that he too can become virtuous and beautiful himself. Finally, since we are finite and forgetful beings,⁷² one will always need to love virtue and wisdom, even after one comes to possess it, since one also desires to maintain it in the future. Thus, love will also play a role in the life of the virtuous and wise agent.

Among contemporary virtue ethicists, few have even discussed, much less focused on, love as Plato conceives it—to the extent that there is a discussion of love, it is typically restricted to finding space in appropriate moral reasoning for love of spouse, family, and friends. Iris Murdoch is the only thinker, to my knowledge, who has made love central, and her notion of love as "un-selfing" is explicitly inspired by Plato.⁷³

V. VIRTUE, POLITICS, AND LAW

Plato develops a number of radical proposals for reorienting the life of the state such that it may serve to make the citizens as virtuous and wise, and thus as happy, as they possibly can be. This is accomplished by making sure that the power in the city is held by those who are themselves virtuous and wise and that the city is governed by laws that are aimed at the moral improvement and maintenance of the citizens. For *virtue politics* in general, states have "the aim of making the citizens themselves as good as possible," and this is what it is to "care for the city and its citizens,"⁷⁴ and, in the states described in

Republic and the *Laws*, they achieve this aim primarily through a complex program of ethical training and habituation.

For Plato, both *law* and *ruler* are defined as aiming at the benefit or advantage of the citizens,⁷⁵ where this benefit is understood as becoming more virtuous and thus happier.⁷⁶ In the *Statesman*, Plato considers the question of the priority relationship between the rulers and the laws, considering which is more effective in benefiting the citizens.⁷⁷ The argument importantly hangs on the contrast between suppleness and flexibility of the ruler's wisdom as opposed to the rigidity and generality of the articulated laws: "law could never accurately embrace what is best and most just for all at the same time and so prescribe what is best."⁷⁸ This is because laws are "not something completely correct" and can be at best approximations that hold for the most part.⁷⁹ A law, like any rule, will only be apt at a certain level of generality for a certain set of cases: they are "set down according to the principle of 'for the majority of people, for the majority of cases, and roughly, somehow, like this.'"⁸⁰ There will be a gap, in other words, between the law and the particular cases that the law is intended to range over. By contrast, "rulers who truly possess expert knowledge"⁸¹ provide the best constitutional model because the "intelligent application of their expertise" allows them to "preserve [the citizens] and so far as they can to bring it about that they are better than they were."⁸² Since their expertise can, in each instance, be adapted to the particular concerns of the given circumstance, the wise rulers are not restricted in the way that the laws are.

In both the *Republic* and the *Laws*, the most important laws are those relating to the *moral education* of the citizens. Indeed, in the *Republic*, Plato nearly exclusively focuses on setting down the laws for the city's educational program. The core of the two programs is the same, and they operate according to the same principles and with the same aims (even if the details of their respective moral psychologies are somewhat different). In short, both programs aim at aligning the citizens' cognitive, emotional, and affective lives:

Cognitive Aim: inculcating in the citizens the right, as in true, moral beliefs about what is good and evil.

Emotional Aim: getting the citizens to love what is good and hate what is evil.

Affective Aim: getting the citizens to take pleasure in what is good and be pained by what is evil.

In short, the educational program aims at instilling in the soul of the citizen a psychological unity, such that all motivational units are aiming at the same things.⁸³ Further, this will be achieved by representing what is good as *kalos*, that is, as beautiful:

[S]ince [anyone who has been properly educated in music and poetry] has the right dislikes, he will praise *beautiful* things, be pleased by them, received them into his soul and being nurtured by them, become *beautiful* and good. He'll rightly object to what is shameful, hating it while he is still young and unable to grasp the reason, but

having been educated in this way welcome the reason when it comes and recognize it easily because of its kinship with himself.⁸⁴

While the young citizens will be developing true moral beliefs, they will not have a developed understanding of *why* these beliefs are true, but they will be properly disposed to accept the arguments when they do come. Given this relationship between early training and later understanding, it is hard to overstate the importance of moral education.

There is also remarkable overlap between the *Laws* and the *Republic* concerning how to achieve the educational aims: through broadly cultural means, which encompass, but do not reduce to, a wide variety of the fine arts, including poetry, music, drama, dance, painting, and sculpture. All cultural artifacts are to imitate what is genuinely beautiful, namely virtue: [A]ll movements and tunes associated with the virtue of soul or body (the real thing or an imitation) are beautiful.⁸⁵ There is, at bottom, a set of compositional principles that the creators of cultural media must adhere to, and they will be supervised to ensure that they follow them.⁸⁶ The basic or most general principle can be formulated as follows:

Principle of Compositional Imitation: All cultural media must present accurate and beautiful imitations of human goodness, or virtue.

Note that since virtue *really is* beautiful, presenting it as beautiful is also accurate. The principle is quite general and ranges over not only stories and direct representations of character, but also music, dance, sculpture, and so forth, and indeed will determine, for example, what kinds of instruments are appropriate and inappropriate. For example, it is assumed that certain kinds of music imitate the sounds of courageous citizens performing courageous deeds,⁸⁷ and such music will be appropriate for the city. So too will architecture and other craft products of the city reflect the ideals of virtue.⁸⁸

Poetry, music, and dancing stand at the forefront of the educational program primarily because of the way citizens experience them. We might make a distinction between the primarily *passive engagement* one has, for example, with a painting or a sculpture, or in general anything that one merely looks at or watches, and the primarily *active engagement* one experiences when one takes part, as for example, in music and dance, whereby one sings the lines and acts out the action through dancing. The most effective method of inculcating virtue employs the powerful force of *active imitation*:

Principle of Active Imitation: People take on the characters of those figures that they actively imitate.

As Socrates puts the point in the *Republic*, “imitations practiced from youth become part of nature and are established as habits in gesture, voice and thought.”⁸⁹ Though the effect is much more pronounced in children, Plato seems to regard it as a basic fact about humans that active imitation has this habituating effect. Thus, by actively imitating the correctly composed musical imitations, the citizens bootstrap their way toward becoming like the figures that they imitate; that is, they assimilate themselves to virtue.

One interesting difference between the educational programs of the *Republic* and the *Laws* is that the *Republic* provides a very detailed higher education program specifically designed to create and sustain a class of wise rulers,⁹⁰ while in the *Laws*, there is a focus on the continuing education of all the citizens. In the latter, the laws provide the citizens with constant reminders about how and why they should strive to be ethically good, in large part through an extensive system of daily religious festivals.⁹¹ Indeed, one of the most striking arguments in the *Laws* makes the case for the importance of drinking parties, on the grounds that older citizens need to become softer and more childlike through drink so that they can become pliable again and thus more open to continuing educational training and guidance.⁹²

When it comes to *criminal law*, Plato thinks that the justification for, and aim of punishment, is rehabilitation, and, in the most extreme cases of vice, in which rehabilitation is impossible, the punishment, usually death or exile, should serve as a deterrent. Just as education habituates primarily through pleasure, criminal law habituates primarily through pain—this is because the function of these laws is corrective, and the bad habits need to be expunged.⁹³ Criminal laws, like the educational ones, serve the single proper purpose of morally improving the citizens. In the *Laws*, Plato explores the educational function of the laws also for those who have not yet committed crimes and, in doing so, insists that the laws should not merely operate by threatening with punishment those who might consider breaking the law, but also to persuade the citizens that the law has been appropriately made and should be followed. To that end, Plato used his great legal innovation in the *Laws*, namely, the *legal prelude* that seeks to justify each law, or at least, to persuade the citizens of its goodness.⁹⁴ The criminal laws are expressions of a basic principle of justice, that is never just to *harm* anyone.⁹⁵ This is the converse of the principle that laws and rulers aim at benefiting the citizens. On this view, no one is ever harmed by any of the laws, or by any of the punishments, since to harm someone just is to make them more vicious. Even those who are put to death are thought to be spared a life of further vice and misery.⁹⁶

Virtue politics has not enjoyed the same resurgence as virtue ethics, likely because the basic principles of virtue politics are highly paternalistic and thus alien to modern, liberal political ideals of freedom from interference—we moderns are much more comfortable having the state make room for our individual pursuits of happiness than we are having it play an active role in shaping our happiness. That said, Plato has much to offer on what principles and practices would contribute to citizens' virtue and happiness, and those interested in developing a virtue politics should listen.

VI. CONCLUSION

Plato's virtue ethics may—indeed, should—be a resource for contemporary virtue ethicists. Plato's thinking is useful not only for carving out distinctive and interesting positions on core issues within virtue ethics, but also for providing an impetus and model for taking virtue ethics in new directions. Plato's positions on core questions about

the structure of virtue (§2) and the relationship between virtue and happiness (§3) are underexplored in the contemporary literature. His presentation of Socrates' self-knowledge as a kind of "moral epistemic humility" (§1), his emphasis on the centrality of love (§4), and his virtue politics, in which the state tends to the virtue and happiness of the citizens primarily through moral education (§5), may be a source of inspiration for those interested in exploring new avenues of research in virtue ethics.

NOTES

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4. J. Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), "Sophist," 20e–21b; all translations are from Cooper (1997) with some alterations.
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7. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Sophist," 22c–e.
8. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Charmides," 164d, 170a.
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13. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Euthyphro," 4e–5a, 5d.
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16. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Protagoras," 360d.
17. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Laches," 192d.
18. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Laches," 194e–195a.
19. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Charmides," 159b.
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21. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Charmides," 164d.
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24. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Republic," 332d.
25. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Republic," 338c.
26. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Republic," 442c–d.
27. See J. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
28. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Charmides," 174b–c; Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Laches," 199c–e.
29. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Protagoras," 349b–c, cp. 329c–330b.
30. E.g., Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Charmides," 174b–c.
31. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Protagoras," 360d; cp. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Laches," 194e–195a.
32. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Protagoras," 352a–d.
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34. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Republic," 431e–432a, 441d–e.
35. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Laws," 631c–d.
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38. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Euthydemus," 278e; Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Symposium," 204d–205a.
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40. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Euthydemus," 278e.
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42. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Euthydemus," 281a–b.
43. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Euthydemus," 281b.
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45. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Euthydemus," 280b–281e; Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Laws," 660e–661d.
46. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Laws," 281b–d.
47. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Laws," 281c–d.
48. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Laws," 661a–c.
49. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Laws," 661e.
50. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Philebus," 51e, 66c.
51. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Symposium," 177d–e, 198d; and Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Phaedrus," 257a.
52. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Symposium," 199c–201d.
53. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Symposium," 199d.
54. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Symposium," 200a.
55. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Symposium," 200a–b.
56. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Symposium," 200d.
57. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Symposium," 201a; 203d, 210a–212b.
58. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Symposium," 201c.
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60. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Symposium," 205a.
61. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Symposium," 202c–d, 204d–205a.
62. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Symposium," 211c–d.

63. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Symposium," 204b, 209a–c, 210d–e.
64. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Symposium," 210e–212a.
65. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Symposium," 245b–c.
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67. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Symposium," 252a.
68. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Symposium," 252e.
69. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Symposium," 250d.
70. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Symposium," 256a–b.
71. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Symposium," 206b, 206e, 212a.
72. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Symposium," 207d–208b.
73. I. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good* (London: Routledge Press, 1970).
74. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Gorgias," 513e, 502e–503a, 521a.
75. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Greater Hippias," 283e–285a; Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Republic," 342c–e.
76. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Republic," 353d–354a.
77. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Republic," 293b–302a.
78. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Republic," 294a–b.
79. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Republic," 294d.
80. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Republic," 294e–295a.
81. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Republic," 293c–d.
82. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Republic," 297b.
83. See Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Laws," 653a–c.
84. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Republic," 401d–402a.
85. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Laws," 655b2–6.
86. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Laws," 656c, 660a; Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Republic," 377b–379a.
87. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Republic," 399a.
88. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Republic," 401b–d; see Burnyeat 1999)
89. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Republic," 395d; Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Laws," 653e–654b; 656b.
90. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Laws," 522b–537d.
91. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Laws," 828a–b.
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93. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Gorgias," 477b–479e.
94. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Gorgias," 722e–723e.
95. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Republic," 335e; cp. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Crito," 47e; Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Laws," 859d–860b.
96. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, "Laws," 862d–863a.

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CHAPTER 5

ARISTOTLE AND MORAL VIRTUE

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I shall address five questions about Aristotle's virtue ethics. (I) What sort of entity is a virtue (*arête*)?¹ (II) Which character traits are virtues? (III) How are virtuous actions identified? (IV) How is virtue acquired? (V) How is Aristotle's virtue ethics grounded? Along the way, I shall contrast Aristotle's virtue theory with other virtue theories in order to clarify and situate Aristotle's account.

I. THE NATURE OF VIRTUE

Aristotle takes up the question of what a virtue is in the following passage.

[A] We must consider what virtue is. Since things that are found in the soul are of three kinds—passions (*pathē*), faculties (*dunameis*), states of character (*hexeis*)—virtue must be one of these.²

In this passage Aristotle considers only passions, faculties (abilities to feel passions), and states of character (dispositions to feel passions). After eliminating passions and faculties, he concludes that (1) virtues are states of character.

[B] Now neither the virtues nor the vices are passions, because we are not called good or bad on the ground of our passions, but are so called on the ground of our virtues and our vices Again, we feel anger and fear without choice (*prohairesis*), but the virtues are choices or involve choice. Further, in respect of the passions we are said to be moved, but in respect of the virtues and the vices we are said not to be moved but to be disposed in a particular way. For these reasons also they are not faculties.³

Here Aristotle assumes that (2) virtues involve choice, and (3) they are the basis of moral evaluation of people. Indeed, they can be the basis of moral evaluation because, rather than being the results of external influences (i.e. being “moved”), virtues partially result from choices.

[C] We must, however, not only describe [virtue] as a state, but also say what sort of state it is. We may remark, then, that every virtue both brings into good condition the thing of which it is the virtue and makes the work (*ergon*) of that thing be done well If this is true in every case, the virtue of man also will be the state which makes a man good and which makes him do his own work well.⁴

The work of a person turns out to mean leading a human life. So in passage [C], Aristotle is saying that (4) virtues are states of character that make people and their lives good. What sort of state of character does that?

[D] A master of any art (*techne*) avoids excess and defect, but seeks the intermediate and chooses this—the intermediate not in the object but relatively to us If, further, virtue is more exact and better than any art, . . . then it must have the quality of aiming at the intermediate. I mean moral virtue; for it is this that is concerned with passions and actions, and in these there is excess, defect, and the intermediate.⁵

Like artificers, virtuous agents “aim at the intermediate.” Thus, (5) virtues are medial dispositions for acting and feeling. This is Aristotle’s famous doctrine of the mean. Since there are different sorts of means, Aristotle further specifies that (6) virtues are means “relative to us.”

There is more to a virtue than medial dispositions of action and passion. While describing the way in which a virtuous person differs from a non-virtuous person performing the same act, Aristotle specifies additional components of virtue. Both virtuous and non-virtuous people perform virtuous acts, but virtuous people perform them “virtuously,” by which Aristotle means that

[E] [t]he agent must be in a certain condition when he does them; in the first place he must have knowledge, secondly he must choose the acts, and choose them for their own sakes, and thirdly his actions must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character.⁶

Virtuous people (7) have knowledge, (8) choose virtuous acts at least partially for their own sake, and (9) possess reliable dispositions.⁷

i. Dispositions

One simulacrum of virtue ethics maintains that a virtue is simply a disposition to follow a moral rule.⁸ Aristotle disagrees. People who long to get drunk every night yet manage

to refrain are not temperate, for example. Simply following the rules is not enough. In passage [D] Aristotle says that virtues and vices are dispositions to feel certain passions as well as act in certain ways in certain situations. In passage [E], Aristotle makes it clear that virtuous people also reliably desire and enjoy the right objects (i.e., act with certain motivations), and have knowledge (particularly about values). Elsewhere, Aristotle adds that they perceive in the right ways. To be virtuous, one must get all of these *components of virtue* right.

On the other extreme, some maintain that acting is irrelevant; virtue consists in having a certain state of mind.⁹ Aristotle rejects this view in passage [E], too. People who do not reliably perform virtuous acts are not virtuous.

Some say that the components of virtue are not all independent or indispensable. Agents must perceive situations correctly to act correctly, of course, but Socrates maintains that if people have knowledge of the good, then they reliably act virtuously because this knowledge is so compelling.¹⁰ Hume argues that if people sympathize with others, then they reliably act virtuously because this passion is so compelling. Thus, right action is not a separate component of virtue, but merely a consequence of right reasons or right passions.¹¹ Against Socrates, Aristotle argues that people often know what is good, but do something else because they are distracted by wrong passions.¹² Against Hume, Aristotle argues that without practical wisdom (*phronesis*), agents with good passions can act wrongly.¹³ Virtuous action separately requires accurate perception, good passions, and right reasons.

Aristotle distinguishes *virtue*—a state in which reasons, passions, and therefore actions are right—from *continence* (*enkrateia*)—where right reasons overcome wrong passions, resulting in right actions. While some thinkers maintain that dispositions to overcome temptations are virtues,¹⁴ Aristotle maintains that the virtuous person is not tempted to do wrong.¹⁵ Our long-term goal should not be to strengthen our willpower so as to triumph over our bad passions, but rather to replace whatever bad passions we have with good ones. Of course, continence is morally better than *incontinence* (*akrasia*)—where wrong passions overcome right reasons, resulting in wrong action. Both continent and incontinent people are internally conflicted, but *vicious* people, like virtuous people, are internally harmonious. Their wrong acts are the results of wrong reasons aligned with wrong passions. Feeling no regrets, they have no incentives to improve. Thus, Aristotle says that the vicious are incorrigible.¹⁶ Aristotle mentions several other character types. *Heroic virtue* goes beyond virtue.¹⁷ Presumably, the passions, reasons, and actions of heroically virtuous people are exceptionally good. This is a virtue ethics version of supererogation. *Brutishness* (*thēriotēs*) goes beyond vice.¹⁸ Brutish people have exceptionally bad passions; they are not merely far, but very far from the mean. Just as people with bad passions may be vicious, continent, or incontinent, so people with exceptionally bad passions may embrace their passions (brutishness), or struggle against these passions successfully (*brutish continence*), or unsuccessfully (*brutish incontinence*).¹⁹

Virtue ethicists must distinguish vice from mental illness, for vice merits blame and punishment, while mental illness merits compassion and healing. Now Aristotle says

Table 5.1 States of Character

States of Character	Passions and Desires	Reasons and Reasoning	Choices and Actions
Heroic virtue	RIGHT	RIGHT	RIGHT
Virtue	Right	Right	Right
Continence	Wrong	Right	Right
Incontinence	Wrong	Right	Wrong
Vice	Wrong	Wrong	Wrong
Brutishness	WRONG	WRONG	WRONG
Brutish continence	WRONG	right	right
Brutish incontinence	WRONG	right	WRONG

that brutishness is caused by defective nature, disease, madness, cultural conditioning, or sexual abuse in childhood.²⁰ Thus, while Aristotle holds vicious people responsible for their vice, he does not consider brutish people to be responsible for their brutishness. Aristotle's examples of brutish passions are conditions we currently call mental illnesses. While cowards might fear risky things too much, brutish people feel overwhelming fear of innocuous things.²¹ They have anxiety disorders. While intemperate people might desire both good food and junk food, brutish people indiscriminately desire to eat all sorts of things (including raw or human flesh).²² They have eating disorders. Thus, Aristotle arguably distinguishes vice and some mental illness by degree of severity. (See Table 5.1.)

ii. Choice

Every moral theory takes people's choices to be crucial. But what is choice?

[F] Choice will be deliberate desire of things in our own power; for when we have decided as a result of deliberation, we desire in accordance with our deliberation.²³

Choice cannot exist either without thought and intellect or without a moral state, for good action and its opposite cannot exist without a combination of intellect and character Hence choice is either desiderative thought or intellectual desire, and such an origin of action is a man.²⁴

So a virtuous person's choice to perform a virtuous act consists of a reasoning process called deliberation, leading to the formation of a desire to perform the act. Passage [F] says that choice is neither purely cognitive nor purely affective. Because choice intrinsically includes both reason and passion, it distinguishes us from both beasts, which lack reason, and Aristotle's god, which lacks desire.

Aristotle says in passage [B] that “we feel anger and fear without choice.” We do not have a choice about what passion to feel when we first find ourselves in a particular situation. And Aristotle’s account of deliberation and choice in II.2–3 mentions the choice of which acts to perform, but not which passions to feel. Nevertheless, Aristotle does not believe that we are stuck with whatever passions we happen to have at a particular moment. Although we may not be able to choose our initial passionate response to a situation, Aristotle does think that we can modify that response.²⁵ The passions are open to rational persuasion.²⁶ We can talk ourselves out of anger or fear if we recognize that such responses are unreasonable, for example.

Virtues are about choice in a second sense, too. People are not stuck with whatever *dispositions* of actions and passions that they have. Although Aristotle does not believe that people can change their dispositions easily or quickly, he does believe that over time people can modify their dispositions to act and feel. We should use reason to determine which dispositions to have, and then choose acts which develop these dispositions. Not only do they dictate certain choices of actions and passions, virtues are also partially created and maintained by such choices.

iii. Evaluation

Because people choose their states of character, they are responsible for, and can be legitimately evaluated on the basis of their character. But although we can see what other people do, we cannot observe the other components of their character traits (passions, desires, perceptions, and reasons). So how are we to know their characters? Luckily, other evidence is available.

[G] We must take as a sign of states the pleasure or pain that supervenes on acts; for the man who abstains from bodily pleasures and delights in this very fact is temperate, while the man who is annoyed at it is self-indulgent.²⁷

A person’s pleasures and pains upon each action are evidence of that person’s character. Humor provides an interesting and important example.

[H] [Jokes] are thought to be movements of the character, and as bodies are discriminated by their movements, so too are characters.²⁸

For example, laughing without twinging at racist jokes raises a red flag. In general, people manifest the components of their character traits in various indirectly observable ways. Peoples’ tastes and talk are clues to their characters. They are not clear windows onto the soul, but they are bits of evidence. Thus, evaluations of character are possible, but should be tentative.

iv. Virtuous Actions and Happiness

Passage [C] indicates that virtues are character traits that are conducive to leading a good life, a life characterized by happiness or flourishing (*eudaimonia*). Thus, one might expect Aristotle to argue that each trait he lists as a virtue is more conducive to happiness than the competing traits. For example, he might argue that courageous people are more likely to be happy than cowards and rash people because courageous people avoid terribly risky acts that are likely to have painful, injurious, or even fatal sequelae, but by taking reasonable chances courageous people gain various goods that cowards lack. Alas, Aristotle fails to make such arguments.

Although virtues are character traits conducive to happiness, Aristotle does not think that *each virtuous act* is conducive to happiness, or is chosen for the sake of happiness. Rule utilitarianism aims at increasing overall happiness, but does not expect each person to opt for the act that increases overall happiness at every juncture. Instead, one should adopt rules that increase overall happiness if widely followed, and then follow those rules through thick and thin, even if doing so will not increase (or will decrease) happiness in a few situations. Similarly, Aristotle does not expect agents to opt for the acts that increase their own happiness at every juncture. Instead, one should pick character traits that increase one's chances for happiness, acquire them, and then exercise these traits through thick and thin, even if doing so will not enhance (or even preserve) one's own happiness in a few situations. In rare situations, courageous acts predictably result in death, injury, or pain, while cowardly acts keep one safe, yet courageous people will nevertheless opt for courageous acts in these situations.²⁹

v. Doctrine of the Mean

Aristotle's doctrine of the mean has two components. The first is that each virtue lies between two opposite character traits: an excess and a deficiency. Courage lies between cowardice and rashness; temperance is bracketed by self-indulgence and insensibility; and so on. Here Aristotle opposes the popular *corrective theory of virtue*, which says that to each temptation or deficiency there corresponds an ability to resist the temptation or make up the deficiency. The disposition to deploy these corrective abilities appropriately is a virtue. According to the corrective theory, each virtue has a single opposite.³⁰

Virtue is a mean in a second sense as well.

[I] Both fear and confidence and appetite and anger and pity and in general pleasure and pain may be felt both too much and too little, and in both cases not well; but to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way, is what is both intermediate and best, and this is characteristic of virtue. Similarly with regard to actions also there is excess, defect, and the intermediate.³¹

To be virtuous is to be medial with respect to each *parameter* of passion and action. The parameters mentioned here are occasions, objects, people, motive (i.e., desire), and way (i.e., degree). Being typically excessive with respect to any parameter is one vice; being typically deficient with respect to any parameter is the opposite vice. Some people “are a mixture of rashness and cowardice.”³² They have both bracketing vices at once, presumably by being excessive with respect to some parameter(s) and deficient with respect to others.

Aristotle argues for the doctrine of the mean by analogy to the arts in passage [D]. Elsewhere, he argues that the doctrine of the mean is a useful tool of character improvement. Extreme acts and passions erode character, and medial acts and passions build character, so one should avoid extremes and seek acts and passions that are intermediate on each parameter.³³

Aristotle’s list of parameters plus the doctrine of the mean provide a nuanced taxonomy of character flaws and prescriptions for improvement. He does not simply tell timid people to buck up; rather, he indicates a three-step procedure. First, determine the sort of situations that elicit problematic responses. Second, determine precisely what the problem is in terms of the parameters (fearing too greatly, too often, etc.). Third, move toward the mean by habituation. If the problem is fearing too greatly, then work on reducing the degree of fear, while if the problem is fearing too often, then work on reducing the number of occasions of fear.

Critics of a numerical interpretation of Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean object that sometimes the problem consists in aiming at the wrong things, rather than at too many or too few of these things.³⁴ It is indeed awkward to describe musophobia as excessive fear of mice rather than fear of a wrong object. Yet framing the problem quantitatively emphasizes that improvement will consist in reducing this fear by degrees, rather than eliminating it in one swoop.

vi. Relative to Us

Some maintain that virtue is relative to the agent’s character.³⁵ But Aristotle rejects this claim. He does not think that the more we are capable of doing, the more we should do. “Can” does not imply “ought.” Conversely, agents with limited opportunity or flawed natures who do the best that they can are not thereby virtuous.³⁶

Nor is Aristotle a cultural relativist. He does not allow that what is right for Athenians or Greeks is wrong for Spartans or Persians. Instead, he holds people of all cultures to the same objective standards.³⁷ Aristotle even criticizes members of his own culture for enslaving people who do not benefit from slavery.³⁸

On the other hand, Aristotle is not a strict absolutist. He is not willing to ban any acts in all circumstances. In particular, Aristotle says that adultery, theft, and murder are always wrong, but that is because their names already include the concept of wrongness.³⁹ Aristotle is not saying that sleeping with someone other than

one's spouse, taking someone else's property, and killing people are always wrong. There is no right time to commit murder, for "murder" means wrongful killing, but there are right times to kill people. Killing enemy soldiers in war is not wrong, for example.

What he really means by the phrase "relative to us" is that the right thing to do, feel, and desire depends upon the situation. Actions that are medial in some situations are extreme in others.⁴⁰ Courage often demands that one stand and fight, but when the potential gain is minimal and the chances of success are low, then standing fast is rash.

vii. Knowledge

Passage [E] indicates that virtuous people act virtuously by utilizing some sort of knowledge rather than through appeal to authority, intuition, passion, or luck. Clearly, the knowledge in question is not merely knowledge of the situation. Virtuous people reliably act well, and so must know how to determine which acts are virtuous in each situation. They must have knowledge of the right general principles, values, or goals, plus the knowledge of how to apply these to particular situations.

Must people also know *why* these general principles, values, or goals are virtuous in order to be virtuous? Is knowing what to do enough, or must we be able to give ultimate reasons? On the one hand,

[J] The facts (*to hoti*) are the starting-point, and if they are sufficiently plain to him, he will not need the reason (*to dihoti*) as well.⁴¹

The statement that "he will not need the reason" suggests that it is unnecessary to know that the ultimate reason(s) acts are virtuous. On the other hand,

[K] It is not merely the state in accordance with the right rule (*orthos logos*), but the state that implies the presence of the right rule, that is virtue; and practical wisdom is the right rule about such matters.⁴²

So virtuous people do not merely have a disposition to do the right thing; they have within themselves "the right rule," which is (part of) practical wisdom. They have some sort of understanding about right action. In passage [K] Aristotle seems to be saying that virtuous people not only know that certain acts are virtuous, but also why they are virtuous.

How should the tension between passages [J] and [K] be resolved? Perhaps Aristotle's view is that learners on the path to virtue gain "the facts" before they gain "the reason." Alternatively, Aristotle may think that ordinary virtue does not include knowledge of

“the reason,” but ideally virtuous people have this knowledge. Or perhaps passage [K] means that knowledge of general principles, values, or goals is necessary, while passage [J] means that knowledge of reasons for these is unnecessary.

viii. Motivation

Virtuous acts are typically triply motivated. (1) Virtuous people perform actions to achieve *characteristic goods*.⁴³ One eats in order to gain nutrition; one gives to charity in order to help others. (2) Although Aristotle mentions it only with respect to courage, virtuous acts are risky. Agents performing virtuous acts also try to avoid certain *characteristic harms*. When eating, one tries to avoid spoiled food; when giving, one tries to avoid impoverishing oneself.

The third sort of motive is a bit trickier. Passage [E] says that the virtuous person performs virtuous acts at least partially “for their own sake,” and elsewhere Aristotle says these acts are performed “for the noble (*kalon*).”⁴⁴ Combining these two claims, I take Aristotle’s view to be that virtuous acts are performed not merely as a means to further goals, but also as ends in themselves, and virtuous people make them ends in themselves because they are virtuous acts. That is, (3) virtuous people take acts *qua* virtuous to be intrinsically rather than instrumentally choiceworthy.

Corresponding to these three motives are certain pleasures and pains. A temperate person eating nourishing food will gain gustatory pleasure, avoid the pain of bad-tasting or non-nourishing food, and feel the warm glow of doing the right thing. A generous person will gain the satisfaction of seeing another person become a bit better off, avoid the pain of running short of funds, and feel the warm glow of doing the right thing. (See Table 5.2.)

(1) Seeking the characteristic goal of a virtue and (3) seeking the noble are different motives. Continent misanthropes help other people because (3) they want to do the right thing, but not because (1) they want other people to be better off. Conversely, when Huck Finn helps Jim escape from slavery, Huck is motivated by (1) his desire that Jim be happy, but since Huck believes in slavery, he is not motivated by (3) a desire to do the right thing.⁴⁵ He thinks he is doing the wrong thing.

Table 5.2 Motives, Pleasures, and Pains

Motives/Desires	Success	Failure
(1) Achieve characteristic good	Proper Pleasure	Frustration
(2) Avoid characteristic harm	Relief	Proper Pain
(3) For its own sake, for the noble	Pride	Shame

ix. Reliableness

Aristotle sometimes talks as if one must be perfect to be virtuous.⁴⁶ Moreover, Aristotle considers the virtuous person to be the standard for determining which actions and passions are truly right and pleasant.⁴⁷

On the other hand, if the virtuous person were perfectly virtuous, there would be no room for the heroically virtuous person. Moreover, Aristotle often says that virtue is a matter of degree. He says, for example,

[L] People may be more just or brave, and it is possible also to act justly or temperately more or less.⁴⁸

Indeed, Aristotle says that virtuous people *qua* virtuous sometimes perform non-virtuous acts.

[M] It is highly characteristic of a liberal man to go to excess in giving, so that he leaves too little for himself; for it is the nature of a liberal man not to look to himself.⁴⁹

Virtuous people reliably perform virtuous acts, but as passage [E] says, virtuous acts are not performed solely by virtuous people. Continent people reliably perform virtuous acts, and incontinent and vicious people sometimes perform them. Conversely, passage [M] says that the acts of virtuous people are not always virtuous. Indeed, their virtues reliably lead them to perform vicious acts of certain sorts. Virtuous acts need not flow from virtue, and acts that flow from virtue are not necessarily virtuous.

How could virtues lead to vicious acts? Perhaps perfectly virtuous people would not perform vicious acts, but Aristotle is interested in real people, rather than ideal people. Thus Aristotelian virtues are good, but not perfect character traits. They have glitches that very occasionally yield improper passions and/or reasoning.⁵⁰ For example, suppose Joe's anger is generally appropriate, except that he becomes furious and starts punching whenever his mother is insulted. Joe's character is good enough to qualify as good-tempered, yet it reliably causes him to react with excessive anger on rare occasions.

II. THE LIST OF VIRTUES

People tend to expand familiar systems and strategies beyond their appropriate application. Such extrapolations beyond one's field of expertise are initially intriguing and sometimes enlightening, but often disastrous and ultimately pathetic.

A chemist explains romance novels in terms of molecular bonds; a transplant surgeon advises auto mechanics on how to replace an oil filter; and so on. Similarly, ethicists sometimes apply their favorite virtue too widely. One might begin with courage on the battlefield, and then extend it to the academy (intellectual courage), the stock market (courageous investing), human relationships (emotional courage), principled stands (moral courage), and soon courage comes to encompass all of virtue.⁵¹

Aristotle resists this reductionistic move. He divides human life into clusters of situations, and preliminarily defines each virtue as a disposition to reliably respond well to the situations in one of these *spheres*. For example, Aristotle makes room for other virtues by restricting courage to a narrow sphere.

[N] Now we fear all evils, e.g. disgrace, poverty, disease, friendlessness, death, but the brave man is not thought to be concerned with all . . . He who fears [disgrace] is good and modest, and he who does not is shameless . . . Nor is a man a coward if he fears insult to his wife and children or envy or anything of the kind; nor brave if he is confident when he is about to be flogged.⁵²

Here Aristotle is saying that the sphere of courage does not govern all harms. Disgrace is governed by the virtue of shame, poverty by liberality, friendlessness by friendliness, insult by goodtemper, envy by poetic justice, and flogging (as punishment) by rectificatory justice. Courage is acting, feeling, perceiving, desiring, and reasoning appropriately, but only within situations of physical risk.

Aristotle derives a thicker account of virtue by specifying in some detail the appropriate ways of responding within each sphere.⁵³ The doctrine of the mean provides a start by ruling out extreme states. By itself, the doctrine of the mean does not adequately specify which character traits are virtues, however. It says, “Be moderate; avoid extremes,” but does not specify what counts as moderate or extreme. Do middle-class, benevolent people donate 10% or 90% of their income to good causes? Both dispositions lie between two more extreme states (e.g., the dispositions to donate 5% and 15%, and the dispositions to donate 85% and 95%). Aristotle further specifies the virtues by describing the way in which virtuous people make decisions.⁵⁴

Although he remarks that by presenting a detailed description of the virtues, “it will become plain how many they are,” Aristotle does not seem to be claiming that his list is complete.⁵⁵ Perhaps he is observing that the virtues are numerous. Socrates lists only wisdom. Plato lists wisdom, justice, courage, temperance, and sometimes piety. But Aristotle offers thirteen moral virtues, not to mention several intellectual virtues spread throughout NE VI.

Aristotle does not individuate spheres by uncritically adopting and codifying the standards and values of his time (see Table 5.3). He is quite willing to state that certain character traits are virtues (e.g., appropriate ambition) and vices (e.g., insensibility), even though they are not so identified by his society.⁵⁶ Since he does not explain

Table 5.3 Spheres, Virtues, and Vices

Sphere	Virtue	Vice of Excess	Vice of Deficiency
Physical risk	Courage (<i>andreia</i>)	Rashness	Cowardice
Sensual pleasure	Temperance (<i>sophrosyne</i>)	Self-indulgence	Insensibility
Monetary goods	Liberality (<i>eleutheriotēs</i>)	Prodigality	Stinginess
Great wealth	Magnificence (<i>megalo-prepeia</i>)	Vulgarity	Penny-pinching
Honor	Proper pride (<i>megalo-psyche</i>)	Vanity	Humility
Accomplishment	Right ambition (none)*	Over-ambitious	Under-ambitious
Insults and injuries	Good temper (<i>praotēs</i>)	Irascibility	Inirascibility
Humor	Wit (<i>eutrapelia</i>)	Buffoonishness	Boorishness
Self-description	Truthfulness (<i>alētheia</i>)	Boastfulness	False modesty
Social association	Friendliness (<i>philia</i>)	Obsequiousness	Quarrelsomeness
Opinion of others	Shame (<i>aidōs</i>)	Guiltiness	Shameless
Fortune of others	Poetic justice (<i>nemesis</i>)	Spite	Envy
Scarce goods	Justice (<i>dikaio-sunē</i>)	Greed	Self-denial

* Aristotle says that this virtue lacks a name. See P. Gottlieb, "Aristotle's 'Nameless' Virtues," *Apeiron* 27 (1994): 1–15.

how he divides life into spheres, or assure us that he has not inadvertently added, omitted, or distorted a sphere, Aristotle's defense of his list of virtues must be its plausibility. Unfortunately, Aristotle's descriptions of the virtues (especially the social virtues) are brief and misleading. I shall offer some suggestions about the nature of Aristotle's virtues.

i. Courage and Continence

Courage governs the sphere of physical harms such as death, injury, and pain. Although Aristotle echoes the common saying that courageous people are fearless, he cannot be speaking literally without abandoning his doctrine of the mean.⁵⁷ Fearless people are rash, or perhaps brutish, but not virtuous.⁵⁸

Courageous people are often said to overcome their fear, but Aristotle cannot accept this common saying, either, for it would conflict with his distinction between virtue and continence. Continent people overcome bad passions or desires, but virtuous people do not experience this internal struggle. I suggest that the fear felt by continent people is inappropriate because it is too severe (or too mild), too lengthy (or too short), and so on. It pushes them to shirk (or seek extra) risky duties. By contrast, the fear felt by courageous people is medial, and pushes them to take steps to reduce the risk while performing their duties. A continent soldier might *overcome* a fear-induced desire to flee from the enemy (or a fearless desire to charge recklessly forward), while a courageous person *heeds* a fear-induced desire to don body armor before engaging the enemy.

ii. Temperance and Incontinence

Temperance governs the sphere of physical pleasures such as food, drink, and sex. Just as Aristotle's definition of courage must cohere with his distinction between virtue and continence, so his definition of intemperance must harmonize with the distinction between vice and incontinence. Intemperate people cannot struggle against and then succumb to bad desires, for then they would be incontinent rather than intemperate. Thus, intemperate people not only have bad desires, they also consider these desires to be good. Their values and desires dovetail so that, unlike the incontinent, the intemperate do not experience internal conflict or regret.⁵⁹

Aristotle provides a right rule identifying the right way to act and feel for each virtue. Most of these rules are applications of the rules of justice,⁶⁰ but because dealing with sensual pleasure is not primarily a matter of justice, the right rule for temperance is specified separately.

[O] The things that, being pleasant, make for health or good condition, the temperate person will desire moderately and as he should, and also other pleasant things if they are not hindrances to these ends, or contrary to what is noble, or beyond his means.⁶¹

So we may enjoy whatever sensual pleasures we like so long as they are not unhealthy, deconditioning, contrary to the prescription of some other virtue, or too expensive.

iii. Benevolence

Does Aristotle's list omit crucial virtues? He does not list the virtue of benevolence, but he does not omit it, either. Aristotle's virtue of *liberality* consists of properly purchasing, keeping (including earning to maintain one's holdings), taking (accepting gifts), and giving monetary goods.⁶² The first two are the virtues of money management, but proper taking is collecting contributions for the assistance of others, and proper giving is actually assisting others by donating monetary goods. Together these constitute monetary benevolence.

Friendliness is non-monetary benevolence—helping with the honorable and prudent proposals and projects of others. Thus, Aristotle breaks benevolence into two parts, but does not ignore it.

iv. Social Virtues

Despite its name, Aristotle's virtue of *good temper* is not a disposition to be even-tempered, but rather a disposition to retaliate appropriately for insults or injuries. It is an

alternative to the currently admired character trait of unconditional forgiveness. Rather than eschewing anger and acts of retaliation entirely, a good-tempered person forgives the repentant wrongdoer, but becomes angry at the unrepentant and retaliates in proportion to the wrong.⁶³

Aristotle's virtue of *truthfulness* is not the virtue of honesty. Honesty governs all sorts of communications, and is bracketed by the vices of dishonesty and rigid honesty—telling too many (too few) lies, on too many (too few) occasions, about too many (too few) things. But truthfulness governs a much narrower sphere, and is bracketed by two sorts of deception: boastfulness and false modesty. Truthfulness consists in presenting one's self accurately in word and deed with respect to matters of reputation, neither overstating nor understating one's accomplishments, and not misleading others about one's commitments.⁶⁴ Truthful people are "true to themselves." Some might call this integrity.

Humor seems to be a nice, but trivial trait. Why is the virtue of *wit* on Aristotle's list of virtues at all? The associated vices provide the answer.

[P] [Buffoons aim] rather at raising a laugh than at saying what is becoming and at avoiding pain to the object of their fun; while those who can neither make a joke themselves nor put up with those who do are thought to be boorish and unpolished.⁶⁵

Rather than telling too many jokes, buffoons tell unbecoming and painful jokes. Buffoonishness is a disposition to be offensive and hurtful through humor. Conversely, boors refrain from telling certain jokes because they wrongly believe that these jokes would be hateful. They are excessively touchy, both with respect to themselves and on behalf of others. Thus, rather than taking wit to be the ability to tell and appreciate funny jokes, Aristotle takes it to be the disposition to tell inoffensive jokes and avoid hateful jokes. By listing wit as a virtue Aristotle is not counterintuitively maintaining that a good sense of humor is required to be a morally good person. Instead, he is saying that one must avoid wounding people through humor, without being overly touchy. Aristotle considers humor to be important because he recognizes that humor has a unique ability to get under one's skin.

The virtue of *shame* is a disposition to fear dishonor.⁶⁶ Shame is a learner's virtue. Perfect people do not need it, but it helps imperfect people improve their character by restraining them from wrongdoing. The virtue of *appropriate ambition* is shame's positive correlate. It is a disposition to seek honor from the right people by performing good actions.⁶⁷ Its corresponding vices are (a) biting off more than one can chew and (b) wasting one's talents by undertaking less than one could easily manage.

v. Magnificence and Greatness of Soul

Liberality and friendliness concern helping others, and the social virtues all concern honor in one way or another. *Magnificence* and *greatness of soul* also concern helping and

honor. There is no consensus among interpreters about how to understand these virtues, however, and discussing the interpretive controversy is beyond the scope of this chapter.

vi. Justice

Aristotle describes three sorts of justice. All address the issue of what goods people deserve, but their natures and relationships are contested. I take *poetic justice* to be about other peoples' luck. People with poetic justice are pained by the undeserved good and bad fortune of others, and pleased by the deserved good and bad fortune of others. *Particular justice* prompts people to seek a fair share for themselves—neither more nor less. I take *general justice* to be a compound virtue consisting of all of the other virtues insofar as they involve the agent's relationships with other people, and are not explicitly independent of justice.⁶⁸ That is, general justice consists of particular and poetic justice and all of the social virtues, plus courage, liberality, magnificence, and greatness of soul insofar as they apply to interpersonal situations. Temperance is excluded because it is primarily individual rather than interpersonal. Benevolence is excluded because it involves giving over and above what is required by justice.

Aristotle offers three principles of justice. Since general justice is a compound, they govern all of its component virtues. I offer the following examples.

- (a) *Rectificatory justice* requires restoring to victims something equal to their loss, and removing from wrongdoers something equal to their gain.⁶⁹ This is the right rule of good temper. Victims should retaliate in proportion to their losses. They should force the victimizers to refund their ill-gotten gains and the “prestige” of having gotten away with injustice.
- (b) *Reciprocal justice* requires exchanging items of equal value when buying, selling, or trading.⁷⁰ This is the right rule of the “proper purchasing” and “proper keeping” parts of liberality. It the fundamental principle of fair pricing; both overpaying and underpaying are unjust.
- (c) *Distributive justice* requires that people who are equal (or unequal) in the relevant respects receive equal (or proportionately unequal) shares of whatever good or burden is distributed.⁷¹ This is the right rule of courage. People contributing equally (unequally) to a common goal should have shares of safety equal (or proportionately unequal) to their contribution. Those who take more than their share of safety (less than their share of risk) are cowardly; those who take excessive risk (insufficient safety) are rash.⁷²

Does his promulgation of these rules disqualify Aristotle from membership in the virtue ethicist club? No. For Aristotle, virtues are more fundamental than rules in several ways. One must identify virtuous role models in order to learn the rules, be raised by virtuous people in order to comprehend the rules, and possess virtuous perceptions in order to apply and retain the rules.⁷³

III. VIRTUOUS ACTION

In addition to (I) defining virtue, and (II) describing particular virtues, Aristotle discusses the related issues of happiness, pleasure, friendship, incontinence, and intellectual virtues at some length. But he gives rather short shrift to several issues that contemporary virtue ethicists see as central. The paucity of textual evidence means that my sketch of Aristotle's views on (III) virtuous action, (IV) virtue development, and (V) virtue ethics grounding will be somewhat speculative.

i. Virtuous Acts

Aristotle does not give a clear, detailed explanation of how agents know which acts are virtuous in particular situations. The one thing he repeatedly says is puzzling.

[Q] Virtue makes the aim right, and practical wisdom the things leading to it (*ta pros to telos*).⁷⁴

Does this passage indicate a division of labor between practical wisdom and non-rational virtue? The claim that practical wisdom (or more narrowly, deliberation) determines the means is unproblematic. But how could virtue, understood as habituated, fine dispositions of action, passion, perception, and motivation, provide the ends of action?

Some commentators maintain that perception, structured by passion, provides ends in the following way. Passions are salience projectors; in the perceptual field they foreground things they take to be relevant, and background the rest. Anger at an insult might foreground a stick with which to hit the offender, and background the sparrow next to the stick. Structured perception thus suggests ends.⁷⁵ Aristotle does say,

[R] How far, therefore, and how a man must stray before he becomes blameworthy, it is not easy to determine by reason; for the decision depends upon the particular facts and on perception.⁷⁶

However, although passage [R] stresses the importance of perception, it does not deny that reason plays a role in identifying right ends.⁷⁷ Perception provides the "particular facts" of the situation; reason provides the rest.

Some commentators assign the task of providing ends to deliberation. In each situation, agents choose the acts that are means or parts of the agents' ultimate ends.⁷⁸ But that interpretation conflicts with passage [Q]. Moreover, since the agents' ultimate end is their own happiness, this interpretation makes virtuous agents repugnantly selfish.

Yet other interpreters maintain that agents use intellectual intuition (*nous*)—perhaps combined with induction (*epagōgē*)—to move from (a) grasping the end in key

situations to (b) grasping the nature of ultimate ends. Agents then (c) apply this understanding of ultimate ends to the rest of the cases.⁷⁹ This suggestion also conflicts with passage [Q]. Moreover, why not dispense with ultimate ends entirely by utilizing whatever method provides ends in key cases to provide ends in all cases?

Aristotle's summary of his definition of virtue rebuts all of these suggestions.

[S] Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle (*orthos logos*), that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it.⁸⁰

Passage [S] says nothing about perception, but instead says that the mean is "determined by a rational principle." Reading this as a reference to deliberation, intuition, and/or induction would be a stretch, for the rational principle seems to be a tool used by the practically wise person rather than a faculty or process, and as mentioned earlier, Aristotle does provide principles. Passage [S] does not say that agents determine the mean by imitating the acts and passions of virtuous people, but rather by using a principle that virtuous people would use. Agents need the person of practical wisdom as a guide to selecting the correct rational principle; they then use that principle to pick out the virtuous acts.

My own suggestion is that in passage [Q], virtues are not just habits, but habits plus relevant parts of practical wisdom, which, as passage [K] says, includes the knowledge of right rules.⁸¹ But let us admit that Aristotle's sparse, scattered remarks do not add up to a theory of how virtuous acts are chosen. Perhaps Aristotle does not provide a detailed explanation of how to determine ends because hard cases, although fascinating to philosophers, are rare. The important task is to produce the sort of person who does the virtuous thing in situations where the end is obvious to reasonably right-thinking and right-feeling folks.

ii. Right Acts

Surprisingly, Aristotle does not think that virtuous acts are always right acts. As passage [M] says, virtues sometimes urge agents to perform morally wrong acts because they "overshoot" the target. Thus, Aristotle disagrees with Hursthouse's claim that "[a]n act is right iff it is what a virtuous agent would characteristically (i.e. acting in character) do in the circumstances."⁸² Aristotelian virtue is realistic rather than idealized. Virtuous people act and feel reliably, but not perfectly right.

Virtues also urge wrong acts in another way. Some situations involve several goods, and so are governed by multiple virtues. Different virtues provide different sorts of pictures and push agents to make different sorts of responses to the same situation. For example, Aristotle says,

[T] Citizens seem to face dangers because of the penalties imposed by the laws and the reproaches they would otherwise incur, and because of the honors they win by

such action This kind of courage [civic courage rather than the virtue of courage] . . . is due to virtue; for it is due to shame and to desire of a noble object (i.e. honor) and avoidance of disgrace, which is ignoble.⁸³

Courage presents situations in terms of risks and goals. It pushes courageous agents to feel fitting fear of physical harm and confidence in achieving a worthwhile goal, and to take actions understood as “seeking the goal” and “taking precautions.” Passage [T] indicates that the virtues of shame and appropriate ambition present the same situations in terms of potential disgrace and acclaim. These virtues push agents to desire honor and shun shame. They urge the same actions as courage, but understand these actions as “likely to accrue honor.”

In situations of *overlapping spheres* such as the one described in passage [T], the different virtues recommend compatible passions and the same actions under different descriptions, but in other overlap situations the virtues clash. For example, Aristotle says,

[U] We must for the most part return benefits rather than oblige friends, as we must pay back a loan to a creditor rather than make one to a friend.⁸⁴

Here Aristotle considers situations in which we must choose between paying debts and helping others. In such situations, justice requires agents to repay loans, while benevolence urges agents to make new loans. Whatever agents do in such circumstances, they will be neglecting one virtue for the sake of another. They will be performing an act that is both virtuous and vicious. Aristotle thinks that there is a right answer in such cases, determined by practical wisdom. Passage [U] says that repaying the loan is generally a virtuous (just) and right act, while making a new loan is virtuous (benevolent) and wrong.⁸⁵ Benevolent, just people will generally recognize this. However, benevolent, unjust people, having flawed practical wisdom, will recognize what benevolence requires, but not what justice requires, and will perform benevolent, but unjust and wrong acts.

iii. Reciprocity of Virtue

Are there really benevolent, but unjust people? Aristotle claims that there are (at least) two versions of each virtue. People with *ideal virtues* have all of the virtues, but passage [L] shows that Aristotle’s focus is on *non-ideal virtues* throughout the NE, and Aristotle allows that having some, but not all non-ideal virtues is possible. Although he does not mention benevolent, but unjust people, Aristotle does mention liberal cowards.⁸⁶

Aristotle’s argument for the claim that a person who has any ideal virtue must have all of the ideal virtues is widely thought to preclude ideal virtues from issuing conflicting injunctions in the same situation. Aristotle argues that making the right choices in any sphere requires a comprehensive grasp of what is important in life, and why. And this global practical wisdom cannot be had without possession of all of the ideal virtues.⁸⁷ However, deducing lack of conflict among ideal virtues would require some further

premise to ensure that conflicts such as the one described in passage [U] do not occur. Anyway, even if Aristotle's argument for the reciprocity of virtue thesis precludes ideal virtues from issuing conflicting injunctions, this would not apply to the imperfectly virtuous people of the real world.⁸⁸

IV. ACQUIRING VIRTUE

For Aristotle, ethics is a practical, rather than theoretical inquiry.

[V] We are inquiring not in order to know what virtue is but in order to become good.⁸⁹

Although moral development is the point of ethics, Aristotle surprisingly says rather little about how to acquire virtue. Most of what Aristotle does say is framed as an answer to Meno's initial question.⁹⁰ Aristotle asserts that (1) moral virtue is acquired through habituation; (2) intellectual virtue is imparted later by teaching; (3) neither is provided by nature alone, but both presuppose a certain sort of nature as well as (4) certain goods of fortune.⁹¹

i. Habituation

Aristotle thinks that moral development typically takes place in stages. The first stage is habituation.

[W] We become just by doing just acts, and temperate by doing temperate acts.⁹²

Motivated by hope of reward and/or fear of punishment, learners repeatedly perform virtuous acts, presumably identified by parents, pedagogues, and/or laws.⁹³ It is easy to see how this repetition produces good habits of action, and the ability to perceive what is morally important improves with practice. But does habituation produce the rest of the components of virtue? How could it produce good dispositions of passion and desire? How could it produce knowledge?

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle maintains that morally good plays exercise the passions of pity and fear properly, and motivate theatergoers to emulate noble people while avoiding their character flaws. Generalizing, I speculate that repeated exposure to arts of other genres cultivates other appropriate passions and motivations.

ii. Teaching

Knowledge is obviously acquired through teaching. Common sense says that as one teaches children right and wrong, one also builds good habits by encouraging them to

practice what they are taught. Surprisingly, Aristotle denies that teaching and habituation go hand in hand.

[X] Argument and teaching, we may suspect, are not powerful with all men, but the soul of the student must first have been cultivated by means of habits for noble joy and noble hatred, like earth which is to nourish the seed.⁹⁴

Here Aristotle insists that teaching is ineffective unless *preceded* by habituation. Just as the earth must be plowed before sowing, habits must be cultivated “first.”

iii. Nature

One influential version of the corrective theory of virtue assumes that people are subject to various natural tendencies to go wrong.⁹⁵ Virtues are correctives to these tendencies. Conversely, others maintain that people are naturally good. Moral development consists in extending our natural tendencies while avoiding corruption. Aristotle disagrees with both views.

[Y] Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit.⁹⁶

People are neither bad by (fallen) nature, as the Christian doctrine of original sin implies, nor good by (uncorrupted) nature, as romantics such as Rousseau maintain. Nature’s role is merely to provide the raw material of virtue, morally neutral abilities. Humans naturally experience sensual pleasure, for example. Exercised appropriately, this ability is the core of temperance; exercised inappropriately, it becomes intemperance or insensibility. But in itself, the ability to experience sensual pleasure is morally neutral.

Aristotle mentions people with different sorts of deficient natures, all with flawed rationality. Some *brutish* people have been badly damaged by trauma, disease, sexual abuse, or destructive socialization, but others have horrible habits of passions and desire by nature.⁹⁷ Acquiring the virtues is extremely hard, if not impossible for brutish people because they have “no rational part.”⁹⁸

The so-called *natural slaves* lack sufficient reason to recognize what they should do in certain situations; they can only manage to act well when forced to follow the orders of virtuous people.⁹⁹

Aristotle considers *women’s* reason to be “lacking in authority.”¹⁰⁰ That is, women are less able to rule their passions than men. Thus, lesser versions of the virtues, and even lesser virtues are appropriate for women.

[Z] The temperance of a man and of a woman are not the same, or the courage and justice of a man and of a woman, are not, as Socrates maintained, the same; the courage

of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying. And this holds of all other virtues . . . “Silence is a woman’s glory,” but this is not equally the glory of a man.¹⁰¹

Just as the standards for female weightlifters are lower because women are, on average, physically weaker than men, so Aristotle thinks the standards for female virtue are less stringent because women are psychologically weaker than men. To be a good person, one must have the virtues on Aristotle’s list, but to be a good woman one must have a different, less demanding suite of virtues.

iv. Goods of Fortune

Aristotle does not think that virtue is available to all physically and mentally sound people. He considers certain goods of fortune to be necessary for the acquisition and exercise of virtue.¹⁰² For example, he says that farmers and laborers lack sufficient leisure to develop virtues.¹⁰³ Although Aristotle is a sexist, he is not a snobby elitist. Rather than disparaging workers, Aristotle maintains that they are victims of bad luck or injustice. People who lack reasonably healthy human nature or sufficient goods of fortune deserve sympathy, therapy, and opportunity, rather than responsibility and penalty.

Aristotle gestures at other suites of virtues, too. He introduces the notion of role virtue by remarking that the character traits of a good pilot, rower, or lookout are different from each other because they are defined as the traits conducive to performing different functions of sailing.¹⁰⁴ These roles are innocuous; the virtues of sailors are compatible with those of non-sailors. But some roles are morally suspect. Aristotle mentions that the best soldiers are rash rather than courageous, so in at least one respect, good soldiers (or at least great soldiers) are not good people.¹⁰⁵ The virtues of a soldier, like the virtues of a woman, are different from the virtues on Aristotle’s list.

Aristotle also describes the virtues of citizens. Since different states have different goals, and good citizens are people disposed to forward the goals of their states, a good citizen in one state might be a poor citizen in another.¹⁰⁶ Thus, Aristotle introduces the role virtues of citizens of aristocracies, democracies, oligarchies, and so on. He adds that a good citizen and a good person are different except in good states.¹⁰⁷ Thus, the role virtues of citizens of bad states are also different from the virtues on Aristotle’s list. A good oligarch is not a good person.

V. GROUDING VIRTUE ETHICS?

Aristotle gestures at naturalism. In passage [C], he defines virtues as character traits that are conducive to happiness. Elsewhere, he explains that happiness consists in the virtuous exercise of our natural human abilities.¹⁰⁸ However, defining virtues as character traits conducive to virtuous activity is arguably viciously circular, and at best

insufficiently detailed. From nature we may infer that we should use our ability to feel sensual pleasure well, but nature alone will not determine what counts as “well.”

To thicken his theory of virtue, Aristotle frequently appeals to commonsense beliefs and to the beliefs of experts (*endoxa*). He juxtaposes these beliefs with various theoretical claims, and then tweaks both the beliefs and the claims until they harmonize. This procedure—a precursor to Rawlsian reflective equilibrium¹⁰⁹—is used to flesh out the basic structure of the theory with this and that detail, and to argue for this or that point.

But his hybrid of naturalism and reflective equilibrium is a strikingly halfhearted grounding for the theory as a whole. Much of Aristotle’s theory consists of unargued assertion. Surprisingly, this is not a serious omission. Bucking the philosophical orthodoxy, I suggest that neither ordinary folks nor philosophers accept or reject theories primarily on the basis of arguments. Arguments persuade us to assent to additional components or consequences of an already accepted theory, but what induces us to accept the theory as a whole is that it paints an appealing picture. Pictures appeal in many ways. They may make sense of a bit of the world, or cohere with the results of science and common sense. They may also appeal by being elegant, or telling us what we want to hear, or pushing us to do what we believe (for other reasons) that we should do. Aristotle’s virtue ethics is appealing for all of these reasons, and that is why it has been, still is, and deserves to be widely accepted.¹¹⁰

NOTES

1. Following Aristotle’s lead, by “virtue” I shall mean moral virtue.
2. 1105b19–21. All quotations from Aristotle are taken from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by W. D. Ross, revised by J. O. Urmson in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, edited by J. Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), except that I translate *aretē* as “virtue” rather than “excellence.”
3. 1105b28–1106a7.
4. 1106a14–24.
5. 1106b5–18.
6. 1105a30–33.
7. Virtuous acts might be labeled “acts in accord with virtue” in order to stress that they are not necessarily performed “virtuously.”
8. This is Kant’s view, on a traditional interpretation.
9. This is the Stoic view.
10. *Protagoras* 357a–b.
11. D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1888), 413.
12. 1150a11–13.
13. 1144b6–14.
14. Again Kant’s view, on a traditional interpretation.
15. The claim that virtuous people are not tempted to perform vicious acts is a simplification. See sections (I9) and (III3).
16. 1150b29–36.
17. 1145a26.

18. 1148b34–1149a1.
19. 1149a12–20. Aristotle mentions two other naturally defective character types: natural slaves and women. See section (IV3).
20. 1148b17–31.
21. 1149a7–8.
22. 1148b19–30.
23. 1113a11–12.
24. 1139a33–b5.
25. 1149a25–b1.
26. 1102b33–1103a1.
27. 1104b3–7.
28. 1128a10–12.
29. 1117b7–16.
30. P. Foot, *Virtues and Vices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 8–9.
31. 1106b18–24.
32. 1115b31–32.
33. 1103b21–1104a23, 1105a18–19, and 1109a30–b7, respectively.
34. R. Hursthouse, “A False Doctrine of the Mean,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 81 (1980–1981): 61; G. Pearson, “Does the Fearless Phobic Really Fear the Squeak of Mice ‘Too Much’?” *Ancient Philosophy* 26 (2006): 87.
35. S. Leighton, “Relativizing Moral Excellence in Aristotle,” *Apeiron* 25 (1992): 49–66.
36. L. Brown, “What Is ‘the Mean Relative to Us’ in Aristotle’s Ethics?” *Phronesis* (1997): 80–90.
37. 111331–33.
38. *Politics* 1255a3–28.
39. 1107a8–17.
40. 1106a29–b4, 1120b7–10.
41. 1095b6–7.
42. 1144b26–28.
43. 1175b26–36.
44. 1115b20–24, 1120a23.
45. J. Bennett, “The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn,” *Philosophy* 49 (1974): 123–34.
46. 1128b22–32.
47. 1113a31–34, 1176a15–18.
48. 1173a20–22. See also 1117b9–11, 1120b9–11, 1123b26–30, 1168a33–35, 1172a10–14.
49. 1120b4–6. See also 1121a1–7, 1125b35–1126a3, 1127b7–8, 1136b19–21.
50. H. Curzer, “How Good People Do Bad Things: Aristotle on the Misdeeds of the Virtuous,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 28 (2005): 233–256. See section (III3) for another way in which virtues may lead to vicious acts.
51. Socrates similarly expands wisdom (*Meno* 99a). Slote expands care (M. Slote, *Morals From Motives* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992], 36–37).
52. 1115a10–24.
53. M. Nussbaum, “Non-Relative Virtues,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13 (1988): 32–53.
54. See section (III1).
55. 1115a5.
56. 1125b20–29; Gottlieb, 1–15.
57. 1115a34.
58. 1115b26–27.
59. 1150b29–36.

60. See section (II6).
61. 1119a16–20.
62. 1120a8–9.
63. *Rhetoric* 1380a10–b28; 1126a3–8.
64. 1127a20–23.
65. 1128a6–9.
66. 1128b11–12.
67. 1095b28–29.
68. 1129b25–27.
69. 1132a6–10.
70. 1133b16–17.
71. 1131a19–24.
72. Let me emphasize that these are only illustrations. Each of these principles applies to several virtues. For example, an application of distributive justice to the virtue of liberality is that a company's profits are distributed fairly among the owners only if each owner's profits are proportional to his or her contribution to the company (labor, start-up capital, etc.).
73. 1179b23–31, 1140b11–19, 1144a34–36.
74. 1144a7–9. See also 1145a5–7, 1151a15–19, and the parallel statements that wish, rather than deliberation, provides ends: 1113b3–4, 1111b26, 1112b11–16, 1112b33–35, 1113a14–15.
75. J. McDowell, "Some Issues in Aristotle's Moral Psychology," in *Companions to Ancient Thought IV: Ethics*, edited by S. Engstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 113, 126; J. Moss, "'Virtue Makes the Goal Right': Virtue and *Phronesis* in Aristotle's Ethics," *Phronesis* 56 (2011): 204–261.
76. 1126b2–4. See also 1109b20–23, 1112b34–1113a1.
77. 1141b14–16, 1142a14–24.
78. D. Wiggins, "Deliberation and Practical Reason," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, edited by A. Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 222–227.
79. C. D. C. Reeve, *Practices of Reason: Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 56–73.
80. 1106b36–1107a2.
81. H. Curzer, "Aristotle's Practical Syllogisms," *The Philosophical Forum*, 46 (2015): 133–136, 152–153.
82. R. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 28.
83. 1116a18–29.
84. 1164b31–33.
85. Situations in which the loan is exceedingly noble or necessary are exceptions (1165a3–4).
86. 1115a20–22.
87. 1144b31–1145a2.
88. D. Bostock, *Aristotle's Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 45.
89. 1103b27–28.
90. *Meno* 86a.
91. 1103a14–26, 1099b31–32.
92. 1105a17–19.
93. 1104b9–11, 1172a20–21.
94. 1179b23–26. See also 1095b3–6, *Politics* 1338b4–5.
95. Foot, 8–9.
96. 1103a23–26. See also 1106a6–10.
97. 1148b17–31.

98. 1150a2–3.
99. *Politics* 1254b22–24, 1260a12, 1260b3–4.
100. 1260a13.
101. *Politics* 1260a21–31. See also 1277b20–25.
102. 1099a31–33.
103. *Politics* 1278a20–21, 1328b39–1329a2.
104. *Politics* 1276b20–27.
105. 1117b17–20.
106. *Politics* 1276b30–35.
107. *Politics* 1288a37–39.
108. 1097b33–1098a18.
109. J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 48–49.
110. Many, though not all of the claims in this chapter are argued more fully in H. Curzer, *Aristotle and the Virtues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

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CHAPTER 6

STOIC VIRTUE

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STOIC ethical doctrines are too easily dismissed, either by caricature or by consignment to the category of historical interest. It is true that Stoicism needs a good deal of exposition to be made plausible as something of continuing theoretical interest for ethics. But the effort to get an accurate exposition is rewarding.

The primary aim of this chapter is descriptive and explanatory. Section I describes Stoic naturalism, including Stoic cosmology and theology. Section II describes, expands, and implicitly defends the Stoic account of natural moral development. Section III describes and defends the Stoic account of virtue. Extensive bibliographic material on the topics of all three sections may be found in the Bibliography.

But the secondary aim of the exposition here is to indicate ways in which the ancient Stoic conception of virtue can be the basis for a variety of contemporary ethical theories. The aim is not to outline any particular attempt to do this, but merely to indicate the range of available possibilities—both with and without Stoic theology.

I. STOIC NATURALISM

The Stoics standardly divided philosophy into three parts: physics, logic, and ethics. In all three the Stoics were uncompromising naturalists.

Stoic *physics* included topics in what we now call the physical, biological, and behavioral sciences, together with cosmology, metaphysics, and theology. Stoic *logic* included topics in philosophy of language, epistemology, rhetoric, and various branches of formal logic, including modal and temporal logic. It included propositional logic as well, which the Stoics apparently invented. Their *ethics* included not only what we call ethics and moral philosophy, but also social and political philosophy—all of it construed broadly enough to intersect in a fundamental way with the part of physics we would call the physiology and psychology of moral development. The general idea was a systematic one: to get the logic right; get the physics right; and then to make sure that the ethics was consistent with the logic and the physics.

In their physics, theology, and metaphysics, the Stoics were thoroughgoing corporealists (materialists; physicalists) and determinists—both about the universe at large and everything operating within it. There was nothing “above” nature—not god or the gods; not the soul. They thought that the human mind was a corporeal object, infused throughout and inseparably integrated with what is popularly called the body. (Today we might think of this mind as the human body’s nervous system;¹ its active, animating system, extending from the brain all the way through the body and its sensory organs, out to the superficial sensory nerves in the skin.) The Stoics thought that reasoning was a deterministic physical process, as were changes in and around every physical object. They rejected the idea that anything other than a body could physically interact with another body. They thought that the universe itself was a single, integrated, and rational being, functioning (as god) deterministically and providentially. They thought that human beings, as parts of the universe, had an assigned function within it—particularly in terms of their capability for rational activity. They did not, however, think that human beings were parts of god in a functional sense—that is, parts of the universe’s own active, animating, rational agency; its own nervous system, so to speak.

In their ethics, the Stoics were also uncompromising naturalists. Their guiding maxim was that human beings should act in accord with nature, after first determining what things are within their control to achieve, and then by making sure their rational activity was guided by practical intelligence wholly toward ends consistent with virtue. At that point, practical intelligence becomes practical wisdom, and rational activity in accordance with it amounts to making progress toward Stoic virtue.

The ethics the Stoics constructed in terms of the maxim of following nature was a holistic and integrated form of naturalistic virtue ethics. Finding that a particular end was in accord with nature was evidence that it *might* be permissible, nothing else considered. Finding that it was natural and necessary was evidence that it *might* be required, nothing else considered. But seemingly licit and seemingly required ends multiply, and often conflict. So we need practical intelligence to sort things out. Specifically, it needs to guide us by a set of priorities that are in accord with nature *all-things-considered*.

As a first approximation, the Stoics would probably think of “priorities in accord with nature” as those that develop from the complex of natural impulses typical of human infants—that is, those impulses stemming from, and typically productive for, self-preservation and the whole complex of associated infant pursuits, including social relationships. These impulses are further complicated during the long—perhaps even lifelong—process of moral development. Along the way, they are organized, modified, and embedded in dispositions through which they are channeled toward some behaviors and away from others. Within such dispositions our impulses function as motivating factors toward the ends characteristic of each particular disposition.

In healthy children living in a reasonably hospitable physical and social environment, such motivated, dispositional ends typically have the makings of a set of natural virtues very like the inventory that has been more or less standard in Western philosophy since Plato—that is, courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom (the core or cardinal virtues, together with practical wisdom), enlarged with an inventory of social and cooperative

virtues such as love, kindness, sympathy, benevolence, trustworthiness, generosity, and so forth.² Impulses and dispositions of a more directly self-interested sort are usually taken for granted as natural also, though they are sometimes in conflict with the social and cooperative ones. The story of how such dispositions can eventually become specifically Stoic virtues is an interesting one (see sections II and III). And we might initially suppose that the story would centrally involve a careful analysis of the standard inventory of these distinct virtues.

But the Stoics do not seem to have been much interested in developing their theory (as opposed to their teaching and practical advice) by focusing on the separate virtues that they so carefully classified.³ Rather, their account of moral development led them to focus on the centrality of rational agency and the way it comes to dominate (or fail to dominate) human activities. Perfecting rational activity became their preeminent concern. After all, if an act of kindness is unwise because it is not consistent with nature all-things-considered, then it isn't truly virtuous. This is so even if, looking at that kind act in isolation, *nothing*-else-considered, it does look virtuous.

So the Stoics mostly turned their attention away from the separate virtues and toward virtue in the singular. They held that human virtue was the *perfection* of human rational activity operating in ways consistent with nature, and thus consistently with the natural way in which human beings functioned within the universe. They held that virtue so conceived was the *only* thing that was *ultimately* good for human beings. Everything else that was at all beneficial was properly regarded as a matter of indifference. They held that such virtue was the source of human freedom, and through that, was not only necessary but sufficient for human happiness (*eudaimonia*). They held that in its perfection, virtue was an all-or-nothing matter; it was not a matter of degree. They held that making progress toward virtue required a steady practical control over one's emotions and attachments, and perhaps the elimination of the extreme passions, though certainly not the elimination of "good" emotions (*eupatheiai*). They held that all human beings with the ordinary inventory of human capabilities were capable of virtue and should be treated accordingly. The Stoics were thus universalists; cosmopolitans.

This list of Stoic doctrines is merely a high-altitude map of the terrain—one that obscures significant differences among major Stoic thinkers on many topics. The genius of Stoicism, for present purposes, is in its account of the natural development of moral agency, and the way it can come to be motivated and dominated by the effort to make progress toward virtue through practical wisdom.

II. THE NATURAL COURSE OF HUMAN MORAL DEVELOPMENT

For the Stoics, human moral development followed a course of events that was natural in the sense that it was self-initiating, self-sustaining (in terms of motivation),

and self-sequencing. Moral development was much like human physiological development generally, then, which produces a predictable array of changes through infancy, childhood, youth, adulthood, and old age. Our bodies grow in size and strength, and then gradually decline in those ways. We acquire improved function in autonomic systems (respiration, digestion, immune response, etc.), coordinated movements of our limbs, manual dexterity, visual discrimination, and much more. Those things also gradually diminish with age, or are lost. And these predictable changes will standardly produce new things, like teeth or reproductive fertility, on a built-in schedule, and the consolidation of existing things, such as the bones of the skull. Such development can, of course, be helped or hindered by human interventions, by good or bad nutrition, and by good or bad fortune generally. But if we have the ordinary human inventory of physical endowments, and get the care we need to survive and thrive, these predictable things will happen more or less on a pre-set schedule. Moreover, this natural schedule of events is robust. It takes quite an extraordinary set of misfortunes—either in our endowments or circumstances—to defeat it altogether.

Human moral development was similar, the Stoics held. It could be helped or hindered by an extraordinary abundance or shortage of physical or psychological endowments or circumstances, but in the ordinary course of events the components of virtue tended simply to unfold in a predictable sequence of self-initiating, self-sustaining, and self-sequencing events from infancy through childhood and into adulthood.

The Stoics apparently thought that by early adulthood, in the ordinary course of events, human beings would have become active, more or less effective rational agents and would have a collection of dispositions and attachments corresponding roughly to the standard list of virtues (or, alas, vices). That collection might not be unified or even coherent, and the dispositions might not be steady or strong in terms of effectively motivating conduct. So what would remain were the changes needed to align these components properly so that making progress toward Stoic virtue (and genuinely Stoic versions of the separate virtues) would become the dominant motivation of one's rational activity. For that, they apparently thought at least a rudimentary Stoic moral education was necessary. This could be available to anyone, in just the right accidental external circumstances, but it always required persistent effort on the part of the agent, and often went better with the help of a good Stoic handbook, and a good Stoic teacher.

A good deal of philosophical work remains to be done in distilling a detailed account of moral development as the Stoics might have—or could have—understood it. In particular, more needs to be done on the development of rational agency, the way it can become thoroughly infused with practical wisdom, and the way it can then come to be uniquely motivated and uniquely infused throughout the moral emotions and separate moral virtues. What follows merely lays out the materials needed for such continued work. It gives an account of what one finds (and doesn't find) in the texts, together with some brief discussion of its philosophical potential.

i. The Cradle Argument: Infant Agency, Complex Motivation, *Oikeiōsis*

Infant Agency Is Motivationally Complex

The Stoics insisted on beginning ethical theory with some observations about nature equipping us, from birth, with a special form of sub-rational agency pointed toward its own survival, health, and development. In a complementary way, parents and adults generally are equipped with “tender feelings” toward infants and young children. Such tender feelings are important because they help to motivate older children and adults to protect infants and young children, and to provide them with the care they need in order to survive and thrive. But the Stoic insistence on starting with careful attention to infant agency generated what has been called a “cradle argument” that is a central feature of Stoic ethical theory.⁴

For one thing, their cradle argument allows the Stoics to see infants and young children as goal-directed agents even before we can plausibly speak about them as rational or moral agents. They initiate activity of many sorts, including but not limited to those emphasized by Aristotle (seeking nutrition, imitation, habituation) and Epicurus (pleasure seeking and pain avoidance). Even initially, the Stoics emphasized, infant behavior is more accurately described as self-preservation than merely pleasure seeking and pain avoidance. Infants seek many things relevant to self-preservation, including food, safety, and security, and they will repeatedly try things, explore things, and tolerate discomfort in the process. Even sub-rational infant agency is motivationally complex.

Complex Motivation Yields the Beginnings of Practical Intelligence

For another thing, though the point is not explicitly emphasized in the texts, one should note that the cradle argument allows us to see that many of the activities initiated by infants and young children are by their nature, though not by the child’s intention, aimed at the further development of the child’s agency itself, along with health, growth, and self-sufficiency. For example, as the complexity of agentic motivation continues to increase through childhood and adulthood, the motivation for managing this complexity will also arise and begin to increase. Initially, the goals will be to avoid paralyzing ambivalence or frustrating activity and to seek satisfying activity through the reduction of complexity. This amounts to the beginnings of practical intelligence. Success with practical intelligence initiates, and repetition sustains, what later becomes the motivation for the development of practical wisdom (*phronesis*), and for giving it a hegemonic role in our activities.

Oikeōsis, Social Oikeiōsis, and Attachments

And finally, the cradle argument allows the Stoics to introduce a distinctive element of their account of what eventually becomes moral development. *Oikeiōsis* is the term they use for the way in which human beings appropriate or incorporate things external to themselves into the range of things that matter to them almost as much as

self-preservation. Through *oikeiōsis* we come to love externals in much the same way as we love ourselves. We thus begin the process of becoming *as attached* to externals as to ourselves.

The process is a familiar one. The infant has several small blankets, of different colors, weights, and textures. At first the infant accepts any of them, and merely seeks out the nearest one. But soon, sometimes, one blanket becomes the favored one—the one always sought out, even though all of the blankets remain acceptable. And eventually, perhaps, the favored blanket becomes indispensable. The infant becomes so attached to it that when it is not available, the infant is temporarily inconsolable. It is as if the infant feels the loss of the blanket as a threat to self-preservation, or security. The same goes for attachments to particular toys, foods, routines, ways of being held. Such attachments persist beyond the usefulness of our favorite things, and we want to preserve them just in order to preserve them—for their own sakes, as it were. The blanket may become so worn, tattered, and torn that it is useless as a blanket. But the attachment remains.

We become attached to other people in this way also, through *oikeiōsis*. At first the attachment may be purely instrumental or even accidental in origin. We favor the people who help and care for us, and who provide food, shelter, and other necessities. Then we become attached to them, at first just because when they are around, things tend to go better for our activities. But once we have appropriated another in this way, we can become attached to the other in much the same way we are attached to ourselves. And the attachment tends to persist well beyond its instrumental or accidental origin. We want to preserve those other people just in order to preserve them—for their own sakes.

The Persistence and Strength of Attachments

The persistence of attachment thus becomes a prominent factor in Stoic accounts of virtue. It is obviously a remarkable source of non-egoistic motivation, and *oikeiōsis*-driven attachments are prominent factors in Stoic accounts of all the aspects of virtue (including justice) that require genuine concern for the well-being of others. Furthermore, insofar as some aspects of justice or of practical wisdom lead us to universalize such attachments to all human beings, *as* human beings, they lead us toward cosmopolitanism and (in contemporary theory) toward commitments to human duties and rights.

But such attachments are also a notorious source of moral problems. For example, we may wind up with stronger attachments to mere things (money, reputation) than to our own children. Or we may wind up with such strong attachments to our own children that we ourselves thrive only through their success or failure.

The Stoics confront problematic attachments in ways that many people find unnatural or even inhumane. They seem to recommend a continuous form of inner detachment—in which one may groan on the outside, apparently in sympathy with a grieving friend, while remaining tranquil inside. The Stoics would categorically reject the labels *unnatural* and *inhumane*. And though they sometimes may have spoken harshly about these matters to adult students (not an unknown or especially inhumane technique), they can easily dispose of this whole objection by pointing out how genuine friendship often requires providing help to a friend disabled by grief, and thus requires in the helping

friend not only empathy and consolation, but also a form of temporary detachment, much like what Epictetus recommends.⁵ After all, one might need to *act effectively while grieving*: to call others for assistance, or care for the grieving friend's young children. It takes little imagination to connect that case to all sorts of ordinary emotion-management problems. And what is necessary for the helping friend might also (at least sometimes) be necessary for the grieving friend herself, might it not?

Social Oikeiōsis

An interesting question remains, within Stoicism, about whether *oikeiōsis* always works outward from each agent's temporally prior egoistic concerns to that agent's secondary non-egoistic concerns for others. If so, it looks as though the form of universalized concern that the agent would naturally develop for others would most likely be a form of radiating benevolence—hottest at the originating center, and progressively cooler as one moves outward from the center.

Some Stoics, however, might have thought that non-egoistic moral motivation was traceable to direct, natural, pro-social impulses for the well-being of others. At the very least, even if attachments to others always do grow out of the ground of self-preservation, that ground might be made especially fertile and complicated by our innately social nature. This, combined with Stoic universalism, might even motivate an impulse toward a form of universal *equal* benevolence rather than radiating benevolence.⁶ We would expect such motivation to show up in self-sacrificial aspects of virtuous activity.

ii. Childhood Development: Second-Order Complexity, Practical Wisdom

The Relative Silence of Stoic Texts about Childhood Development

The Stoics seem to jump from the matters just discussed to the point at which rational agency has replaced infant agency, and rational activity is beginning to be coordinated and controlled by the more developed forms of practical intelligence, though not yet full-fledged practical wisdom. But any full account of the natural course of moral development will have to pay attention to the ways in which the childhood process leading up to rational agency is self-initiated, self-transformative, and motivated.

A convenient way to do this is to focus on healthy (i.e., non-self-destructive, non-self-defeating, non-pathological) intellectual development in childhood. If we find that the ordinary course of it (for healthy individuals in a hospitable environment) leads to the development of rational agency and a prominent place for the development of practical intelligence, we can be confident that the Stoic story about natural moral development continues through childhood. This will be especially important if we find that such development into rational agency is every bit as robust as the development of sub-rational agency during infancy.

It seems very likely that this is so. It certainly is consistent with the best accounts of the psychology of child development now available.⁷ And it is consistent with what the Stoics themselves could have observed, and doubtless did observe: the increasing complexity of the child's self-concept, practical activity, and practical intelligence; language acquisition; evaluation of alternatives, deliberation, and choice; control of impulsive behavior; powers of memory, perception, anticipation, and prediction; new impulses in adolescence that dramatically complicate the development of standard virtues and/or vices; and so on. For us, this is also supplemented by contemporary developments in cognitive neuropsychology, particularly in a developmental account of our "executive functions" or executive system.

From Practical Intelligence to Practical Wisdom

Practical intelligence is compatible with the pursuit of vicious ends as well as virtuous ones. Psychopathic serial killers, for example, may have a good deal of practical intelligence, but no practical *wisdom* at all—certainly not practical wisdom in the Stoic sense—that is, practical intelligence directed wholly toward wise (virtuous) ends, and ultimately to Stoic virtue itself.

The movement from practical intelligence to even the beginnings of practical wisdom is naturally emergent in the sense that conflict among the ends embedded in separate virtues and vices emerges in daily life, and we are thus motivated to resolve the tension caused by the conflict. But there is a special problem with it that eventually needs a strong Stoic response. It is simply that people often develop unwise, deeply habitual forms of practical intelligence. They may develop the habit of resolving more or less all conflicts among competing ends in the same limited way, nothing-else-considered. (When in doubt, just be prudent. Or just do as you please. Or just do as you're told.) This moves practical intelligence only toward what we might call prudential intelligence, or feel-good intelligence, or obedient intelligence, rather than toward practical wisdom.

The obvious Stoic response is to help people make their repeated efforts at coherence and conflict resolution consistent with ends that are wise in an *all-things-considered* way. It is only that form of practical intelligence that can move us toward the practical wisdom required for making progress toward Stoic virtue.

The Brink of Adulthood

In any case, all of these developments leave things on the brink of adulthood in just the place Stoics want to address: the way in which adults can become attached to Stoic virtue itself—that is, to the perfection of rational activity guided by practical wisdom wholly toward wise ends, all things considered. This adult continuation of moral development is not entirely naturally emergent. If it were, we could expect almost everyone to become a Stoic, and the Stoics didn't expect that. So the attachment to Stoic virtue itself needs a special, naturally emergent push. That push is described in the rest of this section, and the following one on Stoic virtue.

iii. Adult Development: Cosmic Hegemony, Human Freedom, Human Limits, Practical Widsom

The Relevance of Stoic Cosmology and Theology: Then and Now

Here is some of what the ancient Stoics seem to have agreed to emphasize for adult moral development on the basis of their cosmology and theology:

- (a) Cosmology and theology established that the universe itself was rationally, providentially, and wisely formed, so that for human beings, acting in accord with it was obviously also rational and wise, at least in some ultimate sense.
- (b) Cosmological and deterministic principles identified the source and scope of human freedom and responsibility, and thus established the importance for human beings of getting their conduct right—of getting it in accord with nature.
- (c) The cosmology and the nature of human freedom supported the notion that all human beings who become rational agents have a special status within the universe—a status that extends to all of them and supports cosmopolitan principles.
- (d) The cosmology/theology was both inspiring and reassuring: inspiring because it was imaginative and beautiful in its depiction of relentless divine activity; reassuring because it yielded the thought that each of us, no matter how insignificant, has a predefined role to play in the divine scheme of things.

The Stoics probably thought that all of these matters arose as intellectual discoveries and were probably most effective in moral development when they were discovered or communicated during late childhood and early adulthood.

The question is whether these elements of Stoic physics, metaphysics, and theology remain necessary for contemporary ethics in the Stoic tradition. If we keep the Stoic theology, that means giving up the notion of god as a supernatural being. It is unclear how else one could stay within the Stoic tradition in theology. If their theology is unacceptable, however, one still has three choices:

- (a) One choice is to keep a supernaturalist theology and incorporate into it some version of ethics in the Stoic tradition. Renaissance neo-stoicism proceeded in this way,⁸ and some scholars pursue evidence of such a Stoic influence in early Christianity,⁹ and in much later Christian thinkers such as Joseph Butler.¹⁰
- (b) A second choice is to reject both supernaturalist theology and the Stoic version of a naturalistic one—and then adopt a different naturalistic theology (perhaps by rejecting the Stoic commitment to a providential god, as Spinoza did), before proceeding to one's own ethics. This can look very much like working in the Stoic tradition, either intentionally or unintentionally, as it does in the case of Spinoza.¹¹

- (c) The third choice is to abandon theology altogether, and proceed to develop a naturalistic virtue ethics in the Stoic tradition, arguing for a similar account of moral development, a similar moral psychology, and a similar account of Stoic virtue.¹²

Each of these three choices can have a strong claim to be working in the Stoic tradition, even without Stoic cosmology and theology. It is obvious that some parts of Stoic physics are no longer plausible: for example, geocentric astronomy. But the question remains whether the Stoic account of mind, and of the mental aspect of the universe as a whole (providential or not, with respect to human beings) remains plausible. If it does, then the following reminders about the ways the Stoics deployed their cosmology and theology in their ethics may be useful. They do connect directly to the Stoic story about adult moral development, and in most respects they can be translated into secular language.

The Universe as a Hegemonic Rational Being

The Stoics held that the universe, operating providentially through its “governing faculty” (*hegemonikon*) has produced a very old and thoroughly deterministic environment. Perhaps it is a cyclical one, going through long periods of expansion and complication, followed by conflagration and contraction, leading again to expansion. But perhaps not. The Stoics disagreed among themselves about this. In either case, we humans have had no choice in this—no choice in the time or place of our births, or the nature of our endowments and the way they unfold throughout our lives. We had no choice about the fact that we are mortal, and that much of the universe is apparently not directly “for” us because it is lethal for us. Even the parts that are for us in the sense that we can survive and thrive in them can be shaped by us only in superficial ways, and only by extensive cooperative human activity. We run up against the hegemonic activity of the universe/god whenever we run up against our limitations as individual human beings, and the limitations of organized, cooperative human activity. We run up against it when we face the defeat of some particular goal-directed activity we choose. We learn that it is futile to oppose the hegemonic activity of the universe, and it is self-defeating to stake our happiness on our success in opposing it.

Human Beings as Hegemonic Agents

Human beings are parts of the universal rational being. Though we are not parts of its divine *hegemonikon*, we are of special significance because we can develop something like its ordered, integrated, goal-oriented, and rational activity. As such beings, we each possess a human-scale cognitive governing system, or *hegemonikon*, and some limited degree of freedom to determine the details of some causal chains. Human freedom is thus compatible with a thoroughly deterministic world—though not, perhaps, with a thoroughly predetermined world in which every detail of how things happen, down to the precise number, position, and size of each grain of sand at each moment is fixed prior to the creation of anything. The ancient sources are somewhat confusing on this metaphysical point. The normative point, however, is that if we wish to be free, we need

to focus on the ways in which our rational activity is actually an indispensable part of various causal chains.

The idea may be something like this. Some causal chains do not run through human beings at all. For example, a list of causes leading up to the formation of the sun will not be able to make any mention of prior human existence at all, let alone the existence of a particular individual. And a list of other causal chains, for example the chain leading to the birth of a particular son, say Sam, even though it must mention Sam, will not be able to mention his rational agency—his deliberation and choice. Some other causal chains, however, *must* include reference to Sam's deliberation and choice—if, for example, *but for* those activities of his rational agency, the event *X* at the end of the chain would not have occurred. Instead, a different event *Y* would have occurred. It might be that the *only* difference between *X* and *Y* will be that Sam's rational agency was not involved in *Y*. But notice that in that case, *X* and *Y* are nonetheless *different* events.

The point is simply that determinism is not fatalism. The Stoics did not hold that things within the control of human beings were fated to happen (or not) no matter what the human beings involved chose to do. And just as we can accidentally cause something to happen, or negligently allow something to happen, we can deliberately make some things happen. Rational agents experience this, correctly, as a power of their agency—to contribute, or not to contribute, to particular chains of events. This power can properly be regarded as a form of freedom, even though rhetorically we can make it seem an empty form of it. We do so by describing our deliberation and choice as something that *could not have been otherwise*, given antecedent conditions. But oddly, rhetorically, we can make it seem a non-empty form of freedom as well. We do that by describing our deliberation and choice as something that *would* not have been otherwise, given antecedent conditions. Metaphysically, much more remains to be said to make a Stoic account of human freedom acceptable. But the same is true for any account of human freedom currently available.

Recognizing Which Things Are Within Our Control

In order to follow this line of thought about freedom ethically, however, we must devote an increasing part of our activity as rational agents throughout late childhood and adulthood to the effort to recognize accurately the difference between things that are within our control and things that are not. Things may, of course, be in various mixtures of those categories: partly but not fully up to us; partly but not fully up to us *yet*; partly but not fully up to us *now*, though they once were; and so on. Some things may be within our control if and only if we engage with others in cooperative ventures for mutual benefit: commerce, for example, and peaceful coexistence. Some things may be within our control only insofar as they are coordinated with others according to the same conventions, rules, or patterns of behavior: language use, for example, and rules of the road.

The Stoic normative point about this remains unchanged. It has two parts. The first is that our attitudes, attachments, and emotions, as well as what we choose to do and how we choose to do it, are always, ultimately, within our control *if we have learned to manage these things effectively*. That calls our attention immediately to the importance

of developing these management powers in advance, before they are needed. And that is tantamount to calling our attention to the importance of perfecting our rational activity by integrating it thoroughly into the activity of practical intelligence of the sort that leads to practical wisdom (see section III).

The second part is that when we accurately recognize our limits, we should then judge our success not by whether we get to the final goal of some activity, but rather by whether our activity in pursuit of that goal was as close to perfect as it could be, given our circumstances and constitution. Once the arrow leaves the bow, many things that are not within our control (the wind, people standing in front of the target, or a suddenly moving target) can intervene to prevent the arrow from reaching the target. But if we have pointed the arrow and drawn the bow to account for the distance to the target and the wind, and waited for the target to be clear, and otherwise made the shot perfectly, then we have done everything that is within our control to hit the target. When we make the shot perfectly, regret for missing the target is not appropriate; it leads us away from the effort to act appropriately (the effort to make the shot perfectly). And it leads us toward the implicit and unwise—even impious—belief that underwrites unwise regret generally: namely, that we are somehow responsible for the parts of nature that do not “belong” to us at all, but belong only, perhaps, to others or to the universe alone.

III. STOIC VIRTUE

We can now say, on the basis of the way the preceding sections have developed, that Stoic virtue can be described, schematically, as follows.

To have virtue is to do, and be, and know, and feel the appropriate things as guided by practical wisdom in pursuit of wise ends, at the appropriate times, in the appropriate ways, in the appropriate amounts, for the appropriate reasons, and to do so reliably, as a matter of settled traits of rational agency, across a very wide variety of situations, both expected and unexpected.

The ancestor of this is in Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1109a. But then the Stoics go on to argue for a trio of notoriously austere doctrines about virtue: that it is the only good; that it is sufficient for happiness; and that it is an all-or-nothing achievement. With the addition of those doctrines, the contrast between the Stoics, Aristotle, and everyone else becomes quite striking. This is so even though there is considerable overlap between the Stoics and others elsewhere (e.g., on the unity of the separate virtues, the list of them, and the central role of wisdom and practical wisdom in achieving virtue).

Although these Stoic doctrines about virtue are not naturally emergent, the Stoics insist that they are logically implied by the nature of the universe, human nature, and the natural course of human moral development. We can give an account of the logical implications roughly as follows.

i. Virtue and the Integrated Moral Personality

Attachment to Competent Forms of Rational Agency

It is through active, competently effective agency that we have freedom in a deterministic world. Through this we can reliably make a limited range of things happen, and to the extent that they are within our control, make them happen as we want them to happen. Given the complexity of our goals and activities, as well as the very limited extent of our control over the outcomes of our activities, such power is very attractive.

When we discover this power, we understandably begin to reach for it repeatedly, and favor it for its instrumental value. As we discover the range of situations in which it is instrumentally valuable—and the range of situations in which the lack of it destroys the possibility of eudaimonistic outcomes—we invite its appropriation through the natural process of *oikeiōsis*. We invite the formation of a settled disposition to make competent rational agency a pervasive and, directly or indirectly, a controlling feature of our activities.

Attachment to Making Progress toward Perfecting Rational Agency

Once we develop a strong disposition for competent rational agency, and discover the limitations of mere competence, we will have developed a preference for improving that disposition toward its excellent, and ultimately perfected, forms. If competence is good, excellence is better, and perfection is best. Such a preference understandably develops into the motivation to make progress toward the perfection of rational agency, and the internalization of such motivation into a powerful disposition and attachment. The practice necessary for such progress is difficult, and continuous as long as we continue to encounter new tasks, or old tasks in new circumstances. So even when we are motivated to make such progress, we may have to be doubly motivated to do the necessary practice. (Think of being motivated to become physically fit but finding it difficult to stay motivated to exercise.)

This is a difficult step in moral development—one that the Stoics recognized as requiring constant attention and the constant reinforcement of reminders. They developed handbooks, exercises, and teaching techniques devoted to this step in moral development, and to its related ones with respect to emotions, attitudes, and detachment.

Attachment to Making Progress toward the Perfect Integration of the Virtues

Emotions, attitudes, dispositions, attachments, powers of detachment, and goals must all be consistent with each other and with wisdom and practical intelligence. The same is true of the traits we identify as the separate moral virtues—justice, courage, moderation, benevolence, and so forth. It is the integration of our moral psychology generally that determines whether we are on the path toward virtue or toward vice.

Merely being pointed in the direction of virtue will fail to be virtuous unless it has the appropriate underlying impulses—impulses that come from being motivated

to be just, courageous, temperate, benevolent, and so forth. We need to be oriented toward those ends, but we also need to be moved to action toward them. And we also need the right kind of motivation *in each case*—motivation constituting the appropriate priority in each case. When benevolence is the appropriate priority, purely calculated benevolence, without the appropriate concern for the well-being of others, is not actually benevolence, because it is not done from benevolent motives. Purely expedient fairness, or merely the appearance of justice, is not fairness or justice, either.

If our activity is to be rational and virtuous overall, all of these impulses and motives must be prioritized, modulated, and managed by practical intelligence into a single coherent and internally consistent trait—virtue in the singular. Insofar as that happens, practical intelligence becomes practical wisdom, directed wholly at the wise ends of Stoic virtue itself.

Stoic Emotion

The Stoics are often challenged to explain how the integration of emotion and practical wisdom can be achieved without producing a life of more or less flat affect—of the sort that is now the dictionary definition of the Stoic. And in fact the ancient Stoic use of the term *apatheia* seems to the incautious to establish the point. But the Stoics did not use it to mean “without emotion,” but rather the presence (always) of an *appropriate* sort of emotion. The Stoics had an account of *eupatheiai*, or good emotions. And the Stoics were quite aware of the natural inevitability of what they called *propatheiai*—sometimes very sudden and strong affective reflexes, prior to the addition of the cognitive elements (beliefs) they thought necessary for full-fledged emotions. Even the Sage may go pale or tremble reflexively in a violent storm aboard an overloaded ship.

The Stoics described the difference between appropriate and inappropriate emotions in terms of the truth or falsity of the two sorts of beliefs typically involved in full-fledged emotions: beliefs about the world (e.g., whether there is in fact something under your bed that goes thump in the night) and beliefs about its connection to your well-being (e.g., whether it is in fact a threat). It is the individual’s “assent” to such beliefs that gives emotions their impulsive power. Replacing false beliefs with true ones will alter the type or level of the affective component of the emotion. It can instantly change fright to relief, for example, to find that there is nothing under the bed, or nothing that is threatening. And that not only changes the affect, but may eliminate, or transform, the impulse to act.

But that is not all there is to it. There might in fact be something threatening under the bed, and then one needs to be able to *act appropriately*. The Stoics surely must have been aware of the necessity, for action, not only of the appropriate emotional impulses, but of the appropriate emotional tension or tenor required by various activities—even for the Sage, who has a firm grasp of the truth that virtue is the only thing that is ultimately good, and might thus regard whatever it is that goes thump in the night to be a mere dis-preferred “indifferent.” In the fragments we have, the Stoics are not always careful enough to make this clear.¹³

Strictly speaking, Stoic ethical theory requires modifying or eliminating emotions *only* where and when they compromise active, effective rational activity; where and when they compromise progress toward virtue; where and when they are unwise. Some Stoics held, apparently, that this always happens in cases when the emotions or passions are extreme or protracted or pointless. To be consistent, however, they should have ruled out only emotions that were inconsistent with virtue, or inconsistent with making progress toward it.¹⁴

ii. Virtue, the Final Good, and Happiness

Virtue is the Only Good

The Stoics held that virtue (in the sense of the perfection of rational agency) was not only *a* good for human beings, it was *the* good; it was *incomparably* good; it was the *only* thing that was *ultimately* good for us. Comparatively, everything else in the realm of beneficial things was a matter of indifference. Without virtue, no amount of any other benefit or sum of benefits could be sufficient for a good life. And in the presence of virtue, the presence or absence of any other benefit could neither add nor subtract anything significant for a good life. After all, the presence of virtue—the perfection of rational agency—was the perfection of the very form of life for which we are naturally suited, and it is only in that form of life that we are free.

Objections to this from their contemporaries soon forced Stoics to develop what became their settled view of the matter. They continued to resist calling anything but virtue a good. But they acknowledged that many other things might be rank ordered against each other by an objective standard derived from human nature. Compared to each other, such “externals” might be either preferred or dis-preferred to one another. One prefers health to ill health, wealth to poverty, comfort to pain. But by comparison to virtue, all these preferences are matters of indifference—preferred or dis-preferred “indifferents.” One welcomed the preferred things if they occurred, or were “brought to one,” as at a banquet. One selected them if they were consistent with virtue. And one avoided the dis-preferred things when possible, and when that was consistent with virtue. But faced with the choice between a life of virtue and a life of health, wealth, and comfort, there was no contest. Virtue was the only thing choice-worthy; the only thing worth *choosing*.

The Stoics’ critics, then and now, have rarely been convinced on this definitional point. But the Stoics insist on it.¹⁵ Why? Because it helps us to avoid confusing the one incomparably good thing that is in theory within our control (virtue) with things that are not even on the same scale of value. It is our active, effective, rational agency that gives us our freedom, and what little genuinely hegemonic power we have in the universe. Making progress toward its perfection (virtue) gives us, within our lives, a meaningful identity as a human person. And making progress toward it is something that is within our control, not only in theory but in practice.

Virtue Is Necessary and Sufficient for Happiness (Eudaimonia)

The Stoics notoriously hold that virtue is sufficient for happiness and good life. Their critics attack them for this on one or both of two grounds. One is that Stoics cannot be eudaimonists—counting happiness as the final good—if virtue is the only thing they recognize as good. The other is that it isn't plausible to think that virtue alone could generate happiness.

(a) Stoic ethics is eudaimonistic. Some critics have argued as follows. Virtue and happiness are distinguishable things. Distinguishable things cannot both be *the* final good. Eudaimonism treats happiness as the final good. But if virtue is the only good, then it (and not happiness) is the only candidate for the final good. So Stoic ethics cannot be eudaimonistic.

The Stoics answered (not always clearly) that in some human activities, success cannot be achieved directly. One must sometimes lead a moving target in order to hit it, or aim at a point above it in order to get the arrow to the target at all. This is true more generally in stochastic activities, such as medicine, where success (the final good of the patient's health) is not ultimately within our control. In such activities, our goal must be defined by things that *are* within our control, namely active, effective, and wise practical activity pointed at wise ends chosen from various probability distributions. Achieving that much brings us its own sort of joy, and if we are virtuous in the Stoic sense, that will be enough for *eudaimonia*. We will be additionally pleased if (for reasons ultimately beyond our control) the arrows actually hit the target, or the best medical practices actually cure the patient's disease. But if they don't, we may be displeased, but we will not *regret* leading a moving target, or operating in terms of best medical practices.

So the answer is that Stoic virtue is the only goal we can choose that is within our control to achieve, and also gives us the best chance we have to hit the target. Sometimes targets and goals diverge in this way.¹⁶ But it is no contradiction for the Stoics to recommend treating Stoic virtue, and the joy it brings, as the final good—overall, the wisest end for us to pursue—and at the same time engage in activities in which we also “wish” for something additional.

(b) Stoic virtue adopts a wise conception of *eudaimonia*. Nonetheless, for some people dissatisfaction remains. How can we be satisfied merely with Stoic virtue when it fails to yield health, wealth, and other delights that are not entirely within our control? Wouldn't our happiness be greater with health, wealth, and other delights added to Stoic virtue, even if the Stoics insist on calling them indifferents? Wasn't Aristotle right to hold that while virtue alone was sufficient for a good life, a life blessed with a modicum of good fortune was even better? If so, then virtue by itself cannot define the greatest good; the final good. And surely it is this final good that is *eudaimonia*.

The Stoics would reply by asking us to consider how we should respond—how it is appropriate to respond—to the delights and disappointments added to virtue by good and bad fortune. Is it wise to treat them as part of our final good? To make them an essential part of our overall aim? In doing so, we put them beyond the realm of things we can control. In doing so, we take *eudaimonia* out of the realm of goals we might plausibly

achieve through our activities alone and put it instead into the realm of hopes that can be fulfilled only when good fortune is added to our activities. This sets us up for an inappropriately wholesale sense of failure when bad luck intervenes to keep us from achieving our (unwise) final good, and an inappropriately wholesale sense of success when good luck intervenes to push us the rest of the way to our (unwise) final good.

Virtue Is Not a Matter of Degree

The Stoics held that virtue is the *perfection* of active, effective rational agency, guided by practical wisdom toward wise ends. The Stoics insisted that like uniqueness, perfection does not admit of degrees. As they liked to say in support of this definitional point, one can drown in a puddle of water as well as at the bottom of the sea. But they did also insist that it was possible to be closer to or farther away from such perfection, and to make progress toward it. Achieving it was humanly possible, but such an achievement was exceedingly rare. The achievement is an ideal of sorts, but it is important for the Stoics to insist that it is a humanly possible one to achieve. It is not like the ideal of the imitation of a god; it is not something that is metaphysically impossible for a human being to achieve.

The austerity here is understandable. We make progress toward Stoic virtue in the course of our moral development, which is always limited by the range of our experience. As our experience of the world gets wider and deeper, the repertoire of appropriate activities has to develop accordingly. And it is understandable that some skills, say those needed for appropriate conduct on a frontier, might get rusty after a long time in Rome. That is why making progress toward virtue is typically a perpetual task. And even if virtue, in its perfection, is achieved, one imagines that the Stoic Sage would not want to claim it—or perhaps would not even recognize it—thinking, wisely, that the achievement is not finished until the perfection is secure. And how would one know that it is secure? Count no one happy until he is dead.

In Stoic moral psychology, however, making progress toward virtue is motivated every bit as powerfully as is the goal of perfected virtue itself. Making such progress is also a source of joy. And the difficulty of both tasks—and the constancy of them over the whole course of one's life—certainly should silence the occasional complaint one hears about Stoics setting their goals too low by making sure they don't strive for things that are beyond their control.¹⁷

NOTES

1. Suggested in A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley (trans., eds.), *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), Vol. 1 at 320. I thank Lloyd Gerson for the page reference.
2. For a discussion of the various ways in which the Stoics appropriated and interpreted the Platonic list of cardinal virtues, see Malcolm Schofield, "Cardinal Virtues: a Contested Socratic Inheritance," in *Plato and the Stoics*, edited by A. G. Long (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 11–28.

3. For the classifications, see A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley (trans., eds.), *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), Vol. 1, §61, and Christoph Jedan, *Stoic Virtues: Chrysippus and the Religious Character of Stoic Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2009), Chap. 4–7.
4. Jacques Brunschwig, “The Cradle Argument in Epicureanism and Stoicism,” in *The Norms of Nature: Studies in Hellenistic Ethics*, edited by Malcolm Schofield and Gisela Striker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 113–144.
5. Epictetus, *Discourses, Fragments, Handbook*, translations by Robin Hard, with editorial material by Christopher Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), *Handbook* at 16; *Discourse* I.11.
6. Hierocles, *Hierocles the Stoic: Elements of Ethics, Fragments and Excerpts*, translation by David Konstan, commentary by Ilaria Ramelli (Atlanta GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 90–91.
7. Philip David Zelazo (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Developmental Psychology*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
8. Jill Kraye (ed.), *Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Vol. I: *Moral Philosophy*, 200–225, contains texts by Justus Lipsius and Francisco de Quevedo.
9. Tuomas Rasimus et al. (eds.), *Stoicism in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010).
10. A. A. Long, “Stoicism in the Philosophical Tradition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, edited by Brad Inwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Chap. 15.4.
11. A. A. Long, “Stoicism in the Philosophical Tradition,” Chap. 15.2.
12. Lawrence C. Becker, *A New Stoicism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998; Revised Edition, 2017).
13. A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley (trans., eds.), *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, Vol. 1, §57, commentary. Epictetus does make the point very clearly, however, that emotional impulses cannot be virtuous unless they are “reasonable.” See *Discourse* I.11 in Epictetus, *Discourses, Fragments, Handbook*.
14. Lawrence C. Becker, “Stoic Emotion,” in *Stoicism: Traditions and Transformations*, edited by Jack Zupko and Steven K. Strange (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Chap. 12, 250–275, at 265–273.
15. A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley (trans., eds.), *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, Vol. 1, §58.
16. Brad Inwood, “Goal and Target in Stoicism,” *Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986): 547–56.
17. For helpful suggestions on earlier drafts, thanks are due to Julia Annas, Charlotte Becker, Lloyd Gerson, Paula Gottlieb, Brad Inwood, Nickolas Pappas, Nancy Snow, Piotr Stankiewicz, and David Wyatt.

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CHAPTER 7

BUDDHISM AND THE VIRTUES

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I. BUDDHIST ETHICS

WHILE it is very easy to find in Buddhist sources systematic philosophical reflection on issues in epistemology and metaphysics, for instance, it is more difficult to find reflections that are obviously comparable to systematic normative ethical theory and metaethics. However, the tradition is very clear, and there is widespread agreement in the philosophical literature on what it recommends. Buddhist ethics counsels practitioners to overcome the three poisons of greed (*rāga*), hatred (*dveṣa*), and ignorance (*moha*), and to cultivate those states and traits of mind (and the actions they motivate) that conduce to the genuine happiness and spiritual freedom of oneself and others.¹

Along with the cultivation of wisdom and meditative concentration, moral discipline (*śīla*) is central to the Buddhist eightfold path to liberation from suffering; that is, right action, right speech, and right livelihood are integral aspects of the path. As for rules of conduct, lay practitioners commit to the five precepts of avoiding killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and intoxication. Monastics take the more stringent *prātimokṣa* vows, numbering in the hundreds. Vows, precepts, and rules are commonly justified as both means to and expressions of positive traits of mind, as well as ways to avoid harm to oneself and others, and to facilitate harmonious social interaction. In terms of positive traits to be cultivated, the most widespread are the four *brahma-vihāras* (divine states): loving-kindness (*maitrī*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekṣā*). In the Mahāyāna tradition, the *bodhisattva* (awakening being) path is organized around the cultivation and exercise of the six perfections (*pāramitās*): generosity (*dāna*), moral discipline (*śīla*), forbearance (*kṣānti*), vigor (*vīrya*), meditative stability (*dhyāna*), and wisdom (*prajñā*). The cultivation and exercise of these virtues is at the heart of the Buddhist path.

Positive traits such as the preceding virtues, as well as positive actions, are most commonly referred to as *kuśala* (“wholesome” or “skillful”). Actions and traits that are *kuśala* conduce to the happiness (*sukha*) or awakening (*bodhi*) of the agent or others, while *akuśala* (“unwholesome” or “unskillful”) actions do the opposite.² For instance, in the *Majjhima Nikāya* we find this advice:

When you reflect, if you know: “This action that I wish to do with the body would lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it is an unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences, with painful results,” then you definitely should not do such an action with the body. But when you reflect, if you know: “This action that I wish to do with the body would not lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it is a wholesome bodily action with pleasant consequences, with pleasant results,” then you may do such an action with the body.³

Now, three fundamental questions immediately arise here. First, does Buddhist ethics rest on a form of hedonism? Second, what are the guidelines for dealing with conflicts between benefit to oneself and benefit to others? Third, what is the relation between virtues and their positive consequences?

With regard to the first question, while Buddhist texts often take pleasure and pain, as well as happiness and suffering, as salient values or disvalues, it is unwarranted to interpret Buddhist ethics as hedonistic. Buddhist texts repeatedly warn against seeking pleasure for its own sake, while exhorting practitioners instead to seek virtue, wisdom, and tranquility. Furthermore, while the traditional doctrine of *karma* is that, in the long run at least, the positive or negative qualities of one’s experience will be in accord with the moral quality of one’s actions, the pleasant or unpleasant consequences of the actions for the agent are not what determine the moral quality of the actions in the first place. Rather, the order of explanation is the other way around. Certain actions are not good because they lead to pleasurable consequences for the agent; rather, they lead to such consequences because they are good. Moreover, the operative notion of *sukha* (“happiness”) here is beyond mere pleasure. Following Dambrun’s and Ricard’s interpretation of a Buddhist theory of happiness,⁴ we may distinguish two types of happiness. Hedonic or “fluctuating happiness” is stimulus-driven, contingent on circumstances, and is part of a larger cycle of periods of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. *Sukha*, or “authentic-durable happiness,” in contrast,

is understood here as an optimal way of being, a state of durable plenitude based on a quality of consciousness that underlies and imbues each experience, emotion and behavior, and . . . [is] not intrinsically dependent on the positive and negative feedback that we are constantly receiving, but rather give[s] one the inner resources to deal with the variability of the world and be a source of continuous optimal adaptation to external conditions.⁵

On this interpretation, an individual may achieve some significant degree of authentic-durable happiness through practice of the path, while the fullest realization of *sukha* (*mahā-sukha*, “great happiness”) comes from awakening, the inner freedom (*mokṣa*) from greed, hatred, and ignorance.

With regard to the second question, compared to contemporary ethical discourse, there is relatively little discussion of potential conflicts between self-interest and the interests of others. To be sure, the critique of selfishness or ego-centrism is absolutely central to Buddhist thought and practice. However, ego-centrism is thought to be harmful to both oneself and others, while selfless altruism is thought to be beneficial to oneself and others. Śāntideva puts the point starkly: “All those who suffer in the world do so because of their desire for their own happiness. All those happy in the world are so because of their desire for the happiness of others.”⁶ I will discuss this connection more extensively later, but for now let us note that there are two interwoven aspects of the Buddhist view here. The first and most fundamental aspect is that the *perception* of a fundamental conflict between (genuine) self-interest and (genuine) other-interest is based in the very egocentric frame of mind that creates and perpetuates it. The second aspect is that the operation of *karma* (both intra- and inter-lifetime) is thought to ensure that there is no ultimate conflict, because the causal order of the world is such that our well-being is partly a function of the moral quality of our mental states and actions. Thus, on the Buddhist view, the more clearly one sees oneself and others, the more one overcomes the false perception of fundamental conflict between what is beneficial to oneself and what is beneficial to others. Moreover, the pragmatic function of precepts and rules of conduct is partly to smooth out potential conflicts among the unenlightened.

Regarding the third question, contemporary interpreters of Buddhist ethics are in broad agreement on the tight connection between virtue and beneficial consequences for oneself and others, even when they disagree on the nature of the connection. Damien Keown, for instance, has argued that early and Theravāda Buddhist ethics can be understood in terms of a teleological virtue ethics, structurally similar to *eudaimonism*.⁷ On this account, the ultimate goal is *nirvāṇa* and the virtues are defined in terms of their relation to achieving and expressing awakening. The goal is one’s own awakening, and cultivating the virtues of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity is integral to the achievement of that goal. The primarily other-regarding virtues are then understood in terms of the role they play in achieving individual awakening. In contrast, several interpreters have interpreted Mahāyāna ethics in consequentialist terms.⁸ On this view, Buddhist ethics is based on promoting the welfare and diminishing the suffering of all sentient beings, and the virtues are understood in the context of that goal. Siderits takes Mahāyāna ethics (at least) to be a form of aretaic utilitarianism in which wholesome states and virtues are a means to the impartial and agent-neutral promotion of happiness and the reduction of suffering. Therefore, the connection between virtue and happiness and the reduction of suffering is instrumental. Charles Goodman, on the other hand, interprets the Mahāyāna ethics of Śāntideva as a form of character consequentialism. On this view, the ultimate goal of Buddhist ethics is understood in

terms of the welfare of sentient beings, but the operative notion of welfare includes both happiness and virtue. This form of perfectionist consequentialism combines the idea of an internal relation between virtue and happiness that is characteristic of many forms of virtue ethics with the universalistic altruism characteristic of utilitarianism. Finally, others have argued that Buddhist ethics is pluralistic,⁹ or that we should resist the temptation to reconstruct Buddhist ethics in terms of current normative theories.¹⁰

In discussing Buddhist virtue theory, I will not presuppose a specific, full theoretical reconstruction of Buddhist ethics. I will, however, return to the question of a Buddhist virtue ethics later in this chapter. For now, I will presuppose three key ideas. First, there is an internal connection between virtue (or the moral quality of states, traits, and actions) and genuine well-being. Second, certain traits of character are good in themselves (*svabhāvataḥ kuśalam*), independently of their consequences. These include, according to Vasubandhu, the three roots of *kuśala* (non-greed, non-hatred, and non-ignorance), self-respect (*hrī*), and concern for others (*apatrapya*).¹¹ Third, the cultivation of altruistic universal compassion in particular is central to Mahāyāna ethics.¹²

The focus of this chapter, then, will not be on the normative theoretical structure of Buddhist ethics, but rather on Buddhist ethics as a transformative-developmental *path*. That is, Buddhist ethics is fundamentally concerned with the progressive dismantling of the greed, aversion, and ignorance that condition our minds and actions, and the progressive cultivation of the non-attachment, compassion, and wisdom of an enlightened character.

II. ESCAPING SAṂSĀRA

In the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Śāntideva gives a striking and memorable characterization of the *saṃsāric* predicament of sentient beings: “Hoping to escape suffering, it is to suffering that they run. In the desire for happiness, out of delusion, they destroy their own happiness, like an enemy.”¹³ *Saṃsāra* here is a kind of existential “catch-22,” a mode of psychological functioning wherein our attempts to attain happiness and avoid suffering are self-defeating. The three poisons of greed, hatred, and delusion are dysfunctional forms of our basic impulses of attraction, aversion, and indifference, on the basis of which we respond to changing circumstances, seeking happiness and avoiding suffering. Because these basic forms of reaction are distorted or dysfunctional, as long as we are bound to them, our attempts to secure the lasting happiness we desire are doomed to fail.

More specifically, the *saṃsāric* predicament has deep roots in our cognitive, affective, and motivational systems. In terms of affect, we are subject to pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral sensations and feelings (*vedanā*), as well as negative states (*kleśa*) such as fear, anger, and craving. These affective states condition and are conditioned by our conative and cognitive states; that is, negative affective states of fear and anger may arise based

on contact with that which we perceive as threatening—or, we may perceive something as threatening based on feelings of fear and anger—and we may act to avoid or destroy that which elicits these feelings and perceptions. In addition, on the Buddhist account, even pleasant states are entangled with the *saṃsāric* framework; for instance, that which is pleasant can elicit craving (*trṣṇa*) or restless desire. Craving can bring about grasping (*upādāna*), the anxious attempt to maintain or protect the perceived source of pleasure. Further, affective states are thought to play an important role in reinforcing dysfunctional conative and cognitive states.

Corresponding to the three basic hedonic states (pleasant, unpleasant, neutral) are three basic motivational states: attraction, aversion, and indifference. These are basic impulses that drive the specific behavioral responses of approach, avoid, and ignore. In the *saṃsāric* framework, the approach-avoid-ignore system is oriented toward seeking pleasant stimuli, avoiding unpleasant stimuli, and ignoring that which is not perceived as relevant to this orientation.¹⁴

At the root of the *saṃsāric* framework are various cognitive distortions (delusions) involving perception, conception, belief, and self-understanding. These distortions are based in a failure properly to recognize the three marks of conditioned existence: impermanence (*anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkha*), and no-self (*anātman*). On my interpretation, these are not simple failures to grasp these concepts or see their application in the world. Rather, they are forms of cognitive bias or distortion, wherein we misconstrue key aspects of experience in ways that perpetuate and reinforce the *saṃsāric* framework. Thus, at one level we may know full well that things change or are impermanent, but at a deeper level we still operate with the expectation that grasping after impermanent stimuli is an effective means to lasting happiness, even though the stimulus, by its nature, cannot provide such happiness. In fact, it is part of the definition of grasping that it involves a misconstrual of or false projection onto the object of attachment. On the Buddhist account, the most fundamental form of cognitive distortion is the belief that one is a fixed, enduring self, and the self-centeredness and self-cherishing that goes along with this belief. As Dambrun and Ricard summarize,

In the end, all of these processes generate fluctuating happiness which is characterized by the alternation of phases of well-being and ill-being. It seems to us that this type of happiness, if it can be qualified as such, also has a tendency to be self-reinforcing. Because the phases of well-being are of short duration, the individual runs the risk of finding himself in a state where he or she is perpetually seeking new gratifications to maximize his or her well-being. In other words, a self-centered style of functioning produces a circular effect in which the individual is, in a way, the prisoner of an “egoistic and hedonic” spiral.¹⁵

Saṃsāra, in this sense, is this dysfunctional, unsatisfactory bondage to the egoistic and hedonistic spiral.

Moreover, on the Buddhist view, living within the framework obstructs the cultivation and exercise of our capacities for more accurate insight, and the development of virtues such as compassion, generosity, and equanimity. Given this analysis, awakening

is not simply an inner state, but rather an optimal mode of being, enacted in and through thought, word, and deed, and always embedded in a context. The Buddhist path, including ethics, must involve undoing the *saṃsāric* framework and developing this more skillful or awakened cognitive, affective, and motivational-behavioral framework.

III. THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES

The four immeasurables (P. *appamañña*) or divine states (P. *brahma-vihāra*) are central to the cultivation of character in both the Theravāda and Mahāyāna branches of Buddhism. As mentioned earlier, the four immeasurables are loving-kindness (*maitrī*, P. *mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekṣā*, P. *upekkhā*). The immeasurables refer to occurrent feelings or attitudes, domains of moral training, and stable character traits. They are perfected in the character of the *arahant* or enlightened being (in early Buddhism and Theravāda) and the *bodhisattva* (in Mahāyāna). Further, these positive states and traits are articulated within a moral psychology that includes an analysis of the “near” and “far” enemies of each state, as well as the use of the immeasurables as “antidotes” to negative states.

The term *maitrī* (P. *mettā*), often translated as “loving-kindness,” is related to *mitra*, “friend,” and connotes an attitude of friendliness or good will toward all sentient beings. In particular, it involves the wish for the happiness and well-being of others. In its ideal form, loving-kindness is universal in scope and includes the wish that all beings achieve both worldly happiness and awakening. Its opposite or “far enemy” is hatred or ill-will (*dveṣa*). Its counterfeit or “near enemy” is selfish attachment (*upādāna*). In general, “attachment” refers to the mistaken desire to cling to what is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and insubstantial (“selfless”) as if it were permanent, satisfactory, and substantial. As the near enemy of true *maitrī*, it has the connotation of a self-centered, possessive, compulsive, or anxious way of relating to those one cares about. It is considered a near enemy because our love and concern for others is so often mixed with (or conflated with) these maladaptive ways of relating. On the Buddhist view, loving-kindness can be cultivated through specific forms of meditation. For instance, in the form of meditation known as *maitrī-bhāvanā* (“loving-kindness cultivation”) the meditator evokes a feeling of kindness first toward herself, then toward a friend, a neutral person, a difficult person, and finally all sentient beings. The meditation technique involves both affective self-priming and stabilizing—that is, evoking and maintaining the feeling of kindness or love in oneself—as well as imaginative extension. Finally, it can serve as an antidote to both acute and chronic forms of ill-will. When one notices the arising of ill-will, one can evoke the feeling of loving-kindness toward the object of one’s ill-will. This is thought to counteract the arising of ill-will. Moreover, repeated practice of *maitrī-bhāvanā* is thought to reduce the tendency to hatred or ill-will over time, while making it easier to counteract specific instances of these negative states.

Compassion (*karuṇā*) involves the concern for others' suffering. It includes both sympathy for the plight of others and the active wish to alleviate their suffering. Like *maitrī*, it is ideally universal in scope. In terms of strength, the compassionate person is said to care for the suffering of others as much as she cares for her own suffering. Its far enemy is cruelty, while its near enemy is pity. Pity is considered a near enemy because it involves a sense of condescension or superiority toward its object based on a sense of fundamental difference between oneself and the other. In contrast, true compassion is based on a deep sense of our shared plight as sentient beings who do not want to suffer. As Śāntideva puts it, "I should dispel the suffering of others because it is suffering like my own suffering. I should help others too because of their nature as beings, which is like my own being When fear and suffering are disliked by me and others equally, what is so special about me that I protect myself and not the other?"¹⁶

Sympathetic joy (*muditā*) involves taking joy in the happiness and welfare of others. Its far enemy is envy or resentment. Its near enemies are biased joy in others' good fortune, such as joy only when one's own child does well, or vicarious enjoyment based in states such as craving, as in celebrity worship. Techniques to cultivate sympathetic joy include attending to or contemplating the good qualities of others, especially those one may envy or resent.

Equanimity (*upekṣā*) involves both mental stability or tranquility and a lack of bias or undue partiality in one's perceptions and interactions with others (and oneself). The far enemies of equanimity are disturbing emotions such as craving and anxiety. These emotions are problematic both because they disturb one's inner peace or emotional equilibrium and because they tend to bias one's assessment of moral situations. Someone in the grip of craving, for instance, may not have the clear unbiased understanding of her situation that is required to act virtuously. The near enemies of *upekṣā* are cold indifference and apathy. Attempting to maintain one's inner peace by ignoring or being unconcerned with the happiness and suffering of others is not virtuous, nor is attempting to be impartial by being equally uncaring toward all.

While the four immeasurables are conceptually distinct and each has its own techniques of cultivation, these virtues are considered mutually supporting. Loving-kindness and compassion are, of course, complementary. Cultivating sympathetic joy can facilitate cultivating loving-kindness or compassion, and vice versa. Equanimity serves to ensure that other virtues are universal in scope and free of prejudice, while the other three virtues serve to ensure that equanimity does not fall into mere indifference. Finally, it is important to note the guiding roles of attention—in the forms of mindfulness (*smṛti*) and attentional stability (*samādhi*)—and wisdom (*prajñā*) in cultivating and expressing the virtues. Stable attention is important insofar as an agitated and unfocused mind is an impediment both to acting virtuously and to the meditative techniques required to cultivate the virtues. Mindfulness is important in that it is said to increase awareness of both one's internal states and processes, and morally salient features of one's situation. For instance, the mindful individual may notice the subtle feeling of anger just as it is starting to arise and thereby can more easily address it. Most

important, wisdom—a deep insight into the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and insubstantial nature of reality—guides and constrains the four immeasurables. An action motivated by compassion, but not guided by wisdom, risks missing its target or worse, being counterproductive or harmful. For the Buddhist ethicist, appropriate action must be well-motivated *and* wise. An enlightened one, as an ideal agent, has perfected wisdom and the four immeasurable virtues.

IV. THE SIX PERFECTIONS

As discussed in the preceding, within the Buddhist tradition, one may distinguish two frameworks or modes of living: *saṃsāric* and awakened. The *saṃsāric* mode is characterized by self-centeredness, the three poisons, and fluctuations of happiness and suffering. The awakened mode is characterized by selflessness, authentic-durable happiness, and the perfection of virtue. For Mahāyānists such as Śāntideva, the foundation of the awakened life is the cultivation and expression of *bodhicitta* (“awakening mind”), which he calls “the seed of pure happiness in the world and the remedy of suffering in the world.”¹⁷

Bodhicitta is the mindset and existential commitment that forms the basis of the awakened life and its cultivation is the path of the *bodhisattva*, the spiritual ideal of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Following Garfield, I will define *bodhicitta* as the “commitment to attain and to manifest full awakening for the benefit of others.”¹⁸ It is centrally a motivational state, but involves cognitive and affective aspects as well. Its cultivation involves the development of wisdom, great compassion (*mahā-karuṇā*), and skillful responsiveness (*upāya-kauśalya*). On the Mahāyāna view, what separates the *bodhisattva* path from other forms of Buddhist practice is the centrality of an *altruistic* motivation for pursuing the path. The aim, then, is complex: one aims to fully develop one’s potential for awakening in order ultimately to release all beings from the suffering of *saṃsāra*.¹⁹ Indeed, the *bodhisattva*, Śāntideva proclaims, “longs to remove the unequalled agony of every single being and make their virtue infinite.”²⁰ It is noteworthy—beyond the grandiosity of the claim—that the aim is to relieve suffering *and* perfect virtue for all beings. The key to moving beyond the *saṃsāric* framework, then, is the cultivation of altruism within the context of a path of moral-spiritual development.

Grounded in *bodhicitta*, the *bodhisattva* path is constituted by the cultivation of the six perfections (*pāramitās*) of generosity (*dāna*), moral discipline (*śīla*), forbearance (*kṣānti*), effort (*vīrya*), meditative stability (*dhyāna*), and wisdom (*prajñā*). The perfections, as the name implies, are virtues to be perfected through moral and spiritual training.

As the *bodhisattva* path takes great compassion as its ideal, it is perhaps unsurprising that training in generosity (*dāna*) plays an important foundational role. The target or aim of generosity is the welfare of others, both mundane and spiritual. Generosity

may involve giving material resources, protection, or healing to those in need. It will also involve giving the higher goods of the *dharma*, the liberating truth. Indeed, because *nirvāṇa* is the *summum bonum*, giving spiritual goods or the conditions to achieve them takes priority over giving aimed at merely worldly well-being. However, Mahāyāna thinkers recognized that a certain degree of worldly well-being is required to pursue the spiritual path and that achieving spiritual freedom is a very long-term goal. Thus, the *bodhisattva* will, as Śāntideva says, “summon the world to Buddhahood and worldly happiness in the meantime.”²¹ Furthermore, the virtue of generosity is not just a matter of its aim; the mental state of the giver is central to the moral quality of the action. One must not only aim to benefit others, one must act *from* a spirit of generosity. The motivation of generosity involves the genuine desire to help, non-attachment to what one gives (including resources, time, or talents), and no expectation of reward. Indeed, Śāntideva goes so far as to say that inner state itself is the perfection.²²

The perfection of *śīla* concerns moral discipline, in particular the keeping of certain precepts and vows. As mentioned earlier, the five precepts for lay Buddhists are to refrain from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and intoxication. Early Buddhist and Theravāda monastics further commit to refrain from eating after mid-day, attending entertainment, wearing jewelry or perfume, sleeping on luxurious beds, and handling money. In the Mahāyāna, *śīla* involved training in the ten wholesome actions (*daśakuśala*): abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, slander, derogatory speech, frivolous speech, covetousness, anger, and false views. The first three concern restraint of the body, the next four restraint of speech, and the last three concern restraint of the mind. From the perspective of moral development, training in *śīla* begins with restraint, allowing one to act in accord with virtue; that is, even if one has not yet developed a virtuous character such that one consistently acts from virtue, keeping the precepts allows one to act consistently with the virtues. Moreover, training in the precepts is itself a means to shape or reshape character. As the practitioner develops morally, the emphasis shifts away from restraint and toward embodying and expressing the virtues themselves.

The next perfection, *kṣānti*, is variously translated as “forbearance,” “patience,” or “tolerance,” though none of these terms has quite the same semantic range as *kṣānti*. Broadly speaking, *kṣānti* is resilient composure in the face of adversity. It can take the form of patience concerning the difficulties of the teachings or the path. It can also take the form of meeting suffering or misfortune with equanimity. Finally, and perhaps most important, it takes the form of facing injury caused by others without succumbing to disturbing emotions such as anger, hatred, or despair. For Śāntideva, “there is no evil equal to hatred, and no spiritual practice equal to forbearance.”²³ Like the Stoics, and unlike Aristotle, the traditional Buddhist view is that anger and hatred have no place in the virtuous character. Anger is likened to a poison that is harmful both to others and oneself. Anger and hatred compromise self-control, reinforce entrenched bias, and tend to be individually and collectively self-perpetuating. There is thus no such thing as righteous or virtuous anger. Training in forbearance, therefore, is centrally concerned with overcoming anger and related reactive attitudes.

Śāntideva discusses a number of strategies for overcoming anger. He writes:

6.22 I feel no anger towards bile and the like, even though they cause intense suffering. Why am I angry at the sentient? They too have [causes]²⁴ for their anger.

...

6.25 Whatever transgressions and evil deeds of various kinds there are, all arise through the power of conditioning factors [*saṃskāras*], while there is nothing that arises independently.

...

6.31 In this way everything is dependent on something else. Even that upon which each is dependent is not independent. Since, like a magical display, phenomena do not initiate activity, at what does one get angry like this?

...

6.33 Therefore, even if one sees a friend or an enemy behaving badly, one can reflect that there are specific conditioning factors that determine this, and thereby remain happy.²⁵

Here he recommends shifting one's perspective from the normal interpersonal level to a more impersonal causal-psychological level as a way to defuse the destructive emotion of anger and maintain happiness and compassion in the face of harm inflicted by another. In particular, the change in perspective here seems to mitigate angry reactions by counteracting an attribution error or bias in which one perceives the harm from another as (simply) motivated by ill intent or vicious character. By shifting to an impersonal perspective, one comes to see that personal agency is a multifactor causal-psychological process and that there is no absolute central controller of this process. Moreover, Śāntideva reminds the reader (and himself) that sentient beings interacting within the *saṃsāric* framework are bound by their own conditioning and that this is as true of others as it is of oneself. The intended effect of this perspective shift, it seems, is to defuse anger at the perceived harm by moving from the interpersonal harm-blame perspective to a perspective that emphasizes the many factors that constrain and condition personal agency and the shared plight of sentient beings as bound by the dysfunctional framework of *saṃsāra*. Ultimately, for Śāntideva, this change in point of view can lead to greater compassion, even for those who cause harm.

Śāntideva defines the fourth perfection, vigor (*vīrya*), as "the endeavor to do what is skillful," while its antithesis is "sloth, clinging to what is vile, despondency, and self-contempt."²⁶ Traditionally, the endeavor to do what is skillful involves avoiding or overcoming unskillful states of mind, while developing and sustaining skillful states. In addition, the perfection of *vīrya* requires cultivating desire for the good, perseverance, delight in virtue, and letting go of unskillful states and actions. Perhaps surprisingly for a path based on selfless altruism, Śāntideva also recommends cultivating a sense of pride (*māna*) to counteract despondency and self-contempt.²⁷ The arduous path of the *bodhi-sattva*, then, is to be undertaken with energetic enthusiasm and a healthy sense of pride.

The perfection *dhyāna* (meditation) involves practicing various techniques of attentional, emotional, and motivational self-regulation, as well as cultivating insight. Two

of the most fundamental types of meditation in the Buddhist tradition are *śamatha* (tranquility) and *vipaśyanā* (insight). *Śamatha* practices aim to develop a calm, focused mind, undisturbed by negative emotions and unskillful motivational states. As Śāntideva remarks, “a person whose mind is distracted stands between the fangs of the defilements.”²⁸ Meditations aimed at cultivating positive states, such as loving-kindness, also fall under this category. The calm and focused mind developed through the practice of *śamatha* becomes the basis for the development of insight (*vipaśyanā*). The practice of insight uses mindfulness (*smṛti*) and meta-awareness (*samprajanya*) in the service of analytical meditation, in which one explores Buddhist insights and teachings in one’s own experience. This includes both internalizing the teachings and working to penetrate them and apply them in one’s conduct and thinking.

The four-point mind-training provides an interesting example of perfecting meditation in the service of moral cultivation. Here one meditates on (1) the equality of self and other, (2) the limits of egocentrism or self-cherishing, (3) the benefits of altruism, and (4) the exchange of self and other. This system of cognitive-affective training is designed to arouse and extend the altruistic concern of *bodhicitta*, as well as the moral perception and responsiveness requisite for the path of the *bodhisattva*. On the first point, Śāntideva instructs, “At first one should meditate intently on the equality of self and others as follows: ‘All equally experience suffering and happiness. I should look after them as I do myself.’”²⁹ The point of meditating on the equality of self and other, of course, is not to correct some mere factual or theoretical error. We may *know* that others also want to be happy and don’t want to suffer, that we are but one being among others. The problem of egocentrism addressed here is, at bottom, a failure of *moral perception* (and thus motivation, too). Egocentrism dampens and distorts the moral salience of others’ suffering and happiness, such that—despite what we may know—we are able to ignore the suffering of others and strive for happiness only for ourselves. The task of cultivating *bodhicitta*, then, begins with correcting these distortions of moral perception through our empathic capacities. One can then *perceive* the happiness and suffering of others as morally salient and therefore as something for which we bear some responsibility.

On the second and third points, as quoted in the preceding, Śāntideva claims, “All those who suffer in the world do so because of their desire for their own happiness. All those happy in the world are so because of their desire for the happiness of others.”³⁰ Egotism or self-cherishing involves deep-seated cognitive, affective, and motivational biases, and is implicated with bondage to destructive or unskillful habits and states of mind. These negative states and emotions undermine the well-being of the possessor and have harmful consequences for others. Despite the strong pull of egocentrism as a style of psychological functioning and strategy for achieving stable happiness, it is ultimately self-defeating. Genuine recognition of this fact is supposed to lead to the genuine desire to benefit others and oneself through altruistic action. On the other hand, by shifting one’s concerns to the happiness and suffering of others, one thereby displaces the excessive self-focus that, in turn, propels the oscillation between grasping and aversion that is characteristic of the *samsāric* framework. The developmental path of *bodhisattva* ethics, then, is premised on the possibility of a positive feedback loop between

other-concern, the cultivation of virtue, and enhanced personal well-being, including the reduction of negative emotions.

Having realized both the basic equality and the interdependence of self and other, the harms of egotism, and the benefits of altruism, Śāntideva states, “whoever longs to rescue quickly both himself and others should practice the supreme mystery: the exchange of self and other.”³¹ That is, one is to imagine occupying different interpersonal statuses, such as a “superior” or “inferior” person. One then attempts to imagine and feel what it is like to occupy that position, and how you in your original position might look from this new perspective. Again, one is to deploy one’s empathic imagination and understanding of different points of view to see how the defilements are at play in our interpersonal interactions. The upshot of this training is to develop the insight and cognitive-affective flexibility to perceive the basic equality of self and other, even across social and interpersonal difference; to perceive the emptiness and fluidity of the distinction between self and others; and to respond compassionately and effectively to others.

Finally, the sixth perfection of wisdom (*prajñā*) is often considered the highest of the virtues, personified as the goddess *Prajñāpāramitā*, the mother of enlightenment. It concerns the cultivation and integration of theoretical understanding, experiential insight, and practical wisdom. In addition, wisdom serves to guide and unify the other perfections. The *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* states. “For this perfection of wisdom directs the six perfections, guides, leads, instructs, and advises them, is their genetrix and nurse. Because if they are deprived of the perfection of wisdom, the first five perfections do not come under the concept of perfections, and they do not deserve to be called ‘perfections.’”³²

Concerning theoretical understanding and experiential insight, wisdom is characterized by a penetrating realization of the *dharma*, such as the truths of impermanence and no-self. Further, in the context of the Mahāyāna *bodhisattva* path, the perfection of wisdom is the realization of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). For thinkers of the Madhyamaka school, such as Śāntideva, this means that all phenomena are devoid of *svabhāva*. That is, they lack ontological independence or any absolutely intrinsic nature. The result is a strong anti-substantialism and anti-essentialism, wherein phenomena are seen as thoroughly interdependent. For thinkers of the Yogācāra school, emptiness is understood as the realization that reality (including experience) is, in its deepest nature, devoid of subject-object duality. These are, of course, philosophically rich and highly contested ideas. The important point here is that, for Buddhist thinkers, theoretical understanding and experiential insight are absolutely necessary for the perfection of the moral virtues.

Development in wisdom also includes the cultivation of skillful means (*upāya-kauśalya*). The *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* states, “Wisdom not integrated with skillful means is bondage, but wisdom integrated with skillful means is liberation. Skillful means not integrated with wisdom is bondage, but skillful means integrated with wisdom is liberation.”³³ *Upāya* here is a form of practical wisdom, especially concerning how best to facilitate awakening in others. In the ethical context, *upāya* is a sensitive responsiveness

to the concrete moral situation. It is a form of moral skillfulness that goes beyond the mere application of rules or precepts, and indeed is the aspect of wisdom needed to discern when rules or precepts are permissibly broken.

V. FROM VIRTUE THEORY TO VIRTUE ETHICS

Any philosophical reconstruction of a Buddhist ethic will have to account for the diversity of moral factors and forms of moral reasoning present in Buddhist texts. For instance, motivation and virtue are often given (even almost exclusive) pride of place in some discussions of morality. On the other hand, it is undeniable that appeal to consequences and deontic considerations of rules, precepts, and vows play a role in Buddhist moral discourse. Moreover, it is important to appreciate here the *gradualist* nature of the Buddhist path of moral development. Moral evaluation very often appeals to the agent's stage of moral or spiritual development. For instance, a motivation to cultivate virtue or act virtuously based on enlightened self-interest is not only permissible, but even laudable, at early stages on the path. However, the path itself is thought to transform the practitioner's motives so that, eventually, a more fully altruistic motivation predominates. Further, while heroic impartial altruism and generosity may be incumbent on one who has taken the *bodhisattva* vow to save all beings, it is not incumbent upon a layperson who has not taken that vow. The layperson ought to be altruistic and generous, of course, but acting virtuously in that context will be far less demanding than for a dedicated *bodhisattva*.

As mentioned earlier, virtue ethics and consequentialism are two common ways to reconstruct Buddhist ethics in contemporary terms. This is understandable, given that appeal to the factors of motive and virtue and appeal to the twofold harms or benefits (i.e., for oneself and for others) play prominent roles in Buddhist ethics. We may think of a consequentialist reconstruction of Buddhist ethics as deploying an *outside-in* strategy: that is, one begins with the emphasis on the welfare of all sentient beings and the evaluative salience of consequences, and then works inward to ground the value of motives and virtues in their tendency to produce good consequences. As Charles Goodman puts it, "when we turn to our attention to the Mahāyāna branch of Buddhism . . . the focus on acting effectively to promote the welfare of all beings becomes so central that it is difficult to sustain any interpretation that does not somehow contain a consequentialist test."³⁴ Goodman's own approach is to reconstruct Mahāyāna as a form of virtue consequentialism in which virtues are also included in an account of well-being.

Here I want to take up an *inside-out* strategy and sketch the form of a Buddhist virtue ethics. An inside-out approach begins with an account of the ideal state, awakening, and the virtues that partly constitute it, and then moves outward to a consideration of outcomes. In short, an awakened being is supremely wise and compassionate, and so she will be deeply concerned to "effectively . . . promote the welfare of all beings." The result,

in the case of Mahāyāna, is a virtue ethics of wise universal compassion, rather than a virtue consequentialism. Further, on my view, a virtue ethics need not try to reduce other normative notions to the virtues. Rather, a virtue ethics need only be committed to the virtues (and related notions, such as motives) being non-derivative and of central or primary theoretical and practical importance for ethics.

There are several reasons to understand Buddhist ethics as a virtue ethics in this sense. First, as emphasized throughout this chapter, training in the virtues is central to the path of awakening—Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, for instance, is a manual for training in the six perfections. Second, the perfection of virtue is partly constitutive of awakening itself. An enlightened being has perfected wisdom and great compassion, and her very mode of being is the skillful expression of these virtues. Therefore, the perfections have their fundamental value in the constitutive role they play in awakening, rather than merely in the outcomes they happen to produce.³⁵

Third, *cetanā* (motivation or intention) and virtue are strongly emphasized in the evaluation of actions. Indeed, in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* the Buddha says, "It is volition (*cetanā*), O monks, that I call *kamma*. Having willed, one acts through body, speech or mind!"³⁶ The moral quality of the motive or intention makes a non-derivative contribution to the moral quality of the act. At this point, however, it could be objected that an appeal to consequences also plays a non-derivative role in moral evaluation. As quoted earlier, we find in the Pāli Canon: "When you reflect, if you know: 'This action that I wish to do with the body would lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it is an unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences, with painful results,' then you definitely should not do such an action with the body."³⁷ Moreover, one may again cite the strong emphasis on concern for the welfare of sentient beings expressed in Mahāyāna texts.

In light of this objection, it is worth looking again at the structure of both motivation and virtue in this context. The concept of *cetanā* here is complex, and seems to straddle motivation, intention, volition, and choice. Indeed, as Keown argues,³⁸ *cetanā* has both an affective-motivational component and a cognitive-intentional component. Thus, we can understand *cetanā* as encompassing both that *for* which one acts—the aim or intention—and that *from* which one acts—the motivation. A compassionate act is (at least) done from genuine concern and is aimed at alleviating the suffering of another. Likewise, note that the virtues such as loving-kindness and compassion are defined partly in terms of their target (i.e., genuine concern for the happiness or suffering of others). The virtues here are target-oriented—that is, the virtue will be (at least partly) defined in terms of its aim.³⁹ Thus whether and how well an action hits the target of the relevant virtue will be a centrally important evaluative factor. When it comes to other-regarding virtues, then, consequences matter, but that does not commit one to consequentialism. Indeed, recall Śāntideva's insistence that the inner attitude is paramount. An ideal action, on this account, will proceed from a good motive, hit the target of the relevant virtue, be properly guided by wisdom, and constrained by the precepts. Thus, any of these dimensions are potentially salient evaluative factors.

The fourth reason to prefer a virtue ethical over a consequentialist reconstruction is that there appear to be ineliminable aretaic constraints on the promotion of welfare. A distinctive feature of Mahāyāna sources is the appeal to skillful means (*upāya-kauśalya*) to justify certain violations of the precepts. For example, Śāntideva writes, “one should always be striving for others’ well-being. Even what is proscribed is permitted for a compassionate person who sees it will be of benefit.”⁴⁰ So benefit to others can sometimes justify breaking a precept. In commenting on this verse, Prajñākaramati writes,

But the foregoing [exemption] does not apply to everyone: only to cases of the exercise of compassion to its highest degree by one who is of a compassionate nature, who is without selfish motive, solely concerned with the interests of others and totally dedicated to this [ideal]. In this way there is no offence for one who is skilled in means (*upāya-kusala*) and who works for the interests of others with wisdom (*prajñā*) and compassion (*karuṇa*).⁴¹

Note here that an appeal to consequences can justify breaking a precept only when the agent has pure motives and highly developed virtue. Consequences matter, but they do not matter independently of motives and virtues. So, on my reconstruction, the *bodhi-sattva* should “always strive for other’s well-being” not because she is a consequentialist, but because that is target of the perfection (virtue) of compassion. And her promotion of that good will always be an expression of, and therefore constrained by, her wisdom, moral virtue, and skillfulness.⁴²

Much more needs to be said, of course, to properly develop and defend the virtue ethical reconstruction sketched here. What I think can be said with confidence, however, is that the Buddhist tradition offers rich resources for thinking about the human predicament and the nature, structure, and development of the virtues. It also offers a complex and subtle moral psychology, embedded within a dynamic and anti-substantialist account of both human persons and the world. Cross-traditional and interdisciplinary dialogue with the Buddhist tradition on these topics is in its early stages, but it is ripe for further exploration.

NOTES

1. This work was supported in part by the endowment fund of the Colorado State University Department of Philosophy.
2. The relationship between happiness (particularly worldly happiness) and awakening is complex and the tradition is not univocal on the matter.
3. B. Ñānamoli and B. Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 524–525.
4. M. Dambrun and M. Ricard, “Self-Centeredness and Selflessness: A Theory of Self-Based Psychological Functioning and Its Consequences for Happiness,” *Review of General Psychology* 15(2) (2011): 138–157.

5. Ibid., 139.
6. K. Crosby and A. Skilton, *The Bodhicaryāvatāra* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 99.
7. D. Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992).
8. B. Clayton, *Moral Theory in Śāntideva's Sikṣāsamuccaya: Cultivating the Fruits of Virtue*; Goodman, *Consequences of Compassion: An Interpretation and Defense of Buddhist Ethics*; Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy: Empty Persons* (London: Routledge, 2006).
9. W. Edelglass, "Moral Pluralism, Skillful Means, and Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Philosophy* 3(2) (2006): 8–16.
10. J. Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism: Why It Matters to Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).
11. C. Goodman and S. Thakchoe, "The Many Voices of Buddhist Ethics," in *Moonpaths: Ethics and Emptiness*, edited by The Cowherds (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 7–20.
12. These presuppositions are widely, but not universally, shared in the current literature on Buddhist ethics. They are consistent with the views of Clayton, Garfield, Goodman, and Keown, for instance.
13. Crosby and Skilton, *The Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 7.
14. Dambrun and Ricard, "Self-Centeredness and Selflessness."
15. Ibid., 146.
16. Crosby and Skilton, *The Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 96.
17. Ibid., 7.
18. Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism*, 299.
19. The "in order to" here should not be read merely instrumentally. One's own awakening is a constitutive part of the goal.
20. Crosby and Skilton, *The Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 7.
21. Ibid., 22.
22. Ibid., 34.
23. Ibid., 50.
24. Crosby and Skilton translate the term *pratyaya* here as "reasons" rather than the more standard "causes" or "conditions." I agree with Goodman, *Consequences of Compassion: An Interpretation and Defense of Buddhist Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) that this is a misleading translation in the context.
25. Crosby and Skilton, *The Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 52–53.
26. Ibid., 67.
27. Ibid., 71.
28. Ibid., 88.
29. Ibid., 96.
30. Ibid., 99.
31. Ibid., 120.
32. Ibid., 120.
33. Wright, *The Six Perfections: Buddhism and the Cultivation of Character* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 218.
34. Goodman, "Virtue in Buddhist Ethical Traditions," in *The Routledge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, edited by L. Besser-Jones and M. Slote (New York: Routledge, 2015), 93.
35. Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism*, 301.

36. Recall that “karma” here refers to the reliable connection between the moral quality of an act and its appropriate consequence for the agent. Hence, in declaring *cetanā* to be karma, the Buddha is effectively declaring motivation or intention to be the primary determinant of an act’s moral quality; B. Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Complete Translation of the Āṅguttara Nikāya* (Sommerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2012).
37. B. Ñānamoli and B. Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 524–525.
38. Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, 218.
39. This should not be taken as an endorsement of Swanton’s full account of virtue and right action. The point here is simply that the Buddhist virtues have a target-facing aspect. On my interpretation of the Buddhist virtues, both motive and target play a role in determining the moral quality of an action. Here I think I am in agreement with Pettigrove, “Is Virtue Ethics Self-Effacing?” In terms of Swanton’s approach, we might say that the primary Buddhist virtues have both an outer target and an inner target (the proper motive or attitude); Pettigrove, “Is Virtue Ethics Self-Effacing?” *The Journal of Ethics* 15(3) (2011): 191–207; Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
40. Crosby and Skilton, *The Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 41; it is interesting to note that in the previous verse, he writes, “Each of the perfections, beginning with generosity, is more excellent than its predecessor. One should not neglect a higher one for the sake of a lower one, unless because of a fixed rule of conduct” (41).
41. Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, 84.
42. This is in contrast to a classical utilitarian view on which, if it turned out that acting from a motive other than universal compassion better promoted the good, then one should act from that other motive. Likewise, it seems that, for the character consequentialist, one ought to act viciously if, even taking into account the harm to one’s character, doing so better promoted the good overall. I find no compelling evidence in the tradition of these kinds of trade-offs at the level of virtue.

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CHAPTER 8

CONFUCIANISM AND NEO-CONFUCIANISM

JUSTIN TIWALD

I. INTRODUCTION

LIKE most philosophical traditions that have thrived for millennia, Confucianism has many historical manifestations and schools of thought, but it is useful in a brief overview to identify some core features, or at least those features that are closer to the core than others. Probably what most unites the wide array of Confucian thinkers is a set of ethical doctrines and commitments, the heart of which is directly concerned with virtue. Most Confucians maintain that ideal moral agents must necessarily have certain virtues, especially benevolence (sometimes translated as “humaneness”), righteousness, ritual propriety, and wisdom. They also share a commitment to what scholars sometimes call “graded love” or “partial care,” which holds, roughly, that one has stronger fundamental moral obligations to certain people by virtue of one’s relationship to them, above all to one’s own family members. Prior to the twentieth century, Confucian thinkers insisted that people practice and even institutionalize certain rituals and social protocols thought to have come from the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BCE), which emphasize expressions of respect, appreciation, and gratitude, particularly to parents and ancestors more generally.

Of these core features, philosophical theories about the nature, content, and cultivation of the virtues are the most central. Some pre-twentieth-century Confucian thinkers have taken issue with one or more of the previously noted shared commitments, but nearly all have taken virtue as one of the chief objects of deliberation and dispute. Furthermore, all aspired to defend or contribute to a systematic view about the virtues, where the success of a systematic view was determined by whether it actually worked and, in most but perhaps not all cases, whether it was true.¹ Insofar as some Confucians have embraced a religious vision, that vision has remained subordinate, in a crucial sense, to theories of virtue. For example, some of the most influential Confucian philosophers steadfastly refused to offer a party line on the afterlife, arguing that it was too speculative and beside

the point, as it is not any particular connection to life after death that makes virtue worth pursuing.² While most Confucians have recommended sacrificing to one's ancestors, many Confucian thinkers—including Confucius (Kongzi) himself—have discouraged speculation about the exact nature and function of the ancestral spirits to which one sacrifices,³ and some major thinkers seem to have denied that such spirits even exist.⁴ In the canonical works on Confucian rituals, such as the *Rites* (*Liji*), the focus is on the ways in which they shape social relationships and individual character, and not on the mechanics of the spirit world. Ethical philosophy came first in these respects.

My aim in this chapter is twofold: first, to introduce some of the most notable Confucian ideas about the ethics of virtue to a larger audience; second, to develop a certain Confucian understanding of the nature of virtue itself, one that takes what I am calling “wholeheartedness” to be a necessary constituent. The rest of this chapter will be divided into three sections. In the first section I argue for treating major Confucian ethical theories as variants of virtue ethics in the respects that matter most. In the second I give short descriptions of the main Confucian virtues, with a special focus on the claim (which became popular in the tenth century) that all other virtues are subordinate to or unified by humaneness (*ren*). In the final section I explicate and defend my claim that wholeheartedness is a necessary feature of full virtue as the major Confucians construe it.

A quick note about the different historical iterations of Confucianism: Confucian thought has taken many shapes as it has responded and adapted to shifts in the cultural and intellectual landscape. One of the most notable shifts arose after Buddhism became a major religious and philosophical force in China, a process that began in the fourth century CE and reached a crescendo by the eleventh century, at which point several leading Confucian philosophers helped reshape Confucianism so that it could compete more favorably with Buddhism, in part by developing a more robust metaphysics and embracing more radical views on the dangers of human desire. Since this break is more pronounced and historically significant than most others, it will be useful to set apart the Confucians after this shift. I will follow a widely used convention in referring to the founding figures of Confucianism as “classical Confucians” and the group that began in the eleventh century as “Neo-Confucians.” The classical Confucians are better known outside of East Asia, especially Kongzi (Confucius, 551–479 BCE) and Mengzi (Mencius, 372–289 BCE), who came to be regarded as the most authoritative spokespeople for the tradition. But the Neo-Confucians are as worthy of consideration as the classical ones, not least because their opposition to Buddhism drove them to think more explicitly about the place of moral virtue in a coherent theory of ethics, and because their influence is felt just as strongly, if not more so, in Confucian philosophy today.

II. CONFUCIAN ETHICS AS VIRTUE ETHICS

Confucianism has a concept of virtue, and Confucians consider virtues a necessary indicator (usually the definitive one) of positive moral quality. The moral paragons of

Confucianism are the gentleman (*junzi* 君子, also translated as “superior person”) and the sage (*sheng* 聖). Someone with significant moral deficiencies, or whose virtues are largely undeveloped, is a petty person (*xiaoren* 小人). One classification that marks out people of intermediate moral quality is the *shi* 士, a term that ordinarily refers to someone who belongs to a prestigious service class, such as important members of the military or, by the heyday of classical Confucianism, scholar-officials. What makes someone a gentleman or a sage is the possession of certain attributes, each of which is a core feature of virtue. These include the ability and tendency to care about others and to promote their interests (humaneness or benevolence), to avoid shameful or undignified behavior even when most would consider it difficult to do so (righteousness), to perform role-specific social protocols with skill and respect (ritual propriety), and to understand such attributes so well that one can know when they are appropriate and identify them in others (wisdom). Furthermore, these attributes are character traits. The virtuous abilities and tendencies should be firm enough to endure across a wide range of conditions and circumstances, even when these would normally tempt people to behave viciously.⁵ According to Mengzi, when ordinary people are given a “constant livelihood” they will typically behave well, but when deprived of it they will become selfish and dissolute. What distinguishes the *shi* (the person of intermediate moral quality) from ordinary people is that the former has a “constant heart,” such that he can be expected to behave virtuously, even when deprived of a constant livelihood.⁶ The Confucians are agreed that acquiring virtues usually requires long and arduous work aimed at shaping, refining, and uncovering feelings, desires, habits of thought, automatic reactions, and powers of discernment.

Virtue ethics admits of different interpretations, three of which stand out as most relevant for the comparative study of Confucian and Western moral thought. A narrow interpretation, which emphasizes what we might call explanatory priority, says that a theory of normative ethics counts as a kind of virtue ethics if it sees character or agents as being a more central or fundamental notion than right action, or understands assessments of character or agents as being conceptually or logically prior to assessments of actions. Very roughly, this is the interpretation we tend to attribute to someone when she says that, as a virtue ethicist, she believes a certain course of action is right on account of the fact that it’s benevolent or what a sage would do, rather than the other way around. Sometimes it’s assumed that for virtue ethicists right action is always derived from virtue or agents, but in practice I think it’s useful to construe virtue ethics more permissively. Variants of virtue ethics include hybrid views that normally give priority to virtues but allow that certain acts (e.g., catastrophic political decisions) are wrong on their own merits or by virtue of their consequences.⁷ Furthermore, since many philosophers prefer holistic to strict deductive structures, there should be allowances for those who simply want to give aretaic notions more explanatory power or theoretical weight than do consequentialists and deontologists.⁸ Even if these other variants aren’t as pure, they may nevertheless be more plausible and promising than strict consequentialism or deontology, and more philosophically fruitful as well.

Two other interpretations of virtue ethics are broader, in part because they're better characterized as *approaches* to moral philosophy than as ethical *theories* in their own right. One interpretation says that someone's approach is virtue ethical if virtue is the primary subject or focus of her philosophizing. Another of the broader interpretations is defined not by its focus, but by what sorts of philosophical investigation it prioritizes. Virtue ethicists of this type say that the virtues, the nature of virtue itself, and the cultivation of virtue are the more pressing objects of philosophical inquiry than the principles of right action. One can imagine a variety of reasons for thinking that virtue should come before right action. We could say that philosophy sheds little light on right action without more careful reflection on the nature of the virtues that the actions might express, or that hard questions about right action are better solved by acquiring virtues that enable us to discern them more clearly (perhaps only wise and benevolent moral agents can know with confidence whether to switch the tracks on the runaway trolley). Or we could say that philosophers, as lovers of wisdom seeking to live good lives, can expect that specifying the principles of right action will have little effect on their motivation to be wise and good, whereas clarifying the nature of the virtues and their inner workings better positions us to develop traits that actually make us wise and good. I will argue that the most influential Confucian philosophers clearly qualify on the two broader interpretations, and that at the very least the dominant line of Confucian thinkers (Mengzi and the Neo-Confucians who follow Mengzi) also qualify on the narrower interpretation, although not quite as clearly due to ambiguities in both the dominant line and the comparison class in Western ethics.

At the beginning of this section I argued that Confucians conceive of attributes like benevolence and wisdom as virtues. If that's so, then it should be uncontroversial that Confucians are virtue ethicists in the two broader senses—that is, that they see virtue as both the primary focus of their moral philosophy and as having greater investigative priority than right action. This is clearest in the case of classical Confucianism. The two most influential classical Confucian texts are the *Analects* and the *Mengzi*. The largest share of these two texts is presented as the recorded sayings and dialogues of Confucian masters, and among those a clear majority are concerned with specific virtues, exemplary moral agents, or with the means and methods by which virtues are acquired.⁹ Even the political recommendations they make are frequently described in terms of virtues or virtuous agents. And the passages that don't fall so squarely into any of the preceding categories often appear to be included because of their implications for virtue and the cultivation of virtues. For example, a string of famous passages recounts Mengzi's arguments for the goodness of human nature, which seems to matter because it establishes that we have incipient virtues that need to be developed in ways that work with, rather than against, the grain of our nature.¹⁰ The third of the great classical Confucian philosophers is Xunzi, who deals with a wider array of philosophical issues, including fundamental questions about knowledge and language.¹¹ Several chapters are also devoted to governance. But here again, the majority of the chapters are focused on virtue and the cultivation of virtues, and even in other chapters Xunzi rarely loses sight of the implications for the virtues. The Neo-Confucians took a greater interest in metaphysics than

their classical forebears, but the most widely read primer on Neo-Confucian thought, *Reflections on Things at Hand*, was concerned above all with the nature, psychology, and cultivation of virtue, and Zhu Xi, one of its two editors, insisted that all of it was concerned with self-improvement, suggesting that the philosophical payoff lay in its implications for the cultivation of virtue.¹²

Another reason to think that the Confucians saw virtue as the higher investigative priority than right action is that many of them rejected attempts to specify principles that could be used to justify or guide behavior in all contexts and circumstances. Mengzi spurned the project of capturing ethics in the form of action-guiding doctrines, which was associated in his time with the Mohists.¹³ Both Mengzi and later Neo-Confucians instead emphasized ways of discerning the correct course of action through faculties more akin to perception, which could identify the right course of action more immediately or intuitively, and provide at best context-dependent reasons to justify them.¹⁴ On their view, we acquire these powers of moral discernment by cultivating virtues and, in some but not all cases, through higher-order reflection on those virtues.

The proposal that Confucian ethics is a form of virtue ethics on the narrow interpretation is more controversial. For the most part, Confucians had little interest in developing a pure normative theory that derives right action from good character or vice-versa. But it is not clear how much of philosophical significance rides on this fact. Most virtue ethicists who lived before the twentieth century had little interest in developing such a theory, and few of the paradigmatic virtue ethical thinkers would meet this high bar, least of all Aristotle or Aquinas.¹⁵ It is more useful to see which notions they gave the most theoretical weight or explanatory power, and whether their bearing on the shape of moral character was closely linked with promoting right action. As both Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden argue, the Confucians tend to give shape to their theories of virtue by appealing to the nature of human beings, ideals of human flourishing, and accounts of ideal moral agents, all of these being characteristic ways of justifying or explaining a theory of virtues for Aristotle and later Aristotelians.¹⁶ Major Confucians like Mengzi and Zhu Xi regularly appeal to accounts of our nature, and theories about the greater and lesser parts of our nature, to show which character traits are worth cultivating, without presupposing a clear theory or vision of which actions count as right or wrong. This should be enough to show a family resemblance to the virtue ethicists that have greatly enriched moral philosophy, certainly a closer resemblance than to consequentialists or deontologists.

Probably the most loudly proclaimed objection to the virtue ethical reading of Confucianism comes from Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont, who argue that Aristotelian and other virtue ethical theories are “grounded in fundamentally different conceptions of what it means to become a person.”¹⁷ On their view, becoming a person consists solely in performing one’s roles well—for example, in being a good parent, child, colleague, friend, or sibling. Becoming a person is necessary for positive moral quality; someone who is the “consummate person” is necessarily of great ethical worth. But these claims are too strong. At times Confucians suggest that people are distinguished from non-human animals by the fact that they have roles defined by

special human relationships, but this is a way of distinguishing kinds, not a regulative ideal by which to measure all ethical worth.¹⁸ To explain the difference between ordinary people and sages, Confucians routinely appeal to the lack of virtue in the former and the presence of virtue in the latter. Furthermore, there isn't convincing evidence that the Confucians frame positive moral qualities simply in terms of playing roles well. The virtues have certain characteristics that cut across roles, thus enabling them to compare, for example, the relative trustworthiness of parents and the relative trustworthiness of rulers. It is difficult to see where the standards for playing a role well would come from, if not from these virtues or some other role-independent value.¹⁹ Finally, even if the Confucian conception of the person were entirely role-based, it could still be compatible with virtue ethical theories or approaches.²⁰ If we take virtue ethics in the narrower sense described here, it is enough that good character is derived from notions other than right action, notions like flourishing, nature, and a well-rounded conception of ideal agents.

A more carefully formulated objection to the virtue ethical reading comes from Manyul Im. Im limits his interpretation to the *Mengzi*, but his article offers an instructive example of the kind of argument that could cast doubt on virtue ethical readings of a variety of Confucian thinkers. Im notes that while Mengzi often decries the practice of seeking to "maximize net benefit" under that description, on multiple occasions he justifies this prohibition on the grounds that righteous motives are more likely to bring greater benefits indirectly.²¹ But this, Im proposes, is only to suggest that Mengzi is an objective consequentialist, according to which maximizing benefits provides an objective criterion of rightness but does not motivate the moral agent or provide her with a decision procedure for action. Furthermore, Mengzi often depicts virtuous people as those who attend to the welfare of others, as benevolent rulers attend to the well-being of their subjects.²² This argument is helpful but understates the theoretical resources available to virtue ethics. Most virtue ethicists think that virtuous people attend to the welfare of others, but this isn't to say that being conducive to the welfare of others is sufficient to show that a character-trait is virtuous—usually it needs to be motivated in the right way, accompanied by the right judgments and attitudes, and balanced against competing virtues, some of which may not be concerned with maximizing welfare. This is surely true of Mengzi, who like most Confucian thinkers insists that the virtues should have a certain psychological structure, and recognizes that some virtues require that we do not maximize welfare. For instance, Mengzi describes the sage-king Shun as someone who would sooner abdicate the monarchy than be compelled to execute his own father for murder, for the sake of preserving his own filial piety but, no doubt, much to the detriment of his subjects.²³ This is characteristic of the Confucians, who, in defense of partial care, insist that we should give the interests and demands of our own family members greater fundamental weight than the interests and demands of others, a doctrine that is more easily explained as part of the inherent structure of specific virtues (like humaneness) than as a commitment to consequentialist assumptions or premises.

III. THE CONFUCIAN VIRTUES

The text of the *Mengzi* treats four sorts of character trait as the chief or cardinal virtues: benevolence or humaneness (*ren* 仁), righteousness (*yi* 義), ritual propriety (*li* 禮), and wisdom (*zhi* 智). Centuries later, Neo-Confucians added a fifth virtue to this list: faithfulness or reliability (*xin* 信), which they also saw as a necessary constituent of all virtues. There were others that played major roles in shaping classical Confucian and Neo-Confucian ethics, including courage (*yong* 勇) and dutifulness (*zhong* 忠). The Confucians are particularly famous for promoting and forcefully defending filial piety (*xiao* 孝), which they saw as both a means of cultivating and a constituent of benevolence or humaneness.²⁴ In this short section, however, we will focus on the aforementioned four cardinal virtues, concluding with benevolence or humaneness, which is in many ways the most complicated and contested of the virtues.

Minimally, righteousness is the virtue of doing what's right. The Chinese character that refers to righteousness as a virtue (*yi*) can also refer to standards of right action, and a person can be called righteous simply for meeting those standards. But for most Confucians the virtue is most pronounced when doing what is right is difficult, as when it runs against one's self-interest (e.g., refusing a big bribe that is offered without risk of discovery) or comes at the expense of public ridicule (e.g., criticizing a ruler's policy or defending an unpopular public figure). Most Confucians also think that righteousness has certain characteristic motives, although there isn't perfect agreement about all of them. With only a handful of exceptions, both classical Confucians and Neo-Confucians tend to assume that righteous acts can't be selfishly motivated, even though it is often in our interest to behave righteously. Mengzi's account offers a richer psychological analysis. He suggests that righteousness is usually motivated by a "sense of shame," by which he seems to mean an awareness of what sort of behavior one would find shameful, and the potential to feel shame or disdain if one were to act in such a manner.²⁵ As Van Norden shows in his careful exegetical work on righteousness in the *Mengzi*, this pertains to actions that would degrade or demean one's character, most often by violating a prohibition, such as accepting food given with contempt or accepting a bribe.²⁶ The Neo-Confucians add an intriguing dimension to Mengzi's account, stressing that righteousness is also a quality of one's judgments about what actions to take (or not to take). One is righteous when one judges what to do based on standards of right and wrong, and does not hesitate or have second thoughts.²⁷ I take this to be an outgrowth of the original sense of righteousness as doing what's right without selfish inclinations, but applied to judgments rather than motives.²⁸ It is somewhat in tension with Mengzi's account because this quality can apply to ethical judgments of any kind, including judgments about what's ritually proper or an appropriate occasion to act benevolently.²⁹

At its most basic, ritual propriety (*li*) is the successful performance of traditional ceremonies and social protocols (e.g., funerals, bowing to elders, serving food to one's parents before eating), but done with a sense of respect and deference.³⁰ On solemn

occasions it requires attentiveness or presence of mind.³¹ The Neo-Confucians generally agree with this analysis, focusing in particular on a certain attitude and attentiveness called *jing* 敬 (“reverential attention”), the acquisition of which can lead to more objective perception and judgment in all areas of life.³²

For both the classical Confucians and the Neo-Confucians, the core ethical sense of “wisdom” is knowledge of other virtues, including both the psychology of the virtues and what would or would not count as an instantiation of a particular virtue.³³ The *Analects* suggests that we use wisdom to assess the moral character of others, thus making it indispensable for good governance, insofar as it is needed to appoint worthy people to administrative positions.³⁴ Kongzi often notes the failure of the unwise to look past a person’s contrived mannerisms and speech, mistaking people who are eloquent about virtue for people of good character.³⁵ Character is better assessed by discovering what motivates people, which we can discern, for example, by looking at what they care about when at leisure or when their guard is down.³⁶ A second sense of “wisdom” is the ability to identify the right means to certain ends, especially where knowledge of means requires an understanding of human psychology.³⁷ Ministers and other political officials exhibit wisdom when they are able to judge when best to speak up or when to resign in protest.³⁸

One of the most vexed issues in Confucian exegesis is how best to understand the virtue *ren* 仁, which is most often translated as “benevolence,” “humaneness,” or “humanity.” The problem is that the character seems to have at least two distinct senses: in the *Analects* it can be used to describe the master virtue, possession of which is sufficient to make one a gentleman. When Kongzi uses the term in this sense, he sometimes says that it should be closely linked with being ritually proper in everything one does, suggesting that proper observance of the rituals is the sole constituent of *ren*, or the chief means by which *ren* behaviors and states of mind are brought about, or perhaps both.³⁹ But occasionally the *Analects* uses *ren* to refer to a narrower set of aptitudes and dispositions that reliably produce love, care, and benevolent behavior toward others.⁴⁰ In the *Analects*, having *ren* as the master virtue appears to require, necessarily, that one have other major virtues such as courage or trustworthiness, but the relationship isn’t symmetrical in that one can have these other virtues without having *ren*.⁴¹ In the *Mengzi* it seems to be used exclusively in the narrower sense, as it appears to be just one virtue alongside the other three and normally is motivated by love, care, or compassion.⁴²

As the Neo-Confucians insist that Kongzi and Mengzi adopted compatible ethical views, it is left to them to find some way of reconciling the two senses of the term. Many mainstream Neo-Confucians attempt this by embracing an ambitious metaphysics of self and world, according to which all things share certain inherent tendencies toward life, growth, and reproduction that warrant the belief or understanding that we are or can form “one body” with everything else.⁴³ *Ren* in what I’ll call this more cosmological sense consists in recognizing and embracing this connection to others. This is contrasted with more self-centered ways of thinking, in which we regard ourselves as separate and more important. *Ren* in the cosmological sense is both a requirement for other virtues and an apt description of complete virtue: we cannot be righteous, ritually

proper, or wise when regarding ourselves self-centeredly, and the total effect of having all of the other virtues is to participate in the orderly life-generating processes of the whole.⁴⁴ But there is a narrower sense of *ren* in which a particular kind of sensitivity to the whole, love, compassion, or care (*ai* 愛) is more appropriate than, say, respect or a sense of shame.⁴⁵ This is perhaps the most direct expression of our special connection to others, so it is appropriate to call it *ren* as well, but it can be instantiated to greater or lesser degrees depending on the domain of action or experience one is in.

IV. WHOLEHEARTEDNESS

i. The Primary Conceptions of Wholeheartedness

In this section I will propose and then explicate what I take to be a criterion of full virtue that is shared by nearly all Confucian philosophers, which I call wholeheartedness. Roughly and preliminarily, wholeheartedness is the quality of being fully committed to a certain state of affairs or course of action, such that one experiences no internal resistance to preserving it or bringing it about. We find a somewhat similar criterion in Aristotle, who suggests that the difference between full virtue and mere continence (*enkrateia*) is that the fully virtuous person has no passions contrary to reason.⁴⁶ For the Confucians, however, there is considerably more reflection and argument about the wholeheartedness of virtue, and while almost all of them agree that this is a desirable ideal in some form or another, many spell it out in different ways. I will review some of the different conceptions of wholeheartedness and then conclude by highlighting some of the most important implications of treating wholeheartedness as a criterion for full virtue, most of which have yet to be developed or explored at length in contemporary moral philosophy.

I begin with a brief overview of the historical development of the wholeheartedness criterion, starting with Kongzi. A pervading theme in the *Analects* is Kongzi's joy in learning, practicing, and then teaching the Way. On one plausible reading, Kongzi is taken to suggest that once one has mastered the Way (that is, understands it and practices it flawlessly), one will be so ebullient that one cannot help but want to teach it to others.⁴⁷ Kongzi also suggests that loving the Way is necessary, but presents joy as a greater achievement than love, possibly because one can love something (or someone) while still having some inner reluctance or resistance, whereas joy indicates a more complete and comprehensive psychological investment in it.⁴⁸ The *Analects* also hints that a fully virtuous person would find virtuous activity effortless in some sense not fully specified, possibly connecting it to what became the popular ideal of *wuwei*, variously translated as non-action or effortless action.⁴⁹

In the *Mengzi*, joy works at multiple stages of one's moral development, including at the very earliest stages, in which one reflects on one's nascent virtues evident, for example, in one's natural sympathy or compassion for living creatures.⁵⁰ But in these early

stages the joy is largely confined to paradigm cases or scenarios in which one has reliably virtuous inclinations. Moral paragons, in contrast, take joy in every instance of humanness or righteousness. Mengzi appears to value joy in part because it helps to make the virtues automatic, almost somatic dispositions, comparing the paragon's practice and appreciation of virtue to the way that one's hands and feet almost involuntarily clap and tap in time with music.⁵¹

Although later Confucians generally took Kongzi and Mengzi to share the same views or assumptions, there may be some tensions between their views on the importance of knowledge and understanding in wholehearted joy. The *Analects* appears to suggest that the joy comes in part from understanding how and why the Way is successful at instantiating personal value and social accord, and perhaps the fundamental basis or grounds on which the Way is justified.⁵² On Mengzi's view, joy appears to be more readily available, and can be found in our sudden and spontaneous natural moral reactions. Of course, it might be that Mengzi would characterize this more spontaneous, natural moral joy as incomplete (not wholehearted in some sense). Still, for Kongzi knowledge and understanding of the Way are clearly major requirements for sagely wholeheartedness, while for Mengzi there is less evidence that this is the case. As mentioned, the *Analects* suggests that a fully virtuous person cannot help but want to impart knowledge of the Way to others, thus linking sagehood with the desire to teach. When Mengzi explains why he teaches, he tends to focus on the need to disabuse people of the pernicious philosophical views that had become popular in his time, implying that he would be less inclined if he had lived in more sensible times.⁵³

The Neo-Confucians make wholeheartedness a more explicit object of discussion and reflection. It frequently comes up in the context of their analysis of *cheng* 誠, variously translated as "genuineness," "integrity," or, as I will do here, "sincerity." For most Neo-Confucians, sincerity requires that one have a certain connection with heaven and earth, usually understood as forming a complete whole with the cosmos and its inhabitants, and borrowing some of its limitless capacity for continuity and rebirth.⁵⁴ However, at least for the most influential Neo-Confucians like Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi, forming a whole with the greater order is not part of the core meaning of the term, but rather a necessary condition or necessary feature of sincerity in the more basic sense of being true to one's nature or innermost feelings.⁵⁵ Zhu and another influential Neo-Confucian Wang Yangming point to three indicators of sincerity (*cheng*), all of which closely track wholeheartedness: lack of self-deception, a sense of contentment with oneself, and having a close match between one's thoughts and one's actual feelings (similar to the close match between thinking an odor is repugnant and it actually smelling repugnant, or thinking a sight is beautiful and being drawn or attracted to it).⁵⁶

Two points in particular are worth highlighting in these Neo-Confucian accounts of sincerity. First, it is the very fact that sincerity is wholehearted that makes the difference between partial and complete virtue. Zhu Xi implies that sincerity distinguishes sagely virtue from something he characterizes merely as good character or moral worth. For sages, virtuous behavior comes naturally and easily, whereas for people of mere moral worth, it requires effort of a kind that indicates internal division.⁵⁷ A second

point has to do with the possibility of sincerity in vice or vicious behavior. Most Neo-Confucians speak as though one can't achieve sincerity without being fully virtuous, and either assert or presuppose that there is no such thing as being sincerely bad, inhumane, unrighteous, and so on. This is probably because they thought that there is an ineradicable goodness in our nature, so that parts of our selves will have to be denied or ignored in behaving or thinking viciously, requiring "self-deception" (*ziqui* 自欺).⁵⁸

ii. Implications of the Wholeheartedness Criterion

If we take seriously that wholeheartedness is a necessary feature of full virtue, as many Confucians have, this will have significant implications for ethics more generally. For one thing, it suggests that human nature should have a relatively strong role in shaping our ethical theories. Most people would agree that human nature sets limits to the type of moral demands that we can legitimately make of people. For example, we can't require that people perform feats of strength or skill that are beyond our natural capacities, or (probably) that innocent people refrain from confessing false crimes under torture. If we want an ethical theory whose requirements are compatible with wholeheartedness, however, then human nature would set greater limitations on those demands. For instance, on some consequentialist theories we might be required to take vital organs from one healthy person in order to save others, or to push someone in front of a runaway trolley in order to prevent it from killing others. Perhaps we could bring ourselves to do such things if strongly compelled, but we couldn't do such things wholeheartedly. It would come at the cost of great inner turmoil and regret. The wholeheartedness criterion tethers an ethical theory to human nature in a stronger way than most theories.

Several Confucian philosophers make this tethering explicit. Mengzi objected to moral theories that were formulated as "doctrines" (*yan* 言) with no grounding in human nature, by which he seems to mean moral theories that we arrive at by modes of justification that take no account of people's natural dispositions and courses of development. One way of justifying this criticism is to say that such doctrines cannot be embraced completely and practiced wholeheartedly. Mengzi makes an example of a Mohist who, despite his theoretical commitment to impartial care and frugality, can't help but give his parents the expensive funeral that decent children were generally expected to provide.⁵⁹ Making the argument more explicitly, Zhu Xi says that the Buddhist requirement that one "leave the family" to shed one's worldly attachments is too demanding because one can't do this with sincerity (*cheng*). Even the most committed Buddhists have some part of themselves that cares about those with whom they share their lives, a part that cannot be uprooted.⁶⁰

A related point has to do with the age-old debate in Chinese philosophy about the goodness or badness of human nature. Mengzi famously argued that human nature is good. Neo-Confucians came to treat Mengzi's view as orthodoxy and pronounced Xunzi, the classical Confucian who argued at length that human nature was bad, an outlier to the tradition. Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi both objected to Xunzi in part because they

thought his view of human nature ruled out the possibility that one could be both a moral paragon and sincere (*cheng*) about one's moral practices.⁶¹

A third implication has to do with the intentional states of mind that moral agents should have. For some purposes it's useful to distinguish between what we *believe* about things and how things *seem* to us. For example, when the moon is low on the horizon it seems larger and closer to the earth, yet nowadays most people know and believe this to be an optical illusion of sorts. Similarly, many people believe commercial air travel to be safer than driving, but except for the most regular fliers it rarely seems that way.⁶² For wholeheartedness it helps not just to have the right beliefs but the right "seemings" as well. One shouldn't just believe that one's elders warrant respectful treatment, they should also seem worthy of respect. The Confucians are particularly interested in ways in which practicing rituals can alter the way things seem to us. Mengzi talks about using ritual and music to adorn or beautify benevolent and righteous behavior.⁶³ Xunzi, a sophisticated ritual theorist, is attentive to the forms, images, and metaphorical "size" that ritual protocols and ceremonies give to things.⁶⁴ He recommends longer mourning periods for parents and rulers so as to make vivid the importance of their contributions to our lives.⁶⁵ For ceremonies meant to honor one's ancestors, he strongly embraces the practice of pretending that spirits are present to receive one's sacrifices, even of having someone impersonate the deceased, because experiencing the likeness of the deceased makes for fuller and more authentic feelings of sorrow and respect.⁶⁶

Finally, making wholeheartedness a criterion for good moral behavior has implications for what we might call the spontaneity or automaticity of virtuous thinking. Neo-Confucians tend to believe that we have a natural inclination to rationalize immoral behaviors, most often in circumstances where our own immediate interests are at stake. Rationalization creates inner division and doubts about doing the right thing, which in turn makes wholeheartedness very difficult to achieve. For this reason we might conclude, as many Neo-Confucians do, that we are better served by cognitive capacities that allow us to make good moral decisions automatically, without creating an opening for second thoughts. Or at least these better serve us when the right course of action is relatively obvious.⁶⁷ (There is room for deliberation where one recognizes that a case is particularly complex, and in cooler, less urgent decision contexts, as when reflecting on one's long-term goals.⁶⁸) Another striking and perhaps surprising area in which to prefer automatic thinking is in how one cares for or empathizes with others. Zhu Xi compares two different ways of accomplishing this: we can empathize by putting ourselves in another's shoes, as it were, reconstructing her situation in our imaginations and considering how we ourselves would feel under similar circumstances. Alternatively, we could have a more immediate reaction to the other's situation, feeling as she feels without having to imagine ourselves in her shoes. The first sort of care requires some forcing and effort, and perhaps also some dissonant awareness of the potential conflicts between our interests and hers. The second does not require effort and dissonant awareness, can therefore be wholehearted, and is thus better suited for full or complete virtue.⁶⁹ These implications, like all the others described in this section, point the way to arguments

about virtue and moral agency barely glimpsed in contemporary ethics, Western or East Asian, and yet they run deep in the historical Confucian tradition.

Earlier in this chapter I argued that major strands of Confucian ethics are usefully characterized as types of virtue ethics. What we have seen subsequently is that Confucianism offers a great deal to virtue theory regardless of how it is classified. The influential Confucian philosophers develop rich and sophisticated theories of distinctive virtues, and in the later, Neo-Confucian tradition they think more explicitly about the ways in which having one virtue necessarily presupposes having others, thus offering several different points of entry into debates about the “unity of virtues.” We looked briefly at two ways in which to spell out that unity, noting that righteousness can be a quality of the ethical judgments required for other virtues, and that other cardinal Confucian virtues contribute to a way of living—characterized by the Neo-Confucians as “benevolent”—in which we conceive of ourselves as belonging to a larger whole. However, this is but a glimpse of the many ways in which different virtues might presuppose one another. Accounts of the numerous overlapping unities of specific virtues became a major focus of inquiry and discussion in Neo-Confucianism in particular, and I know of no discussions as attentive to the various types of unity in other bodies of philosophical literature.⁷⁰ Finally, I hope that it is now more readily apparent that the wholeheartedness criterion for full virtue, which is widely shared by Confucian thinkers, provides resources for virtue theory rarely appreciated outside of Confucianism. If we take the criterion seriously, then norms of human behavior should be tied more closely to the content of human nature, and there is need for greater spontaneity or automaticity in moral decision-making, particularly if we accept the fact that human deliberation is riddled with self-serving cognitive biases. On these issues among others in virtue theory, Confucianism is the place to begin, not just expand or enrich, a well-informed investigation.⁷¹

NOTES

1. Bryan W. Van Norden, *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 365–367. For a Confucian who may have recommended putting pragmatic considerations before truth, see WANG Yangming 王陽明, 王陽明全集 [*The Complete Works of Wang Yangming*] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1992), 1567; Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Readings from the Lu-Wang School of Neo-Confucianism* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009), 131–132.
2. A. C. Graham, *Two Chinese Philosophers* (La Salle: Open Court, 1992), 90–91; CHENG Hao 程顥 and CHENG Yi 程頤, 河南程氏遺書 [“The Surviving Works of the Chengs of Henan”], in 二程集 [*The Collected Works of the Cheng Brothers*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1981), 66 (3.96), 292 (22A.71). In citing “The Surviving Works of the Chengs of Henan,” I will provide the page number in the aforementioned edition and then, for the benefit of those using different editions, provide the fascicle (*juan* 卷) and passage number in parentheses, as illustrated in this note. “66 (3.96)” refers to page 66, fascicle 3, and passage 96.

3. *Analects* 論語, in 論語集釋 [*The Collected Explanations of the Analects*], edited by Cheng Shude 程樹德 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 11.12.
4. Xunzi, 荀子. 荀子集解•考證 [*Collected Commentaries and Evidential Analysis of the Xunzi*], edited by Yang Liang 楊倞 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 2000), chap. 17, 19. For an English translation see Xunzi, *Xunzi: The Complete Text*, translated by Eric L. Hutton (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), chap. 17, 19.
5. *Analects* 7.26.
6. *Mengzi* (*Mencius*) 1A7.
7. Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 99–115; David Copp and David Sobel, “Morality and Virtue: An Assessment of Some Recent Work in Virtue Ethics,” *Ethics* 114(3) (2004): 544.
8. Van Norden, *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy*, 6–7; Bryan W. Van Norden, “Response to Angle and Slote,” *Dao* 8(3) (2009): 305–309.
9. Hui-chieh Loy, “Classical Confucianism as Virtue Ethics,” in *The Handbook of Virtue Ethics* (Durham: Acumen, 2014), 287–289.
10. *Mengzi* 1A7, 2A2, 2A6, 6A1–2, 6A6, 6A8, 7A15.
11. Xunzi, *Collected Commentaries and Evidential Analysis of the Xunzi*, chap. 5, 17, 21, 22.
12. ZHU Xi 朱熹, 朱子語類 [*Topically Arranged Conversations of Master Zhu*], 8 volumes, edited by Li Jingde 黎靖德 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 2629 (105.26). In citing the *Topically Arranged Conversations of Master Zhu*, I will provide the page number in the aforementioned edition and then, for the benefit of those using different editions, provide the fascicle (*juan* 卷) and passage number in parentheses, as illustrated in this note. “2629 (105.26)” refers to page 2629, fascicle 105, and passage 26.
13. Loy, “Classical Confucianism as Virtue Ethics,” 289.
14. Stephen C. Angle, *Sagehood: The Contemporary Significance of Neo-Confucian Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Stephen C. Angle, “Wang Yangming as a Virtue Ethicist,” in *The Dao Companion to Neo-Confucian Philosophy*, edited by John Makeham (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), 315–335; Eric L. Hutton, “Moral Connoisseurship in Mengzi,” in *Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mengzi*, edited by Xiusheng Liu and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 163–186; Philip J. Ivanhoe, “Moral Perception in McDowell, Wang, and Mengzi,” *Dao* 10(3) (2011): 273–290.
15. See Eric L. Hutton, “On the ‘Virtue Turn’ and the Problem of Categorizing Chinese Thought,” *Dao* 14(3) (2015), 333; Loy, “Classical Confucianism as Virtue Ethics,” 286.
16. Philip J. Ivanhoe, “Virtue Ethics and the Chinese Confucian Tradition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, edited by Daniel C. Russell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 49–69; Van Norden, *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy*, 33–59.
17. Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr. “Were the Early Confucians Virtuous?” in *Ethics in Early China: An Anthology*, edited by Chris Fraser, Dan Robins, and Timothy O’Leary (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 20.
18. *Mengzi* 3B9; Xunzi, *Collected Commentaries and Evidential Analysis of the Xunzi*, chap. 9. See *Xunzi: The Complete Text*, chap. 9, lines 286–339.
19. Philip J. Ivanhoe, “The Shade of Confucius: Social Roles, Ethical Theory, and the Self,” in *Polishing the Chinese Mirror: Essays in Honor of Henry Rosemont, Jr.*, edited by Marthe Chandler and Ronnie Littlejohn (New York: Global Scholarly Publications, 2007), 41–56.
20. See Hutton, “On the ‘Virtue Turn’ and the Problem of Categorizing Chinese Thought,” 339–340.
21. E.g., *Mengzi* 1A1, 6B4.

22. Manyul Im, "Mencius as Consequentialist," in *Ethics in Early China: An Anthology*, edited by Chris Fraser, Dan Robins, and Timothy O'Leary (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 41–63.
23. *Mengzi* 7A35.
24. *Analects* 1.2.
25. *Mengzi* 2A6, 6A6.
26. Van Norden, *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy*, 258; *Mengzi* 6A10.
27. CHEN Chun, *Neo-Confucian Terms Explained (The Pei-hsi tzu-i)*, translated by Wing-tsit Chan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), no. 51; CHEN Chun, 北溪字義 [*Chen Chun's Meanings of Terms*], Siku quanshu edition, 1.29a–b; Zhu, *Topically Arranged Conversations of Master Zhu*, 123 (6.140).
28. Chen, *Neo-Confucian Terms Explained (The Pei-hsi tzu-i)*, no. 175; Chen, *Chen Chun's Meanings of Terms*, 2.24a–b.
29. Chen, *Neo-Confucian Terms Explained (The Pei-hsi tzu-i)*, nos. 56, 58; Chen, *Chen Chun's Meanings of Terms*, 1.31a–b, 1.32a–33a.
30. *Analects* 3.26; *Mengzi* 2A6, 6A6.
31. *Analects* 3.12, 3.15, 10.25.
32. Zhu, *Topically Arranged Conversations of Master Zhu*, 211–212 (12.106, 12.109). For an English translation of these passages see ZHU Xi, *Learning to Be a Sage: Selections from the Conversations of Master Chu, Arranged Topically*, translated by Daniel Gardner (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 171–172.
33. Chen, *Neo-Confucian Terms Explained (The Pei-hsi tzu-i)*, nos. 54–55; Chen, *Chen Chun's Meanings of Terms*, 1.30b–31a; *Mengzi* 2A6, 2A7, 6A6; Van Norden, *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy*, 273–277.
34. *Analects* 12.22; see also *Mengzi* 2A2.
35. *Analects* 1.14, 7.26, 14.4, 17.13, 17.18.
36. *Analects* 2.9–10.
37. *Analects* 5.21; ZHU Xi 朱熹 and LÜ Zuqian 呂祖謙, 近思錄 [*Reflections on Things at Hand*] (Zhengzhou: Zhengzhou guji chubanshe, 2008), fascicle 7.
38. *Mengzi* 5A9.
39. Kwong-loi Shun, "Ren and Li in the *Analects*," in *Confucius and the Analects: New Essays*, edited by Bryan W. Van Norden (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 53–72.
40. *Analects* 12.22.
41. *Analects* 5.19, 14.4.
42. *Mengzi* 2A6, 6A6.
43. Philip J. Ivanhoe, "Senses and Values of Oneness," *The Philosophical Challenge from China*, edited by Brian Bruya (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 231–251; Cheng and Cheng, "The Surviving Works of the Chungs of Henan," 15 (2A.17); Graham, *Two Chinese Philosophers*, 98–99; Wang Yangming, 王陽明. 王陽明全集 [*The Complete Works of Wang Yangming*] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1992), 69–70, 81; Wang Yangming, *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings*, translated by Wing-tsit Chan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 166–167, 170.
44. Chen, *Neo-Confucian Terms Explained (The Pei-hsi tzu-i)*, no. 48; Chen, *Chen Chun's Meanings of Terms*, 1.27b–28b; ZHU Xi 朱熹, 四書章句集注 [*Section and Sentence Annotations and Collected Commentaries on the Four Books*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), comments on *Mengzi* 2A7.

45. Chen, *Neo-Confucian Terms Explained (The Pei-hsi tzu-i)*, nos. 48–50; Chen, *Chen Chun's Meanings of Terms*, 1.27b–29a; Zhu, *Section and Sentence Annotations and Collected Commentaries on the Four Books*, comments on *Analects* 1.2 and *Mengzi* 2A6, 2A7.
46. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated and edited by Roger Crisp (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), VII.1.
47. *Analects* 1.1, 7.34.
48. *Analects* 6.20 and see the commentaries on this passage quoted in Zhu, *Section and Sentence Annotations and Collected Commentaries on the Four Books*.
49. *Analects* 7.34, 9.20, 15.5.
50. *Mengzi* 1A7, 2A2, 2A6.
51. *Mengzi* 4A27.
52. *Analects* 2.4, 7.34.
53. *Mengzi* 3A14.
54. Graham, *Two Chinese Philosophers*, 67–68.
55. For example, see Zhu and Lü, *Reflections on Things at Hand*, fascicle (*juan* 卷) 1, passage 31; Cheng and Cheng, “The Surviving Works of the Chungs of Henan,” 92 (6.171); Zhu, *Section and Sentence Annotations and Collected Commentaries on the Four Books*, comments on *Zhongyong* chap. 25; and Justin Tiwald and Bryan W. Van Norden, *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy: Han Dynasty to the 20th Century* (Cambridge: Hackett, 2014), 230.
56. Wang, *The Complete Works of Wang Yangming*, 972; Ivanhoe, *Readings from the Lu-Wang School of Neo-Confucianism*, 171–172. These three indicators—lack of self-deception, a sense of contentment, and the close match between thoughts and feelings—and the comparison to the experience of beautiful sights and repugnant odors are all taken from the *Greater Learning (Daxue)*, an early text that both Zhu and Wang took to be part of the Confucian canon.
57. Zhu, *Section and Sentence Annotations and Collected Commentaries on the Four Books*, remarks on *Daxue*, Commentary Section chap. 6; Tiwald and Van Norden, *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy: Han Dynasty to the 20th Century*, 191–192; Michiaki Fuji, 藤井倫明, 朱熹思想結構探索 [*Investigations on the Structure of Zhu Xi's Thought*] (Taipei: Taida chuban zhongxin, 2011), 28–33.
58. Zhu, *Topically Arranged Conversations of Master Zhu*, 228 (13.48); Zhu, *Learning to Be a Sage: Selections from the Conversations of Master Chu, Arranged Topically*, translated by Daniel Gardner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 183; Wang, *The Complete Works of Wang Yangming*, 972; Ivanhoe, *Readings from the Lu-Wang School of Neo-Confucianism*, 171–172.
59. *Mengzi* 3A5; David S. Nivison, “Two Roots or One?” In *The Ways of Confucianism*, edited by Bryan W. Van Norden (Chicago: Open Court Press, 1996), 133–148.
60. Zhu, *Topically Arranged Conversations of Master Zhu*, 3017 (126.25 and 126.41).
61. Zhu, *Topically Arranged Conversations of Master Zhu*, 1838 (72.114). See also Justin Tiwald, “Xunzi among the Chinese Neo-Confucians,” in *The Dao Companion to Xunzi*, edited by Eric L. Hutton (New York: Springer, 2016), 456–457.
62. I take this example from Michael Stocker and Elizabeth Hegeman, *Valuing Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 38.
63. *Mengzi* 4A27.
64. Xunzi, *Collected Commentaries and Evidential Analysis of the Xunzi*, chap. 19–20.
65. Xunzi, *Collected Commentaries and Evidential Analysis of the Xunzi*, chap. 19.
66. Xunzi, *Collected Commentaries and Evidential Analysis of the Xunzi*, chap. 19.

67. Zhu, *Topically Arranged Conversations of Master Zhu*, 228 (13.48); Zhu, *Learning to Be a Sage: Selections from the Conversations of Master Chu, Arranged Topically*, 183; Wang, *The Complete Works of Wang Yangming*, 971–972; Ivanhoe, *Readings from the Lu-Wang School of Neo-Confucianism*, 169.
68. Zhu, *Topically Arranged Conversations of Master Zhu*, 237 (13.98); Zhu, *Learning to Be a Sage: Selections from the Conversations of Master Chu, Arranged Topically*, 188.
69. Justin Tiwald, “Sympathy and Perspective-Taking in Confucian Ethics,” *Philosophy Compass* 6(10) (2011): 663–674.
70. For extended explorations of the multilayered, overlapping unities of virtues, see Chen, *Neo-Confucian Terms Explained (The Pei-hsi tzu-i)*, nos. 47–82; Chen, *Chen Chun’s Meanings of Terms*, 1.27a–43b; Stephen C. Angle and Justin Tiwald *Neo-Confucianism: A Philosophical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 164–167; and DAI Zhen, 戴震, 孟子字義疏證 [“Evidential Analysis of the Meaning of Terms in the Mengzi”], in 戴震集 [The Collected Works of Dai Zhen] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2009), 316–319; John W. Ewell, *Reinventing the Way: Dai Zhen’s Evidential Commentary on the Meanings of Terms in Mencius (1777)* (Berkeley: PhD dissertation in history, 1990), 351–370.
71. My thanks to Philip J. Ivanhoe for his comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

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CHAPTER 9

THE *PHRONIMOS* AND THE SAGE

MAY SIM

ARISTOTLE and Mencius share an ethics that is focused on the virtues of character essential to a flourishing life. Each emphasizes the role that exemplary individuals play in a moral community. Aristotle's *phronimos* and Mencius's sage are the paragons of virtue. They exemplify practical wisdom, enabling them to perform the virtuous actions that are called for in different situations, and are the concrete models of virtue for all human beings, without whom others would not be able to cultivate their virtues. Both agree that the aim of politics is to enable everyone in a state to lead a good life (i.e., a life of virtue). Thus, ethics and politics are intertwined for them. The goal of a political government is to make people virtuous, and the exemplary person is best suited to accomplish this goal. Aristotle and Mencius are also alike in holding that the virtues of character are based on human nature, and cultivation is key to achieving them. Despite these similarities, they differ in their accounts of human nature, details on the virtues, and how they are cultivated. Whether being the *phronimos* or the sage is the highest good for a human being, the degree of effectiveness he has on fellow citizens and the rest of the cosmos are issues about which they would disagree. Exploring similarities and differences between the *phronimos* and the sage will shed light on nature and nurture in their virtue-oriented ethics.

Let me begin with human nature for Mencius. For him, all human beings are born with four feelings that are the sprouts of virtues that can be developed into complete virtues. Mencius asserts that the feeling of compassion (惻隱 *ce yin*) is the sprout of benevolence or humaneness (*ren* 仁); the feeling of shame or disdain (羞惡 *xiu wu*) is the sprout of righteousness or appropriateness (*yi* 義); the feeling of deference 辭讓 (*ci rang*) is the sprout of ritual propriety (禮 *li*), and the feeling of favoring “what is the case” (是 *shi*) over “what is not the case” (非 *fei*), sometimes translated as “approval” and “disapproval,” is the sprout of wisdom (智 *zhi*). For Mencius, someone without these feelings is not human; having them is as natural as being born with four limbs.¹ When perfected, one has the resources sufficient to care for the whole world; unperfected, one can't even serve one's parents.² To prove these innate feelings in everyone, Mencius asks that we

imagine a child about to fall into a well. Anyone would feel alarm and compassion for the child regardless of one's lack of relation to his parents or desire to impress others.³ This inclination to feel compassion for a total stranger is what makes human nature good, although many don't perfect their incipient virtues. Since everyone is born with these sprouts of virtue, they are internal and accessible as long as one reflects on them. Mencius says, "Benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom are not welded to us externally. We inherently have them. It is simply that we do not reflect upon them. Hence, it is said, 'Seek it and you will get it. Abandon it and you will lose it.'"⁴ It seems that everyone has the resources to develop the virtues. More detailed analyses, however, show that Mencius offers a more nuanced account. Let's examine Aristotle's account of human nature by comparison with Mencius's.

Unlike Mencius, Aristotle does not hold that human nature is composed of certain feelings that are already inclined toward goodness, making human nature good. However, he would agree that virtues are bound up with human nature; parts of human nature determine the virtues that perfect them. Aristotle divides the human soul that is the form/nature of the human being into the rational and non-rational parts. This division already distinguishes the two, for Mencius doesn't separate the heart from the mind. Mencius's heart/mind (*xin* 心) is the faculty that feels (compassion, anguish, shame, disdain, deference, and has a preference for "what is true" over "what is not"), and also thinks and reflects, and is perfected in the four virtues of humaneness, appropriateness, ritual propriety, and wisdom.⁵ Contrary to the single faculty that undertakes feeling and thinking, Aristotle further subdivides the rational and non-rational parts. The non-rational soul is divided into the vegetative and desiring parts, which latter includes the human emotions and appetites. When the desiring part is perfected, one has the moral virtues: justice, generosity, courage, truthfulness, temperance, and so on. The vegetative part is not relevant, as it is not controllable.

The rational part is subdivided into the speculative and deliberative parts. The speculative part is directed at unchangeable objects of scientific demonstration and mathematics, and is perfected in contemplative wisdom (*theôria*). The deliberative part is directed at changeable objects and issues actions that are good or bad, and is perfected in practical wisdom (*phronêsis*). Although both *theôria* and *phronêsis* are intellectual virtues, because Aristotle separates the theoretical and practical objects and their corresponding faculties, perfections in theory and practice are thoroughly separate.⁶ Contrastingly, Mencius does not distinguish between a theoretical and practical mind, nor does he oppose theoretical to practical objects and their virtues. Mencius's single heart-mind that reflects and feels is also one that can know human nature, act virtuously, and know the nature of things. Whereas Aristotle's *phronimos* is not necessarily the *sophos*, Mencius's sage encompasses the whole of wisdom (*zhi* 智).

More importantly, while Aristotle relegates our desiring part that includes our feelings and appetites to the non-rational soul, for Mencius, feeling and thinking stem from the same heart/mind. For Aristotle, feelings aren't the beginnings of virtues; they must be trained to abide by reason and respond appropriately for someone to become virtuous.

Specifically, Aristotle distinguishes between feelings and virtues as follows: (i) One is praised or blamed for having or lacking the moral virtues, whereas one isn't praised or blamed for having or lacking feelings.⁷ (ii) Whereas virtues are decided (e.g., one decides to act courageously or generously), feelings are not decided: one doesn't decide to feel hungry or fear before having these feelings. (iii) Whereas one is moved to feel in a certain way (e.g., fear when suddenly attacked by a bear), virtues are states in which one is ready to act in a certain way (e.g., a courageous soldier stands firm and fights when being attacked by enemies). Considering these distinctions, Aristotle's view differs from Mencius's four innate feelings that are also virtues. What distances them is when Mencius goes so far as to identify the four feelings with the virtues themselves, saying, "The feeling of compassion is benevolent. The feeling of disdain is righteousness . . ."⁸ Their differences in feelings contribute to their disagreements about the goodness or badness of human nature. For Mencius, all human beings are endowed with feelings that are good, inclining them to develop the virtues. Contrastingly, feelings are neither good nor bad for Aristotle; they must be shaped by reason before we can be morally good.

Another difference is that whereas human beings for Mencius can access their innate virtues by reflection to cultivate themselves, short of *phronimoi* in the polis, who exhibit the virtues that others can model, human beings cannot become virtuous for Aristotle.⁹ Nevertheless, a closer look at Mencius's account also shows that absent a sage, who is the first to access the incipient virtues, others would also be prohibited from becoming virtuous. That all human hearts/minds are endowed with the sprouts of virtue that are accessible by reflection, notwithstanding, they can lose them if constantly assaulted by unfavorable circumstances.¹⁰ For Mencius, witnessing the current barrenness of "Ox Mountain" might lead one to believe that its nature couldn't have been fertile in the past. Analogously, current experiences of vicious people might lead us to believe that human nature couldn't have been good. Ox Mountain was once a luscious mountain. It was not only deforested, but its opportunity to reforest, given the respite from deforestation and the nourishment from nature, was stripped by grazing cattle in the day. He says, "if it merely gets nourishment, there is nothing that will not grow. If it merely loses its nourishment, there is nothing that will not vanish."¹¹ Comparing the adverse environmental effects on Ox Mountain's potential to recover its original nature to a king's inability to develop his sprout of wisdom while surrounded by those who assault it, Mencius says,

Do not be surprised at the king's failure to be wise. Even though it may be the easiest growing thing in the world, if it gets one day of warmth and ten days of frost, there has never been anything that is capable of growing. It is seldom that I have an audience with the king, . . . What can I do with the sprouts that are there?¹²

The king's sprout of wisdom and incipient virtues notwithstanding, surrounded by people who assault them, his failure of virtue is inevitable. Disagreements about the goodness of human nature aside, the environment's effect on one's development shows Aristotle's and Mencius's concurrence on the state's impact on cultivating virtues.

Just as it seems that Aristotle and Mencius concur that living in a good state is necessary for cultivating virtues, examining the *phronimos* and the sage shows their differences regarding how these paragons of virtue emerge.

Aristotle insists on certain living conditions to cultivate the virtues. To exercise the rational soul in a way that leads to good deliberation, external goods are necessary. External goods are divided into (i) instrumental, and (ii) those contributing to one's blessedness.¹³ Instrumental external goods include wealth, having friends, and political connections. Wealth makes possible the virtue of generosity, for one needs wealth to be generous, while friends and those with political influence can help one perform virtuous deeds. Instrumental goods enable us to perform virtuous actions more easily.¹⁴ Contrastingly, external goods contributing to one's blessedness include being well-born, having a good family, and not looking utterly repulsive. By being well-born, Aristotle means that one isn't born into slavery. Since a slave isn't free to choose his own actions, he would never be able to exercise deliberation, let alone perfect it and become a *phronimos*. Having a good family is pertinent to a blessed life because parents inculcate virtues in children. Without the virtues of character, someone will lack the right goals in life (e.g., that one is to be courageous, generous and just, etc.), and will fail to deliberate well, since good deliberation depends on the goal of deliberation being correct.

More specifically, Aristotle distinguishes cleverness (*deinos*) from *phronêsis*.¹⁵ *Deinos* is the ability to match means to ends and always to succeed in achieving one's ends. Depending on the goodness or badness of one's goals, *deinos* is either good or terrible for Aristotle. For example, if one's goal were to rob a bank, having *deinos* would issue in the means to rob the bank and get away with the crime. Such *deinos* to achieve a base action would be terrible for Aristotle. Contrariwise, if one's goal were to alleviate poverty, *deinos* would issue in the means to be generous and would result in good *deinos*. Since a *phronimos* always succeeds in his actions, he must have *deinos*. Given that he always aims at virtues, he also has good *deinos*. Thus, having the virtues as the goals of actions is necessary for being moral, and having all the moral virtues is necessary for being a *phronimos*. Otherwise, there's no guarantee that one won't deliberate to a vicious end. In short, although the journey to *phronêsis* is long, because it takes time to cultivate all the virtues and have the right goals, having a good family is a blessing, as parents expose one to virtues. Finally, not looking utterly repulsive contributes to someone's blessedness, as it is more likely that others would relate easily to one who is not repulsive, which relation is helpful or necessary for virtuous acts.

Apart from external goods, Aristotle requires a state with good legislation and *phronimoi* as models for habituating the virtues. Good legislators provide laws for parents to cultivate their children, while *phronimoi* embody concrete virtues, and provide norms of correct deliberation. Aristotle says, "Virtue . . . is a state that decides . . . defined by reference to . . . the reason by which the prudent person would define it."¹⁶ Without concrete models, *phronêsis* is impossible, even for the few with the requisite external goods in a well-legislated state.

Contrary to Aristotle's many pre-conditions for cultivating a *phronimos*, hardly any is required for the emergence of a sage. Because human nature is already endowed with

incipient virtues, one not only can access them by reflection, but also can perform virtuous actions. Mencius asserts, "We and the sage are of the same kind."¹⁷ Being like the sage, our hearts are like his in having the same preferences for the virtues of reason (*li* 理) and righteousness (*yi* 義). Our mouths have the same preferences for flavors determined by Master chef Yi Ya; our ears have the same preferences for sounds determined by Music Master Shi Kuang, and our eyes have the same appreciation for the handsomeness of Zidu. Nevertheless, ordinary persons are different from sages, as the analogy with Ox Mountain shows. If assaulted by unfavorable circumstances, just as nothing will grow on Ox Mountain, likewise, ordinary human beings cannot develop their incipient virtues. Just as Master chef Yi Ya was the first to discover the flavors that human mouths prefer,¹⁸ "sages first discovered what our hearts prefer in common."¹⁹ The reason that sages are the first to discover the sprouts of virtue and are incorruptible by a depraved community, or one that isn't conducive to developing their incipient virtues, is that they never lost their innate human nature.²⁰ For Mencius, all human beings possess hearts that desire the virtues (such as righteousness) over life, and hate the lack of virtues more than death. But it's the sage (*xian ren* 賢 人) who never loses this type of heart.²¹ Mencius says, "One who is a great person (*da ren* 大 人, literally big person) does not lose his infant heart,"²² and "what distinguishes an exemplary person (*junzi* 君子) from other human beings is his preservation of his existing heart (*cun xin* 存 心)."²³ He adds, "exemplary persons have humaneness as their existing hearts; ritual propriety as their existing hearts."²⁴

Further support for a sage's difference from ordinary people such that he can cultivate his incipient virtues independent of resources from his community is clear from Mencius's account of the sage ruler, Shun. Shun did not have a loving family: his own parents and brother didn't love him, and repeatedly tried to kill him. Nevertheless, Shun persisted in being filial to his parents and fraternal toward his brother, even appointing his brother the administrator of the state of Youbi to provide him with wealth and rank.²⁵ Shun didn't *learn* the virtue of humaneness because his parents were lovable, and righteousness because his brother was respectable. Compared to Ox Mountain, like the unfavorable environment that prevented it from reforestation, the attempts by Shun's family to kill him were unfavorable circumstances that should have prevented his sprouts from growing. More elaborately, perfecting the virtues begins with love for parents and respect for elder brothers, and extending these feelings to others in the world. Mencius says, "Among babies in arms there are none that do not know to love their parents. When they grow older, there are none that do not know to revere their elder brothers. Treating one's parents as parents is benevolence. Revering one's elders is righteousness. There is nothing else to do but extend these to the world."²⁶ Since it was unlikely that Shun's natural love for his parents and respect for his brother were nourished by their virtues, his virtues must have been due to his ability to preserve his innately good human nature. This interpretation is supported by Mencius's remark that excellent (*liang* 良) capability is being capable (*neng* 能) without learning, and excellent knowledge is having knowledge without deliberating (*lü* 慮). Combined with his claim that a great person is one who doesn't lose his infant heart,²⁷ Mencius's sages are

different from ordinary people because they can cultivate and perfect their incipient virtues without the preconditions that ordinary people require.²⁸

Whereas ordinary people require a virtuous state to cultivate their sprouts of virtue, a sage can cultivate himself from human nature alone. Witnessing just one instance of a virtuous deed or saying suffices to trigger a sage's access to his innate virtues. As Mencius illustrates with an anecdote about sage Shun: "When he was young and lived deep in the mountain wilds . . . [h]e differed only slightly from the wild people But as soon as he heard one good saying or saw one good deed, it was like a river overflowing its banks, torrential, so that nothing can stop it."²⁹ Unlike ordinary people who need to be instructed, the sage is either self-sufficient (since he has retained his human heart) or requires very little to trigger his virtues. Contrariwise, ordinary people need to be taught. Mencius says, "The Way of the people is this: if they are full of food, have warm clothes, and live in comfort but are without instruction, then they come close to being animals."³⁰ That instruction takes a community rather than an individual is clear from Mencius's anecdote about how someone from the state of Chu is to learn the dialect of Qi. He says, "If one person from Qi teaches him, but a multitude of people from Chu distract him, even if he strives everyday to understand the Qi dialect, he cannot succeed. But if you . . . plant him in . . . a neighborhood in Qi, after a few years, even if he strives everyday to understand the Chu dialect, he cannot succeed."³¹

Not only is Mencius's view of the ordinary person different from the sage in requiring education and a community for cultivation, they differ too as regards bodily goods. Even an ample supply of economic goods doesn't prevent people from becoming beasts when they are uneducated; nevertheless, lacking such economic goods can lead to their moral corruption. For Mencius, people who are starved and parched not only can be injured in their bodies, such that they have no standards for the taste of food and drink, but also can be injured in their hearts.³² Unlike ordinary people, the virtues of sages remain intact under such circumstances. Mencius says, "If one can prevent the injury of hunger and thirst from being an injury to one's heart, then there will be no concern about not being as good as other people."³³ For him, a sage could prevent moral corruption even when lacking basic necessities.

Comparing Aristotle's *phronimos* with Mencius's sage, the latter is quite self-sufficient in accessing his incipient virtues to cultivate himself. Contrariwise, Aristotle's *phronimos* requires a good community with good laws, and *phronimoi* as exemplars of moral virtues, not to mention external goods that offer opportunities to habituate the virtues and the resources for exercising them. Consequently, Aristotle's view of the prerequisites for the cultivation of a *phronimos* is more similar to the needs of Mencius's ordinary people.

More elaborately, when examining the political state as a whole, Mencius and Aristotle share the view that a certain level of economic sufficiency is required for people's well-being. Apart from Mencius's view that lacking food and shelter can lead ordinary people to lose their human hearts, he advocates the "Kingly Way" for ruling in a way that is both environmentally sustainable and economically sufficient. For instance, he recommends not interrupting farming with construction projects, so as to devote proper labor

to farming to reap a bountiful harvest. He warns against fishing with nets that are too fine that would hinder the reproduction of fish and turtles, and cutting down trees in the wrong season. These practices would lead to the unsustainability of fishing for food and logging for building. Mencius maintains that when people have sufficient and sustainable food for eating and materials for housing, they can care for the living and mourn the dead. The ritual of mourning the dead is important for Confucians as it's a part of filial piety or the love and respect for one's parents, which are extended to others beyond the family in humaneness. Mencius says, "When the people have no regrets about caring for the living or mourning the dead, it is the beginning of the Kingly Way."³⁴ He adds:

If each household with a five-acre plot of land is planted with mulberry trees to raise silkworms, fifty-year-olds can wear silk. If the care of chickens, pigs, dogs and sows does not miss its season, seventy-year-olds can eat meat. If one does not steal the labor during the farming seasons of each hundred-acre field, a clan with many mouths can go without hunger. If one is careful about providing instruction in the village schools, emphasizing the righteousness of filiality and brotherliness, those whose hair has turned gray will not carry loads on the roadways.³⁵

Mencius concludes that someone who could safeguard the elderly from lacking silk clothes and meat dishes, and the young from hunger and cold, is sure to become a king. Since Mencius's sage is also the ideal ruler, he would exercise the Kingly Way of providing for everyone in an environmentally sustainable manner.

Aristotle would agree that economic or external goods are prerequisites for cultivating virtues, although he doesn't agree that human nature is already good. Just as Mencius thinks that economic goods are necessary though not sufficient for becoming virtuous,³⁶ Aristotle too holds that external goods are necessary but not sufficient for virtue. Being born into a good family rather than slavery is no guarantee that one will habituate the moral virtues. However, being a slave would prohibit someone from ever becoming virtuous, since he cannot exercise deliberative choice and habituate the virtues.

Mencius is not only concerned with an environmentally sustainable way of dealing with economic goods,³⁷ but also to limit the acquisition of economic goods, and deter the pursuit of profit.³⁸ Advising King Hui of Liang against pursuing profit instead of benevolence and righteousness, Mencius says, "when people put profit before righteousness, they cannot be satisfied without grasping for more."³⁹ Even though Aristotle doesn't provide an environmentally sustainable way of acquiring economic goods, he'd agree to limit the acquisition of economic goods. This is because Aristotle holds that economic goods are for satisfying our bodily needs, which have natural limits. He holds that it is natural for human appetites to desire food and drink when there is a lack. There are also natural limits to our eating and drinking, namely, the filling of what we lack.⁴⁰ Just as bodily needs are limited, there are limits to economic goods for satisfying the needs of the household and the community.⁴¹ Economic acquisitions useful for our lives, households, and the community are aimed at what's sufficient rather than being unlimited. To exceed such natural limits is to aim at more than what's required for

the good life, which will mislead from the virtues by enslaving us to bodily appetites. Thus, Aristotle and Mencius concur that aiming at profit and more than what is required would prevent us from pursuing the virtues. Because of their virtues, neither the *phronimos* nor the sage would engage in the unlimited pursuit of economic goods.

Despite Aristotle's and Mencius's agreement in requiring economic goods for cultivation, and limiting their acquisition, they disagree about who is responsible for acquiring and distributing these goods. Whereas Mencius's sage is the only legitimate ruler responsible for the Kingly Way that would secure economic well-being and education of the people, Aristotle's *phronimos* is not necessarily the ruler, nor is he responsible for procuring economic goods. Whereas economics is about managing goods necessary for life and falls under the private household,⁴² politics deals with the good for life as a whole (i.e., the common good), which falls under the public realm.⁴³ Simply put, Aristotle thinks that only when someone is secure in economic goods can he engage in deliberations about the common good; only when he is not concerned with basic necessities can he think about what's required for the good life. Since human beings are by nature political animals, the good life depends on what's good for the whole community. Thus, Aristotle insists that one can't have the highest good for the flourishing life (*eudaimonia*), unless there's self-sufficiency (i.e., enough economic goods for oneself, family, friends, and fellow-citizens).⁴⁴ Only when there's self-sufficiency can one engage in rational activities that contribute to *eudaimonia*, namely, deliberation and contemplation. Unlike Mencius, Aristotle does not hold the ruler responsible for the acquisition or distribution of economic goods. As external goods, they are goods of fortune and belong to the private realm.

Like Mencius's sage ruler who is responsible for educating ordinary people, Aristotle's legislators make laws that provide the content for habituation. Law "is reason that proceeds from a sort of prudence (*phronêsis*) and understanding (*nous*)."⁴⁵ Moreover, "the legislator makes the citizens good by habituating them, and this is the wish of every legislator; if he fails to do it well he misses his goal. Correct habituation distinguishes a good political system from a bad one."⁴⁶ Again, "It is difficult, however, for someone to be trained correctly for virtue from his youth if he has not been brought up under correct laws; for the many, especially the young, do not find it pleasant to live in a temperate and resistant way. That is why laws must prescribe their upbringing and practices; for they will not find these things painful when they get used to them."⁴⁷ This shows how important good laws are for habituating virtues. Not only are laws necessary for habituating the young, they are required throughout someone's life: "For the many yield to compulsion more than to argument, and to sanctions more than to the fine."⁴⁸ Aristotle holds that someone compelled to do something that is right, say, to live temperately, does not have the virtue of temperance.⁴⁹ His remark that the many are more likely to yield to the sanctions of law reveals that he doesn't expect them to become virtuous. They'll be law-abiding because they are led by pleasures and the avoidance of pain. Accordingly, even though Aristotle and Mencius agree that the aim of politics is to make people virtuous, they differ in Aristotle's acknowledgment that this goal is not realistic for the majority.

Aristotle is so confident that laws can order people that he ranks them more powerful than a father's instructions or a king's rule. Whereas a father's instructions do not have the power to "prevail and compel," a king's rule has the power to compel, but ultimately invites hostility.⁵⁰ Thus, the *phronimos's* legislation of laws to educate ordinary people differs from the sage's way of education. Whereas laws for Aristotle are more effective against the many than a sovereign ruler, Mencius thinks that laws alone, without a benevolent government, "do not put themselves into effect."⁵¹ By benevolent government, Mencius means that only the benevolent should rule; someone who is benevolent but not a ruler couldn't help the world: "Even the Way of Yao and Shun will not be able to pacify and rule the world if it is not used along with benevolent government."⁵² A sage must rule to have an effect on the world. The effect Mencius has in mind is making people virtuous. Benevolent government also means that were a ruler not benevolent, he would inflict evil upon the world.⁵³ He states, "If those above lack a Way to assess by, those below will lack laws to abide by. If those at court do not have faith in the Way, those in office will not have faith in their rules."⁵⁴ Only a sage is in tune with the true Way of government; the Way that cannot bear the suffering of its people.⁵⁵ It takes his extending compassion to the people to execute benevolent government and instill benevolence in them.⁵⁶ For Mencius, only a benevolent government is legitimate.⁵⁷

Contrariwise, a *phronimos* is required to legislate good laws. Once laws are legislated, they are more effective than a ruler because they won't incur the hostilities a ruler would incur. Moreover, despite their effectiveness, especially in compelling the many by the threat of pain, laws don't necessarily make people virtuous. At best, they can prepare some for the life of virtue by habituating them to love the fine and hate the shameful. These characteristics are prerequisites for habituating virtue. Unfortunately, for the many, laws are only effective for making them avoid base actions from fearing penalties.⁵⁸ Despite these effects of laws, Aristotle believes that we should be satisfied if some who have been prepared to become virtuous have "some share in virtue," while others guided by their feelings are kept from baseness. Given his lower expectations for a state to make people virtuous, he doesn't insist on only one ideal form of government, unlike Mencius, whose sage is the only legitimate ruler.

I think that Aristotle's satisfaction with a state in which not everyone can become virtuous stems from his view that human beings are not by nature good and that the majority is more motivated by fear rather than shame, by the avoidance of pain rather than pursuit of what's fine. Challenges to make someone into a *phronimos* are insurmountable for the majority. Aristotle doesn't believe that rule by a *phronimos* would have the same effect as Mencius's benevolent sage, who can make everyone virtuous. Mencius's goal is possible because of the goodness of human nature. Instead of insisting on an ideal ruler like Mencius, Aristotle makes room for a variety of political regimes depending on their particular circumstances. Aristotle acknowledges that different political regimes befit various states depending on the predominance of wealth or poverty, the type of occupation in which the majority engages, the existence of families or groups able to produce descendants who are capable of political leadership, and so forth. If a state can steadily produce people capable of outstanding leadership, then it is most suited

to monarchical rule. An aristocracy is most suitable for one that can produce groups of people who excel at ruling others who can be ruled as free men.⁵⁹ However, depending on the predominance of the poor or the rich, there could be variations in a regime such as a democracy or an oligarchy, in which the poor are as qualified as the rich to share in office, or only those with property, or born into certain types of family, could qualify for office.⁶⁰ Aristotle also considers the occupations of the rulers and the ruled, whether they engage in agriculture, mechanics, or trade, and if they have the leisure for political deliberation and legislation. These factors determine if those who share in office actively rule or are ruled by the laws.⁶¹

In short, Aristotle's pluralistic approach to regimes contrasts sharply with Mencius's commitment to a monarchy. The *phronimos* is key to legislating laws that compel the majority by fear to avoid base actions while preparing others for habituating virtues. Acknowledging the rarity of a ruler with complete virtues and his limited ability to affect the majority, Aristotle settles for a variety of political regimes appropriate for a variety of states depending on their composition and predominant economic activities. Contrastingly, Mencius's sage provides people with the appropriate economic conditions and education to cultivate their incipient virtues, and to inspire them to become humane. He says, "The [exemplary individual] simply returns to the standard. If the standard is correct, then the multitudinous people will be inspired."⁶²

Apart from Mencius's and Aristotle's different accounts of the sage and the *phronimos* for government, they also disagree about how the family relates to the state. Whereas the family is the private realm that satisfies someone's daily needs and belongs to the realm of economics rather than politics for Aristotle, the state makes possible self-sufficiency by providing more than enough for daily needs so that citizens could pursue the good life. As we've seen, external goods are necessary, though not sufficient, for making one virtuous. Moreover, a father's rule, unlike a king's, lacks the power to compel. Without *phronimoi* as legislators, fathers would lack the proper laws to prepare their children for habituating virtues. More elaborately, family relations are separate from political relations for Aristotle. Fellow citizens don't relate as sons to fathers, nor would sons ever take turns to rule or cultivate their fathers. Knowing how to relate well to parents and siblings does not transfer to good relations with fellow citizens.

In contrast, Mencius thinks that the family is continuous with the state. The virtues of a good son and a good brother are the same as those for serving the state and, ultimately, the world. He says, "The core of benevolence is serving one's parents. The core of righteousness is obeying one's elder brother. The core of wisdom is knowing these two and not abandoning them. The core of ritual propriety is the adornment of these two."⁶³ Love for parents and respect for elder brothers are the same feelings or virtues that are extended to others in the state. Contrariwise, Aristotle would find these familial sentiments too particular to constitute the highest virtue of *phronêsis*, the justice a *phronimos* would exercise, and the practical wisdom he would possess. Because someone is always indebted to his parents, Aristotle maintains that such a relation and its sentiments are inappropriate for fellow citizens who take turns ruling and being ruled in an aristocracy, for instance. How could one exercise generosity or honor toward fellow citizens if one

were always indebted to them? Likewise, how would obedience toward fellow citizens give rise to righteousness? If Mencius's righteousness is the functional equivalence of Aristotle's justice, which requires people to relate as free, and either numerically or proportionately equal individuals in ruling and being ruled,⁶⁴ the sentiment of obedience would hinder the conditions of freedom and equality.

Ultimately, Mencius's conviction in a single sage king as the ideal with the power to inspire everyone to virtue is based not only on his view that human nature is good and thus people are attracted by the virtues a sage embodies, but also on his belief that the sage possesses the right way of living, which is the same as Heaven's Way. Given that there's a human Way that is right, this single way permeates what is right for the individual, his family, and the state. Mencius states, "People have a common saying: 'The world, the state, the family.' The root of the world lies in the state; the root of the state lies in the family; the root of the family lies in oneself."⁶⁵ This is exemplified by Mencius's view concerning the continuity between the virtues for family relations and relations within a state. Continuity between the human good in the family and the state is just one of a broader continuity of virtues, since what's good is dictated by Heaven upon causing everything to exist. Mencius quotes the Odes: "Heaven gives birth to the teeming people. If there is a thing, there is a norm. This is the constant people cleave to. They are fond of this beautiful Virtue."⁶⁶ Holding Heaven as the source of all things and their norms, and human beings' natural attraction to the norms, Mencius makes the task of cultivating virtues in the ordinary people easier than does Aristotle. Aristotle is skeptical about the ability of the many to become virtuous because they are guided by feelings drawn to bodily pleasures. Despite the aim of all political regimes to satisfy the criterion of self-sufficiency required for pursuing the good life, satisfying this economic requirement doesn't guarantee the virtues that make the good life. Although Aristotle shares the same political goal as Mencius of making people virtuous, he limits politics to economics in stressing the criterion of self-sufficiency, and restricts the potential impact of *phronimoi*. In contrast, Mencius is sanguine about all human beings becoming virtuous because they are guided by feelings that are drawn to virtues, which are pleasant and delight the human hearts.⁶⁷

Ultimately, for Mencius, the key to the human Way is also Heaven's Way, that is, sincerity (*cheng* 誠), which he defines as being enlightened (*ming* 明) about goodness (*shan* 善). He explains that a subordinate who gains his superiors' confidence can bring order to the state. To gain his superiors' confidence, someone must first gain the trust of his friends, which in turn depends on securing the happiness of his parents. Someone's parents won't be happy unless he finds himself sincere upon reflection, and that's accomplished by being enlightened about what's good. Continuing, Mencius says, "Sincerity is Heaven's Way. Reflecting upon sincerity is the human Way."⁶⁸ Because Mencius is confident that the genuine human Way is to know the Way of Heaven, or to know what's good, which goodness is innate in us and hence accessible through reflection, he is convinced that the human Way or Heaven's Way is perfectly reachable by human beings. Moreover, since the same Heaven that causes human beings and their virtues is also the cause of all things and their norms of goodness, if human beings can know Heaven's

Way, they can also know the Way of all things. He says, "To fully fathom one's heart is to understand one's nature. To understand one's nature is to understand Heaven."⁶⁹ Consequently, the sage's task is not only to cultivate himself and other human beings, but also to assist Heaven in completing all things: "The ten thousand things are all brought to completion by us. There is no greater delight than to turn toward oneself and discover sincerity."⁷⁰ Again, "To preserve one's heart and nourish one's nature is the way to serve Heaven."⁷¹ That the sage and, potentially, all human beings can assist Heaven, the source of all things, to complete all things expands the sage's effectiveness beyond the human realm to the whole cosmos. Aristotle's *phronimos*, in contrast, is only effective in the human realm, and even then can only impact very few well-brought-up people to become virtuous.

Just as Mencius subscribes to Heaven as the first principle, Aristotle posits God/primary substance as the first principle of everything. Whereas God, who is self-sufficient, unchanging, and independent, is the norm for the highest human good of contemplative wisdom, he is contrasted with the secondary good of *phronêsis*.⁷² This is because *phronêsis* is directed at things that can be changed, issuing in generous and just actions, while contemplation is about unchangeable things that can be known. The latter activity is consistent with God's independence, self-sufficiency, and unchangeability, while the former isn't, since generous and just actions depend on others who are in need. Aristotle separates contemplative and practical wisdom; one who is a *phronimos* is not necessarily a *sophos*. The *phronimos* doesn't need to be wise about unchanging truths (e.g., he doesn't need to be wise about the heavenly bodies), let alone assist God in completing all things. This explains why Aristotle's *phronimos* is only effective in the human realm, unlike Mencius's sage, whose effectiveness extends to the whole cosmos because the human Way is also Heaven's Way.

A lesson that Mencius might learn from Aristotle's acknowledgment that various regimes are better suited for various people, their economies, and occupations is that monarchical rule is not the only legitimate form of government. Consistent with Mencius's view that we are like the sage in our perfectability, more than one person could participate in benevolent government.

In contrast, one lesson that Aristotle might learn from Mencius's subscription to Heaven as the first principle of all things, including their goodness, is that practical need not be sharply separated from theoretical wisdom. The practical realm and its goodness need not be exclusive of the theoretical. Just as Mencius thinks that sages can assist Heaven in completing the non-human things, *phronimoi* could play a role in knowing the theoretical and expanding their impact beyond the human (e.g., by acting to benefit the environment), which goodness in turn can instruct the human good.

In conclusion, the characteristics of the *phronimos* and the sage are bound up with human nature for Aristotle and Mencius, respectively. Due to their different views of human nature, they require different conditions for cultivating exemplary individuals. Even though they agree that the aim of politics is to make people virtuous, they disagree about the exemplary person's role in government. They disagree, too, about how the family relates to the state. Separating the family from the state, Aristotle ends up limiting

the impact of the *phronimos* on making the majority of people in the state virtuous. In contrast, the continuity between the family and the state for Mencius enables him to broaden the sage's scope of impact on making the people virtuous. Ultimately, I trace each author's view to his respective first principle, a self-sufficient god for Aristotle, as opposed to a Heaven that is continuous with the cosmos. Aristotle's elevation of *theôria*, because it is more godlike than *phronêsis*, limits the *phronimos*'s impact on the whole cosmos. Contrariwise, Mencius's view of continuity between Heaven and the cosmic world also expands the sage's impact on the cosmos. I conclude by suggesting what each can learn from the other's account.

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise stated, all references and quotations from Mencius are from Bryan W. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009), 2A 6.4–6.6.
2. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 2A 6.7.
3. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 2A 6.3.
4. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 6A 6.7.
5. As Franklin Perkins explains, Mencius doesn't distinguish the faculty of emotion from reason. Franklin Perkins, "Mencius, Emotion, and Autonomy," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 29 (2002): 207.
6. Because *phronêsis* is an intellectual virtue, the *phronimos*'s knowledge is not only about particulars but also about universals. A *phronimos* is "able to deliberate finely about things that are good and beneficial for himself . . . [and] about what sorts of things promote living well in general." T. Irwin, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985), 1140a26–28. This interpretation differs from Yu Jiyuan's that the *phronimos*'s wisdom is limited to the beliefs and values of his community. See Jiyuan Yu, "The Moral Self and the Perfect Self in Aristotle and Mencius," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 28 (2001): 244; and May Sim, "Self Determination and the Metaphysics of Human Nature in Aristotle and Mencius," in *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Mencius*, edited by Yang Xiao (New York: Springer, 2015b) for my disagreement with Yu.
7. See Sim, "Self Determination and the Metaphysics of Human Nature in Aristotle and Mencius," for how Aristotle's views of feelings and virtues differ from Mencius's.
8. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 6A 6.7.
9. Aristotle offers a conception of "natural virtues" in Irwin, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.13 1144b4–6. I agree with Yu that these aren't full virtues without the part that rationality plays. See Yu, "The Moral Self and the Perfect Self in Aristotle and Mencius," 237.
10. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 6A 6.7–6.8.
11. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 6A 8.3.
12. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 6A 9.1–9.2.
13. Irwin, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, I. 8–I. 9.
14. Irwin, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099a31.
15. Irwin, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, VI. 12, 1144a25.
16. Irwin, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, 1107a1–3.
17. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 6A 7.4.
18. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 6A 7.5.

19. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 6A 7.8.
20. Yong Huang repeats Mencius's claim that sages are the first to discover the virtues to distinguish them from the rest of human beings. Yong Huang, "Confucius and Mencius on the Motivation to Be Moral," *Philosophy East & West* 60 (2010): 73. I think that this explanation could be enhanced by pointing out how sages are different because they never lose their innate virtues.
21. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 6A 10.5.
22. <http://ctext.org/mengzi/li-lou-ii>, no. 39, my translation (corresponding to Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 4B 12.1).
23. <http://ctext.org/mengzi/li-lou-ii>, no. 56, my translation (corresponding to Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 4B 28.1). See also Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 7B 32.2, 7A 27.1–27.2, 4B 19.1–19.2, 4A 11.1, for passages in which Mencius either distinguishes the sage from ordinary people or talks about how the latter are constantly missing the Way/*dao*.
24. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*.
25. See Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 5A 2, 3, 3.2, 4.3–5.1.
26. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 7A 15.2, 15.3.
27. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 4B 12.1.
28. This is why I disagree with Franklin Perkins's claim, "even the sage . . . needs the proper environment in order to develop." Perkins, "Mencius, Emotion, and Autonomy," 223.
29. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 7A 16.1.
30. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 3A 4.8.
31. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 3B 6.1.
32. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 7A 27.1.
33. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 7A 27.2.
34. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 1A 3.3–3.4.
35. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 1A 3.4–3.5.
36. Recall his remark about human beings becoming beasts if they were provided with sufficient bodily needs yet were not instructed. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 3A 4.8.
37. Consider his advocacy of sustainable ways of logging and fishing.
38. See Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 3A 3.13, for Mencius's claim that setting field boundaries to make sure that the well fields are equal in size and grain harvest will be even is the beginning of humane government.
39. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 1A 1.4.
40. Irwin, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, IV.11, 1119a19.
41. See Sim, "Economic Goods, Common Goods and the Good Life." 2015a. 441–459 especially pp. 446–447, for a detailed discussion of Aristotle's view of the relation between economic goods and the good life, and the good of the city.
42. H. Rackham, *Aristotle: Politics*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932), 1256b 28–34.
43. See Rackham, *Aristotle: Politics*, 442.
44. Irwin, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, I. 7, 1097b7–12.
45. Irwin, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, 1180a21–22.
46. Irwin, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103b4–7. See May Sim, *Remastering Morals with Aristotle and Confucius* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 68, 41, for detailed discussions of Aristotle's view of the role that laws play in habituating the citizens.
47. Irwin, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, X.9, 1179b33–37.
48. Irwin, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, 1180a5–6.

49. For a detailed comparison of Mencius's and Aristotle's views on the cultivation of virtues and the conditions that must be satisfied for one to be virtuous, see May Sim, "Economic Goods, Common Goods and the Good Life," in *Value and Values: Economics and Justice in an Age of Global Interdependence*, edited by R. T. Ames and P. D. Herschok (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2015a). 441–459.
50. Irwin, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, 1180a19–23. See also Rackham, *Aristotle: Politics*, 1287b5–8, for how Aristotle prioritizes the rule of law over man. But see Rackham, *Aristotle: Politics*, 1282b1–16, for when human judgment is required.
51. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 4A 1.4.
52. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 4A 1.1.
53. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 4A 1.8.
54. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 4A 1.8.
55. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 4A 1.5.
56. See Yang Xiao's emphasis on the significance of feeling compassion in Mencius's view of morality. Yang Xiao, "Agency and Practical Reasoning in the Analects and the Mencius," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 36 (2009): 637.
57. See also Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 4A 1.9–1.10, and "If a ruler is benevolent, no one will fail to be benevolent. If a ruler is righteous, no one will fail to be righteous." Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 4B 5.1.
58. Irwin, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, 1179b11.
59. Rackham, *Aristotle: Politics*, 1288a7–12. See Sim, *Remastering Morals with Aristotle and Confucius*, 176–177, for details of Aristotle's view on how different types of people best equip a city for a certain type of government.
60. Sim, *Remastering Morals with Aristotle and Confucius*, 183, and see Rackham, *Aristotle: Politics*, IV 4–5.
61. Sim, *Remastering Morals with Aristotle and Confucius*, 184.
62. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 7B 37.13. See also Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 4A 12.3, which states, "There has never been a case of one reaching the ultimate of [sincerity] yet not inspiring others," and Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 4B 5.1, "If a ruler is benevolent, no one will fail to be benevolent. If a ruler is righteous, no one will fail to be righteous."
63. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 4A 27.1–27.2.
64. See Irwin, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, V.6 1134a27–28, 1134b10–17 for why there's no relation of justice or injustice to one's own family members.
65. "天下之本在國，國之本在家，家之本在身." Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 4A 5.1.
66. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 6A 6.8.
67. I agree with Luo Shirong that for Mencius, it's our innate tendencies to virtues that make their cultivation possible. Shirong Luo, "Mencius' Virtue Ethics Meets the Moral Foundations Theory: A Comparison," in *The Routledge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, edited by L. Besser-Jones and M. Slote (New York: Routledge, 2015), 83. For the significance of taking pleasure/joy in Mencius's ethics, see Huang, "Confucius and Mencius on the Motivation to be Moral," 73, 82.
68. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 4A 12.2–12.3.
69. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 7A 1.1–1.2.
70. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 7A 4.1–4.2. See P. J. Ivanhoe, "Heaven as a Source for Ethical Warrant in Early Confucianism," *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 6 (2007): 211–220, for how human beings can help Heaven complete all things.

71. Van Norden, *The Essential Mengzi*, 7A 1.2.
72. For the characteristics of God, see Hugh Tredennick, *Aristotle: Metaphysics, Books I–IX*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), 1028a31, 1029a28. For God's independence, see Hugh Tredennick, *Aristotle: Metaphysics, Books 10–14. Oeconomica. Magna Moralia*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), 1074b35.

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CHAPTER 10

ISLAMIC VIRTUE ETHICS

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I. INTRODUCTION

ISLAMIC ethics varies temporally and geographically. This dynamism and diversity are part of the reason Islamic ethics remains a relevant framework for guiding and understanding the contemporary moral lives of Muslims.¹ However, this also means it is not possible to write a universal or exhaustive Islamic account of virtue. To complicate things further, there is no exact cognate for “ethics” in the Islamic intellectual tradition. Islamic legal thought (*fiqh*), which focuses on forms of reasoning, abstract values, and codes of conduct, is often perceived to be the dominant form for reflection on moral matters, and most work that we call “Islamic ethics” produced in the West (Europe and the United States) in the last fifty years is properly categorized as *fiqh*. However, in the Islamic tradition, ethical concerns are discussed in the texts of various other specialized “sciences” such as *akhlaq* (morals), *tasawwuf* (spirituality), *tafsir* (exegesis, especially of the Qur’an), *falsafa* (philosophy), *adab* (etiquette), and so on.² The complementarity among all of the Islamic sciences was more evident in classical times. This is important to grasp for virtue ethics, which is by design a synthesis of moral psychology, casuistry, epistemology, sociology, law, and the like. A full account of virtue would need to pull together many different areas of scholarship.

My intent in this chapter is simply to show how aspects of Islamic virtue ethics can be understood through the exemplary figure, Abu ‘Ali Ahmad ibn Muhammad Miskawayh (932–1030), known as Ibn Miskawayh or simply Miskawayh. His influential work, *The Refinement of Character* (*Tahdhid al-akhlaq*), is regarded as the first systematic treatment of virtue by an Islamic thinker, and it provides a good introduction to the role that virtue and its cultivation play in the Islamic worldview and ethos. Moreover, the impact of *The Refinement of Character* on Islamic conceptions of ethics is immense: it inspired al-Ghazali’s (d. 1111) chapter on self-control in *Revival of the Religious Sciences*; Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 1274) later summarizes *The Refinement of*

Character in Persian; and modern thinkers such as Muhammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905) and Murtaza Mutahhari (d. 1975) incorporate aspects of Miskawayh’s thought into their ethics.

II. BACKGROUND

Before delving into Miskawayh’s work, it is helpful to sketch out some relevant tenets of Islam, as well as the historical treatments of aspects of virtue that predate Miskawayh and from which he draws. Islam is a monotheistic religion. Although Muslims accept prior revelation (e.g., Bible, Torah) and Prophets (e.g., Abraham, Noah, and Jesus), they understand these earlier revelations to be misunderstood by humans. They believe that God sent one final prophet, Muhammad, known also as the seal of the Prophets. It follows that for Muslims the most reliable sources of revelation come from Muhammad, both as the conveyer of God’s message (which later is codified in the Qur’an) and through his actions and sayings (recorded in traditions called *hadith*). This is why we have two primary textual sources for Islam in general and Islamic ethics specifically: the Qur’an and the *hadith*.

The Qur’an is accepted by Muslims as the verbatim record of God’s word, revealed in Arabic to the Prophet Muhammad over twenty-two years, from the first revelation in 610 CE until the Prophet’s death in 632 CE. The discipline of Qur’anic exegesis (*tafsir*) developed as a system for explaining the Qur’an’s norms and teachings to Muslims. This interpretive work is necessary because although the Qur’an is the primary source for how to live a pious Muslim life, only about ten percent of the Qur’an deals with human action. *Hadith* became an important additional scriptural source after the death of the Prophet. Based on oral traditions passed down by word of mouth, *hadith* are brief written reports of things the Prophet Muhammad said or did. They are used to help “fill in” where Qur’anic revelation is silent. By the eighth and ninth centuries, multivolume collections of *hadith* materials were gathered by scholars.

While revelation, recorded in the Qur’an and *hadith*, provides specific moral content, it is limited: these sacred sources do not cover every possible moral dilemma a Muslim may encounter, nor do they articulate a theoretical framework for the elaboration of a fully robust Islamic ethics (such as a full moral anthropology or theory of ethical reasoning). This becomes the task of what we might call Islamic ethics,³ which includes a rich history of ethical reflection, as well as an ongoing robust contemporary debate over what it means to be a good Muslim.

In developing ethical thought, Muslims also engaged with various other ethical traditions, including Greek, Persian, Indian, Jewish, and Christian. The incorporation of Greek philosophy into Islamic ethics has been so extensive that in many ways an overview of Islamic ethics has already been initiated in the chapters on Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics included in this volume (see Chapters 4, 5, and 6).

III. MISKAWAYH'S THEORY OF VIRTUE ETHICS

Miskawayh was born Abu 'Ali Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Ya'qub Miskawayh around 932 in Rayy, near modern Tehran, Iran. In his various appointed positions until his death in 1030, he was part of a class of intellectuals who flourished under Buwayhid patronage. His positions allowed him to live in vibrant intellectual centers of the time—Baghdad, Isfahan, and Rayy—and afforded him ample time to pursue his own research and writing. He is best known for two works, one on history, *Experiences of the Nations and Consequences of High Ambitions*, and one on ethics, which is the focus of the discussion that follows. Even during the golden age of Islamic thought in the medieval Muslim world, Miskawayh stands out for his reputation as both an excellent historian and philosopher.

Miskawayh is widely recognized as having written the first sustained treatment of virtue in the Islamic tradition. This is not to say that earlier Islamic thinkers did not discuss ethics in a way that provided the foundation for Miskawayh's writing. For instance, Al-Farabi (d. 950), who wrote an extensive commentary on parts of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, adopts Aristotle's division of virtue into two groups: moral and intellectual. We will see in Miskawayh's work a similar beginning point. Ibn Sina (d. 1037) closely follows the Platonic model of psychology, with a soul made up of rational, irascible, and concupiscent parts. Miskawayh also adopts this moral psychology. Finally, the great Andalusian philosopher Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), who wrote important commentaries on both Aristotle and Plato, began a synthesis of Aristotle's and Plato's thought that grafted the primary Aristotelian virtues onto parts of the Platonic soul. This became foundational to Miskawayh's theory of ethics.

Although Miskawayh is less widely studied in the West than Islamic thinkers such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, and Al-Ghazali, we are fortunate to have an excellent English translation of *The Refinement of Character* by Constantine Zurayk published in 2002, as well as a substantial body of secondary literature that analyzes it.⁴ The main body of *The Refinement of Character* is divided into six chapters: "The Principles of Ethics," "Character and Its Refinement," "The Good and Its Divisions," "Justice," "Love and Friendship," and "Health of the Soul."

The Refinement of Character is one of the earliest examples of the genre *tahdhib* we have, a type of *adab* (literally, "etiquette") text, whose purpose is to bring together two sources, Islamic revelation and the Greek philosophical canon.⁵ Miskawayh draws selectively from Greek philosophy to make it consistent with an Islamic ethos and worldview. As scholars have previously pointed out, his theory rests on a careful synthesis of Plato and Aristotle, which combines the Platonic soul and Aristotle's ethics.⁶ Majid Fakry put this nicely: Miskawayh harmonizes Plato's concept of what it means to be just (moral psychology) with Aristotle's concept of how to act justly (practical ethics).⁷

Miskawayh's ethics, however, is not a perfect adoption of Platonic or Aristotelian theory. One fundamental difference is Miskawayh's theological belief. Miskawayh's synthesis includes, and in fact is dependent on, Islamic theology, and a theological anthropology that follows from it. For instance, *The Refinement of Character* contains a preamble, which establishes from the beginning the theology presumed by the text:

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful: O God, we turn to Thee, and strive towards Thee; we exert ourselves in Thy obedience, and follow the straight path, which Thou hast set before us, to Thy satisfaction. Help us, then, with Thy strength, and guide us with Thy might; protect us with Thy power, and cause us to attain the highest rank by Thy mercy and the supreme happiness by Thy generosity and Thy compassion. Verily, Thou art powerful over all Thou willst!⁸

Here Miskawayh demonstrates his submission to God (as omnipresent and omnipotent), and characterizes his task as a struggle to decipher God's plan. By beginning with this passage, the entire work of virtue ethics that follows is framed as a process of perfecting the soul for God, who is the perfection. The art of character training for Miskawayh "is concerned with the betterment of actions of man qua man," and since we are fundamentally religious beings, the cultivation of our character is about discovering and then following a divine plan as revealed in the Qur'an and hadith.⁹

In contrast, for Aristotle, like all Greek thinkers, humans have the ability to be moral because of our rational capacities, not our relationship to God. Nevertheless, Miskawayh justifies adopting Greek philosophy by asserting that it affirms the existence and unity (*tawhid*) of God. And his facility with Greek philosophy means that he is able to use it in the service of Islamic thought about morality. For instance, it is not a typographical error that Miskawayh misquotes Aristotle's pagan conception of "Gods" (*theon*) as a monotheistic "God" in his Islamic application: this is necessary because within the Islamic worldview good character is not only about intellectually discerning the right thing and acting on this, but also, and more importantly, about being in right relationship with God as vice-regents on earth.

IV. MORAL ANTHROPOLOGY: THE SOUL

Chapter one of *The Refinement of Character*, "The Principle of Ethics," begins with a lengthy discussion of the doctrine of the soul. In the preamble, Miskawayh justifies this decision. The goal of his book, he tells us, is to provide a theory of good character and practical guidance. "The way to this end is to understand, first of all, our souls: what they are, what kinds of thing they are, and for what purpose they have been brought into existence within us."¹⁰

For Miskawayh, the soul is a self-subsisting entity fundamental to the moral life (Leaman 1998). More specifically, he adopts the Platonic duality of soul and body, and it

is clear that for him the soul is the more noble. He even implies that it is the part of human persons that is more approximate to God since the soul is what desires closeness to God:

The fact that the soul longs for that which is not bodily, is concerned to know the realities of the divine, desires and prefers what is superior to the bodily, and turns away from the pleasures of the body to seek those of the intellect—all this demonstrates to us clearly that its substance is much higher and nobler than that of bodily things, for it is impossible for anything to desire what does not pertain to its nature or to turn away from what perfects its essence and sustains its substance.¹¹

Within the soul itself, and following Plato, Miskawayh describes three faculties: (1) the “kingly” rational faculty (the source of our ability to think and reflect); (2) the “beastly” concupiscent/appetitive faculty (the source of our ability to desire physical pleasure); and (3) the “leonine” irascible (the source of our ability to express anger and self-esteem).¹² The refinement of character is successful when the rational soul achieves dominance, allowing the virtues to come into balance.

V. CORRESPONDING VIRTUES

About halfway into chapter one, Miskawayh transitions from discussing moral psychology, through the Platonic doctrine of the soul, to practical virtue ethics, in which the faculties of the soul correspond to specific virtues. Anyone familiar with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* will recognize Miskawayh's debt to this work in *The Refinement of Character* well before he mentions the Greek philosopher by name in the second chapter. In particular, he draws heavily from Aristotle in his formulation of what virtue is and what the process of moral development looks like.¹³

For Miskawayh, “virtues” are dispositions related to faculties of the soul. “Character” he describes as a two-part state of the soul, involving both natural and moral virtue. On the one hand, there is the natural temperament of an individual that determines her character. On the other hand, there is the part of character that is “acquired by habit and self-training. This training may have its beginning in deliberation and thought, but then it becomes, by gradual and continued practice, an aptitude and a trait of character.”¹⁴ This process of training, which begins as a struggle, requires the repetition of moral acts, and the formation of a habit. Good habits, in turn, help cultivate virtues. Virtues, once obtained, are stable character traits insofar as they are permanent parts of a state of the soul that “go all the way down,” so that to have a virtue is to be a certain sort of person.¹⁵ A virtue, as opposed to a habit, effects multiple actions and causes a person eventually to perform a variety of moral actions without deliberation. Miskawayh writes, “Our object in this book is to acquire for ourselves such a character that all our actions issuing therefrom may be good and, at the same time, may be performed by us easily, without any constraint or difficulty.”¹⁶

Following Aristotle's doctrine of the mean, the virtues are conceptualized by Miskawayh as a form of moderation (*i'tidal*) or proportion (*nisba*) between two extremes so that acting virtuously is acting moderately:

Virtues are means between extremes . . . Putting it in general terms: The center of a circle is at the extreme distance from the circumference, and if a thing is at the extreme distance from something else, then it should, from this point of view, fall on the diameter. In this way, we should understand the meaning of a virtue as a mean, for it lies between vices and at the extreme distance from them.¹⁷

Miskawayh names four primary or cardinal virtues. Three correspond to the three-part Platonic soul: wisdom (the virtue of the rational soul), temperance (the virtue of the concupiscent soul), and courage (the virtue of the irascible soul). And then when all three of these virtues are found, the fourth virtue of justice follows.¹⁸ Thus for Miskawayh justice is both an additive, cumulative virtue and a separate, distinctive virtue.

As for justice, it is a virtue of the soul which it gets from the union of the three above named virtues [wisdom, temperance, courage], when the three faculties act in harmony one with another and submit to the discerning faculties so that they do not combat among themselves or follow their desires according to the dictates of their natures. The fruit of this virtue is the acquisition of an attitude which induces the person to choose always to be fair to himself in the first place, and, then, to be fair to others and to demand fairness from them.¹⁹

Miskawayh goes on to elaborate a number of "divisions of the virtues" for each of these primary virtues.²⁰ The possession of these sub-virtues constitutes a good preparation for the acquisition of the cardinal virtues.²¹ These are not exactly the same as Aristotle's virtues; for example, Miskawayh names six sub-virtues to wisdom while Aristotle names eight, but they are very similar.²²

Finally, central to Miskawayh's theory of virtue is that virtue is not abstract or merely cognitive, but rather performative. Having cultivated a virtuous soul is not the same as achieving moral perfection, nor is virtue merely intellectual. Morality requires action and deeds. As Miskawayh put it, a disposition to do the right thing "may have its beginning in deliberation and thought, but then it becomes, by gradual and continued practice, an aptitude and a trait of character."²³ The performative nature grounds an interest in both the political and social dimensions of the virtuous life, as well as disdain from individuals who withdraw from society in the pursuit of the good life in isolation.

VI. VIRTUE AND HAPPINESS

The goal of human life, according to Miskawayh, is *sa'adah*, most commonly translated as "happiness," in which virtue plays a key role. There are two characteristics of

Miskawayh's concept of happiness that help flesh out his understanding of virtue: levels of happiness and theological implications for happiness.

After providing an overview of other philosophical accounts of happiness (e.g., of Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle), our author states his own view that happiness comes in multiple levels. He explicitly names two, but a close reading of the text uncovers three. The first two types of happiness relate back to the Platonic human form: body and soul. Miskawayh argues that this dichotomy means that a human has two forms of virtue that are necessary for happiness: the "spiritual virtue" of the soul, "by which he is akin to the good spirits that are called angels" and the "bodily virtue" of the corporeal form, "by which he is akin to the animal."²⁴ He elaborates as follows:

So long as man is man, he cannot have complete happiness unless he achieves both states The happy man, therefore, is in one of two ranks: either he is in the rank of the bodily things, attached to their lower states and happy in them, while, at the same time, regarding the noble things, looking for them, desiring them, directing his efforts towards them, and rejoicing in them; or else he is in the rank of the spiritual things, attached to their higher states and happy in them, while, at the same time, observing the lower things, learning from them, reflecting on the signs of divine power and the evidences of consummate wisdom [in them], following their example, regulating them, pouring out goods on them, and leading them gradually to what is better and better to the extent of their readiness and according to their capacity.²⁵

Miskawayh considers bodily happiness to be imperfect. Having achieved bodily happiness alone, the individual remains partially unhappy "on account of the deceits of nature and sensual allurements which present themselves to him in his contacts, hindering him from what he is considering, preventing him from progressing as he should in these matters, and keeping him busy with his bodily attachments."²⁶ In contrast, the spiritually happy person is completely happy:

He has an abundant share of wisdom, and, by virtue of his spirituality, he abides among the higher beings from whom he derives the subtleties of wisdom; he is illuminated by the divine light; and he seeks to add to his virtues in the measure of the attention he gives to them and the lack of hindrances from them Nothing pleases him except the demonstration of this wisdom among the wise, and nothing gives him comfort except the company of those who are akin or near to him and wish to learn from him. Whoever attains this rank has attained the final and extreme happiness. He is the one who does not mind being separated from his beloved in this world, nor does he regret the enjoyments which he misses in it.²⁷

From Miskawayh's description, spiritual happiness has four characteristics: it is a form of intellectual achievement (note the reference to wisdom), it is detached from worldly concerns (note the reference to not regretting missing worldly pleasures), it is continuously cultivated (note the reference to adding to virtues), and it is "illuminated by the divine light."

This last characteristic deserves additional attention because it implies that both a belief in God and perhaps even divine action are required for true happiness. Take the following passage, for example:

[The completely happy individual] is the one who regards his body, fortune, and all the goods of this world . . . as a burden upon him in all but the necessary needs of his body to which he is attached and from which he cannot be set free until his Creator so wills. He is the one who longs to associate with his kindred and to meet the good spirit and the chosen angels who are akin to him. He is the one who does nothing but that which God wants him to do, who chooses only that which brings him near to Him, who does not disobey Him by following any of his whims or base desires.²⁸

In this state of happiness, the individual is rightly oriented to God, and thus chooses to do what he understands to be God's plan. This level requires not only proper bodily habituation (first level of happiness or corporeal happiness) and spiritual/intellectual habituation (second level of happiness or spiritual happiness) but also submission to God, which for Miskawayh in practice means submission to the *shariah* or Islamic law.²⁹ Miskawayh declares that he is drawing his conception of grades of happiness from a text titled *The Virtues of the Soul*, which he attributes to Aristotle. Scholars have refuted that this text was indeed penned by Aristotle, and even if it was, its Arabic translators must have taken liberties to insert Islamic terms and framing into the version Miskawayh quotes at length in Arabic.³⁰ Its dubious authorship aside, the text describes two ranks of happiness, bodily and spiritual happiness, but also mentions that at the "extreme end" of spiritual happiness lies "the purely divine virtue,"

in which the activities of man are all divine. Such activities are absolute goods, and when an activity is an absolute good, it is not performed by its doer for the sake of anything other than the activity itself This state is the last rank of the virtues, the rank in which man's actions come to resemble those of the First Principle, the Creator of all I mean that he gets to the point where he ceases to seek, by what he does, any fortune, or reward, or return, or increase, but where his activity itself is his aim.³¹

These references to divine virtue—which grounds a form of divine happiness and is attainable to only a few, but ultimately is the goal of human perfection—are why it is more accurate to say that Miskawayh assumes three types of happiness: bodily, spiritual, and divine. In other words, the highest form of refinement of character is only open to the believer.

VII. TENSIONS AND AMBIGUITIES

Miskawayh provides a complex theory of virtue acquisition. It is not a perfect theory, of course, and has its own interesting internal tensions that relate to ongoing debates in the

broader field of virtue ethics. By way of conclusion, I will discuss three: (1) the tension between the individual and social dimensions of ethics, (2) the proper role of the body in the cultivation of character, and (3) the possibility of grounding an account of virtue in a theory of mysticism.

One objection to virtue ethics is that it can support forms of egoism when it focuses on character formation as a process of personal cultivation.³² Miskawayh's theory of virtue is an important challenge to this critique because of the way he emphasizes the social, communal, and political aspects of the cultivation of character. It is true that much of Miskawayh's theory of virtue is focused on self-formation: virtue is acquired by an individual and thus on one level is a form of personal ethics. However, he understands the training of the soul to occur in public, with others, and ideally resulting in a form of corporate virtue.

Miskawayh makes clear that withdrawal from society is not the path toward moral perfection. This rejection of isolation is because in Miskawayh's virtue theory, character formation is not merely an individual process aimed at an individual result. In fact, he devotes the entire fifth chapter of *The Refinement of Character* to love and friendship:

We have already spoken of the need which people have for one another, and it has become clear that every one of them finds his completion in his friend and that necessity requires that they should seek one another's assistance. The reason is that men are born with deficiencies which they have to remedy and, as we have explained before, there is no way for any single individual among them to become complete by himself. There is, then[,] a genuine need and a demanding necessity for a condition in which diverse persons are brought together and combined so that they become, by agreement and harmony, as one single person all of whose [bodily] organs associate in the performance of the single act which is useful to him.³³

This emphasis on friends is not surprising, given that Miskawayh understands humans to be "civic beings" by nature.³⁴ It is also another place we can clearly see him drawing from Aristotle, for whom friendship is an external good needed for human flourishing.³⁵

Miskawayh's view of community involvement in the cultivation of character can be broken down into four levels. First, becoming virtuous requires support from and interaction with others. "Man, of all the animals, cannot attain his perfection by himself alone. He must have recourse to the help of a great number of people in order to achieve a good life and follow the right path."³⁶ In fact, the majority of the divisions of justice Miskawayh provides, such as generosity, altruism, and charity, are outwardly directed and dependent on a social context. Second, we need others to act virtuously insofar as interpersonal spheres of activity create occasions to be virtuous. In other words, true virtue requires not only dispositions but also an opportunity to act virtuously.³⁷ Third, our community and our social institutions help us see (or reflect on) our own process of character formation. Quoting al-Kindi, although reminiscent of Aristotle as well,³⁸ Miskawayh suggests that an individual who seeks virtue should consider others as mirrors in which to view the success and failures of his own character

cultivation because it is easier to seek and find the moral failings of others.³⁹ Finally, although Miskawayh is concerned with the perfection of the individual insofar as he tries to provide a theoretical and practical road map for character formation, the ultimate goal of virtue ethics is a just society with a sort of corporate virtue. Character formation becomes part of articulating and sustaining the distinctive Muslim morality, which becomes the necessary basis for political action within our contemporary pluralistic social contexts.

What of the proper role of the body in virtue cultivation? Muslims believe that completing certain bodily actions—such as prayer and fasting—are the “pillars” of a pious Muslim life. In other words, the Islamic moral life is performative insofar as repetitive behavior and physical habits are part of moral development. Miskawayh discusses the role of bodily actions in the cultivation of character in the following passage of *The Refinement of Character*:

Now, as the soul is a divine, incorporeal faculty, and as it is, at the same time, used for a particular constitution and tied to it physically and divinely in such a way that neither of them can be separated from the other except by the will of the Creator . . . you must realize that each one of them [i.e., the soul and the constitution] is dependent upon the other, changing when it changes, becoming healthy when it is healthy, and ill when it is ill . . . Thus we must inquire into the origin of the diseases of our souls. If it lies in the soul itself . . . we should try to remedy these diseases in the way which is appropriate to them. But if, on the other hand, their origin lies in the [physical] constitution or in the senses . . . then we should attempt to remedy it in the way which is appropriate to these diseases.⁴⁰

Using the analogy of health and disease for virtue and vice, Miskawayh points out that some vices originate in our physical constitution, and thus we should expect their treatment to have a physical component. He goes on to discuss how bodily practices are an integral part of character formation, just like physical activity is part of a healthy lifestyle.⁴¹ Some virtues can only be formed through proper bodily practice, just like some aspects of bodily health can only be acquired through exercise. Exercise that raises one's heart rate strengthens the heart. Lifting weights builds bone density. Physical corrections are part of a “healthy/moral” lifestyle. To become a more virtuous person, we must do certain things.

However, at the same time, the body is devalued in Miskawayh's virtue ethics insofar as bodily actions might be necessary for character formation, but they are not sufficient. First, as already discussed, the soul is posited as superior to the body in his theory of moral anthropology and psychology. The soul in “substance is much higher and nobler than that of bodily things.”⁴² Second, vices are located in the body: “As for the virtues themselves, they are not achieved by us until we have cleansed our souls of the vices which are their opposites—by which I mean the souls' wicked bodily passions and their vile beastly lusts.”⁴³ Third, Miskawayh's understanding of “divine virtue” requires a rejection of the body of sorts, or at least a level of perfection that is beyond our corporeal

existence. Quoting the aforementioned dubiously attributed Aristotle text, Miskawayh writes:

Man cannot attain [the culmination of happiness] until he loses all his will in regard to the outside world and all the accidents that affect the soul, and until his thoughts arising from these accidents die away and he is filled with a divine flame and a divine aspiration. He can thus be filled only when he becomes absolutely free from what is physical and is totally purified from it.⁴⁴

Here the body is only important insofar as it supports the soul's work to approach God. The body, and in fact the entire material world, is conceptualized as something to be overcome. Thus there is a tension: the body is necessary for the cultivation of character, but ultimately attachment to it and other forms of materiality impede an individual's progress through moral perfection to other forms of higher human perfection.

Rather than an inconsistency, what this tension actually highlights is Miskawayh's theological assumptions, especially how they relate to mysticism. Remember that for him the ideal is not someone who withdraws from the world for the sake of spiritual formation, but rather someone who is part of the social unit: "those who have sought virtue in asceticism and abstinence from association with other people . . . do not realize any of the human virtues we have enumerated."⁴⁵ But there is also a concern with being controlled by our bodily desires so that the ideal person "is involved in the world but not at its mercy."⁴⁶ These two ideas are held together in a form of Islamic mysticism, and although Miskawayh does not present a complete theory of mysticism here (in part because this would be uncommon in the genre *tahdhib*), his theory of virtue rests on one.

To philosophers, mysticism might seem an odd way to ground a theory of virtue. However, in Miskawayh's thought, Islamic mysticism plays a foundational role. It is also the key for explaining both tensions previously discussed (the tension between individual cultivation of character and a concern with egoism and the tension between bodily actions and the cultivation of inner dispositions). These are both related to the mystic's insistence on outer and inner dimensions of the ethical life.

In Islam there is a concern with the development of the outer (good deeds through obedience to law) and inner (spiritual and psychological) dimensions of human life. Both these concerns are theologically grounded: "The aim of the first is worship of God with a moral vision generally limited to norms and customs . . . specific to the Muslim community. While the aim of the second is realization of God with a moral vision potentially as unlimited as the unbounded presence of God."⁴⁷ Islamic mysticism, or Sufism, as it became known because of the garment of wool (*suf*) worn by early practitioners, is focused on the development of the inner human, or the human soul.⁴⁸ It is grounded in a covenant made between God and human beings described in Qur'an 7:172 that confirms the special intimacy between God and humans. The goal of Islamic mysticism can be described as trying to re-establish this union.⁴⁹

In terms of the first tension already discussed between individual and social virtue, Islamic mysticism is where a concern with egoism is grounded insofar as the mystic is suspicious of any ethical theory that focuses exclusively on the cultivation of an individual's character. Take *shariah* (Islamic law), the focus of the vast majority of work done on Islamic ethics in current scholarship. From the mystic's point of view, *shariah*-derived ethics is based on reward and punishment for doing certain deeds, and thus unintentionally risks cultivating a bad character (for example, creating the vice of greed) by making the ethical life ultimately one of self-interest. This is not to say that Islamic mysticism sees no role for the development of the outer; rather, its objection is to legal-moral knowledge "if not embodied beyond texts in the inner working of the human soul."⁵⁰

Islamic mysticism also helps explain the tension related to bodily practices in Miskawayh's virtue ethics. Early mystics, especially during the eighth and ninth centuries, did practice and valorize a form of asceticism that included detachment from the world. These early mystics believed that humans are corrupted by evil, which is manifested in our desire for earthly goods such as material objects, bodily pleasures, and personal relationships. But this early asceticism was problematic from an Islamic theological point of view for two reasons. First, it devalued God's material creation, and second, it implied human dualism insofar as the body was less important than the soul/spirit. There is an important shift in Islamic mystical thought and practice that can be seen as redefining asceticism from rejection of the world to living in harmony with one's environment. Peter Awn elaborates this new form of asceticism as follows:

Instead of being the pawn of his or her human instincts, the sufi is able to employ both interior strengths and the world of creation to foster continued progress. Asceticism, seen in this light, is transformed from the violent wrenching of spirit from matter enjoined by a dualistic perception of the universe into a force for moderation, temperance, and harmony. The good is to be found even in the world, for a healthy body, sharp mind, and integrated emotional life are assets, not deficits, to continued spiritual growth.⁵¹

Awn describes this as a shift from the ascetic mystic, motivated by the goal of overcoming evil, to the ecstatic mystic, motivated by the goal of union with God. The ecstatic mystic is the one who utilizes bodily practices in his spiritual development.

The fact that outer/practice and inner/spirit are linked for Miskawayh can be clearly seen through his opinion on pleasure. On the one hand, Miskawayh critiques the idea that bodily pleasure is the same as happiness, an idea he attributes to the ignorant masses. Seeking bodily pleasure is a form of slavery for him. But that does not mean bodily pleasure is prohibited; in fact, there is a place for it as a way to recuperation and energizing of the soul, thus allowing the individual to focus on intellectual and religious activities.⁵² There is also a way in which bodily pleasure can morph into spiritual pleasure. As the scholar M. Abdul Haq Ansari put it, first there is passive material pleasure, which is stimulated by embodied desires. Later comes an active form of pleasure, self-caused by a rational soul. "It is this spiritual pleasure which the soul enjoys in

its intellectual pursuits of moral virtues.”⁵³ We could add that there is a divine form of pleasure, open only to those individuals who are able to fully submit to God by overcoming their ego.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

Islamic ethics is the result of a long process of cultural assimilation of values and theories from pre-Islamic Arabia, Qur’anic teaching, historical examples of the Prophet recorded in hadith, Greek ideas of happiness, customs of conquered people, and other religious ethical systems.⁵⁴ Therefore Miskawayh’s understanding of virtue cannot represent Islamic thought on the theme entirely, but his work is an example of cultural assimilation, especially Greek philosophy, Islamic theology, and Sufism.

Miskawayh is among the most influential thinkers on Islamic understandings of the importance and method of cultivating a good character. In *The Refinement of Character*, he presents a Platonic and Aristotelian theory of virtue ethics that is consistent with Islam. Miskawayh thus eases the way for later Islamic thinkers, such as Ghazali and Razi, in which moral development has even stronger theological tones.

Miskawayh’s ethics are interesting beyond Islamic studies in part because he does resort to revelation to resolve theoretical difficulties. Through a distinct harmonization of personal and social implications for character and role of the body in the cultivation of character, he balances personal and political dimensions of character formation, which have implications beyond Islamic studies. For example, he provides us with a glimpse at how Neoplatonic and Aristotelian theories of virtue might differ when grounded theologically, a sophisticated way to think about the role of bodily practices in the cultivation of character, and how virtue ethics might be reconciled with both more inner-focused concerns of human perfection (such as mysticism) and more outer-focused concerns of human cooperation (such as political ethics).

NOTES

1. For an analysis of contemporary usage of the Islamic veil using the tools of Islamic virtue ethics, see Elizabeth Bucar, “Islam and the Cultivation of Character: Ibn Miskawayh’s Synthesis and the Case of the Veil,” in *Cultivating Virtue: Multiple Perspectives*, edited by N. Snow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 197–226. There I argue that virtue ethics allows an understanding of veiling as integral to the development of the virtue of modesty. This, in turn, aids our understanding of an important and frequently misconstrued tradition. I draw on portions of this essay in the present chapter.
2. My thanks to Jamie Schillinger for pushing me to clarify this point.
3. I prefer the term “Islamic ethics” to “Muslim ethics.” The former signals to me the intellectual work done by Muslims and non-Muslims alike to describe, explain, and critique what

- counts as morality within the Islamic tradition and community. The latter term implies that this work is only done by Muslim believers, which is not true in our contemporary context.
4. See, for example, M. Abdul Haq Ansari, "Miskawayh's Conception of Sa'adah" *Islamic Studies* 2 (1963): 317–335; Mohammed Arkoun, "Deux épîtres de Miskawayh" (Two Treatises of Miskawayh), *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* (Institut Français de Damas) 17 (1961–1962): 7–74; Badriddin Bhat, "Miskawayh on Society and Government," *Islamic Studies* 24 (1985): 29–36; Badriddin Bhat, "Miskawayh on Social Justice, Education, and Friendship," *Islamic Studies* 25 (1986): 197–210; Bucar "Islam and the Cultivation of Character: Ibn Miskawayh's Synthesis and the Case of the Veil"; Majid Fakhry, "Justice in Islamic Philosophical Ethics: Miskawayh's Mediating Contribution," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 3 (1975a): 243–254; Majid Fakhry, "The Platonism of Miskawayh and its Implications for His Ethics," *Studia Islamica* 43 (1975b): 39–57; Oliver Leaman, "Miskawayh," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, edited by S. H. Nasr and O. Leaman (London: Routledge, 1996), 252–257; Oliver Leaman, "Miskawayh, Ahmad ibn Muhammad (c. 940–1030)," in *Muslim Philosophy* 1998, www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/rep/Ho42; Oliver Leaman, "Secular Friendship and Religious Devotion," in *Friendship East and West: Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by O. Leaman (Richmond: Curzon, 1996), 251–262; Constantine Zurayk, "Preface," in Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character* (Beirut: Kazi, 2002).
 5. The Greek philosophical canon that Miskawayh would have had access to was handed down and somewhat transformed via Neoplatonic mergings of Aristotle and Plato, as well as Christian theological interpretation. It is worth noting that in Miskawayh's text, the reflection on the Qur'an and hadith is implied rather than stated. In fact, there are few to no direct references.
 6. In order to harmonize these two thinkers, he draws help from Neoplatonic and Stoic authors, for instance Porphyry (d. 304) and Galen (d. 199). Fakhry, "Justice in Islamic Philosophical Ethics: Miskawayh's Mediating Contribution."
 7. "The philosopher succeeds admirably in bridging the gulf between the Platonic, introverted conception of justice, and the more open-ended, extraverted Aristotelian and Stoic conceptions. The two principles of mediation, as we have seen, were the Aristotelian concept of happiness as the active exercise of the moral and intellectual virtues, in which human nature is thoroughly fulfilled and approximates the divine; and the Stoic, peripatetic table of the subdivisions of the genus justice into a series of sub-virtues which guarantee its expansion, so to speak, into the world of inter-subjective relations." Fakhry, "Justice in Islamic Philosophical Ethics: Miskawayh's Mediating Contribution," 251.
 8. Ahmad ibn Muhammad Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq* (*The Refinement of Character*), translated by Constantine Zurayk (Chicago: Kazi, 2002), 1.
 9. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq* (*The Refinement of Character*), 33.
 10. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq* (*The Refinement of Character*), 1.
 11. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq* (*The Refinement of Character*), 8.
 12. Fakhry points out that this trichotomy of the soul is found in earlier Islamic thinkers as well, such as Al-Razi (d. 925), Yahi Ibn 'Abi (d. 974), and the tenth-century group of Arab philosophers known as the Ikhwan al-Safa' (Brethren of Purity). Fakhry, "The Platonism of Miskawayh and Its Implications for His Ethics," 45; Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq* (*The Refinement of Character*), 14–15.
 13. This borrowing is to be expected in a work of Islamic philosophy, because Aristotle is referred to as simply "the philosopher" (al-hakim) or "the first teacher" (al-mu'allim al-awwal) in classical Islamic thought.

14. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 29.
15. Rosalind Hursthouse, "Normative Virtue Ethics," *ETHICA* (2013): 645.
16. The complexity of the role of cultivation of character within Miskawayh's theory of virtue ethics is helpfully fleshed out through the example of the moral education of boys in the end of the second chapter. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 1, 50–55.
17. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 22.
18. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 15–17.
19. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 17.
20. The divisions of wisdom are intelligence, retention, rationality, quickness of understanding, clarity of mind, and capacity to learn. The divisions of temperance are modesty, sedateness, self-control, liberality, integrity, sobriety, benignity, self-discipline, good disposition, mildness, staidness, and piety. The divisions of courage are greatness of spirit, intrepidity, composure, fortitude, magnanimity, self-possession, manliness, and endurance. The divisions of justice include friendship, concord, family fellowship, recompense, fair play, honest dealing, amiability, and piety. I do want to imply that that Miskawayh was gender-inclusive, but there are ways in which his language can be updated to remove some of the most glaring patriarchal implications. For instance, he defines "manliness" as "the inspiration to perform great deeds in expectation of a good reputation," which in contemporary usage might be reworked at "aspiring to a good reputation," which could apply to a virtue for both men and women. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 17–20.
21. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 17.
22. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 20.
23. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 29.
24. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 75.
25. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 75–76.
26. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 76.
27. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 76–77.
28. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 77.
29. The concept of otherworldly happiness is made more explicit in Al-Ghazali's later work. For instance, in addition to cardinal and bodily virtues, he specifies divine virtues such as divine counsel and support. Majid Fakhry, "Ethics in Islamic Philosophy," www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/rep/Ho18 (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1–7.
30. S. Pines, "On Averroes' Political Philosophy," *Hebrew Letters* 8 (1957): 65–83.
31. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 79.
32. Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics and the Charge of Egoism," in *Morality and Self-Interest*, edited by Paul Bloomfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 205–221; Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Christopher Toner, "The Self-Centeredness Objection to Virtue Ethics," *Philosophy* 81 (2006): 595–618.
33. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 123.
34. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 25; For a larger discussion of Miskawayh's notion of friendship, see Lenn Goodman, "Friendship in Aristotle, Miskawayh and al-Ghazali," in *Friendship East and West: Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by O. Leaman (Richmond: Curzon, 1996), 164–191; Oliver Leaman, "Secular Friendship and Religious Devotion," in *Friendship East and West: Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by O. Leaman (Richmond: Curzon, 1996), 251–262.

35. For example: "It is also surely paradoxical to represent the man of perfect happiness as a solitary being; for nobody would choose to have all the good things in the world by himself because man is a social creature and naturally constituted to live in company. Therefore the happy man also has this quality, because he possesses everything that is naturally good; and it is clearly better to spend one's time in the company of friends and good men than in that of strangers and people of uncertain character. It follows, therefore, that the happy man needs friends." Aristotle, *The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by J. A. K. Thomson, edited by Jonathan Barnes (New York: Penguin, 1976), 1169b16–21.
36. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 25.
37. Miskawayh writes, "For he who does not mingle with other people and who does not live with them in cities cannot show temperance, intrepidity, liberality, or justice. On the contrary, all the faculties and aptitudes with which he is equipped are nullified, since they are not directed toward either good or evil. And when they become nil and cease to perform their own distinctive actions, those who possess them are reduced to the rank of inanimate objects or dead people." Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 26.
38. See, for example, Aristotle's reference to friends as mirrors in *Magna Moralia*, 1213a13–26, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, edited by Jonathan Barnes, translated by St. George Stock (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).
39. "The seeker of virtue should look at the images of all his acquaintances as if these images were to him mirrors in which he can see the image of each one of these acquaintances as each of them undergoes the pains which produce misdeeds. In this way, he will not fail to notice any of his own misdeeds, for he will be looking for the misdeeds of others. Whenever he sees a misdeed in some one, he will blame himself for it as if he had committed it and will reproach himself exceedingly on its account." Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 169. Aristotle makes a similar point in regard to the importance of others to our self-knowledge: "we are better able to observe our neighbors than ourselves, and their actions than our own." Aristotle, *Ethics: NE*, 1169b33–35.
40. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 157–158.
41. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 159–160.
42. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 8.
43. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 10.
44. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 80.
45. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 25–26.
46. This social dimension applies to legal (both religious and secular) understandings of ethics as well, since fulfilling the law requires support from and interaction with others. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 45.
47. Paul Heck, "Mysticism as Morality: The Case of Sufism," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 34 (2006): 255–256.
48. The famous Persian Sufi Ansari (d. 1089) does a fascinating linguistic analysis of the root letters of *suf*, demonstrating their connection to important virtues. "The *sufi* derives his name from wool (*suf*). When he puts on wool, he seeks to accomplish what it requires. In fact, the word *suf* consists of three letters, *sad*, *waw*, and *fa'*. With the *sad* he embraces sincerity (*sidq*), purity (*safa*), firmness (*salabat*), patience (*sabr*), and integrity (*salah*); with the *waw*, loyalty (*wafa*), union (*wasl*), and ecstasy (*wajd*); and with the *fa'*, freedom from sorrow (*faraj*) and joy of like (*farah*), so that wearing wool has its full meaning for him." Abdullah Ansari of Herat, *Mukhtasar fi adab assufiyya*, as quoted by Gerhard Böwering, "The Adab Literature of Classical Sufism: Ansari's Code of Conduct," in *Moral*

- Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, edited by B. Metcalf (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 74.
49. Peter Awn, "The Ethical Concerns of Classical Sufism," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 11 (1983): 240–241.
 50. Heck, "Mysticism as Morality: The Case of Sufism," 280.
 51. Awn, "The Ethical Concerns of Classical Sufism," 246.
 52. Ansari, "Miskawayh's Conception of Sa'adah," 328.
 53. Ansari, "Miskawayh's Conception of Sa'adah," 328.
 54. Böwering, "The Adab Literature of Classical Sufism: Ansari's Code of Conduct," 62.

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CHAPTER 11

TURNING TO AQUINAS ON VIRTUE

CANDACE VOGLER

I. INTRODUCTORY

THOMAS Aquinas took much of the direction of his work on virtue from his understanding of Aristotle, but Aquinas had some challenges (or advantages) that Aristotle did not.¹ Aquinas had Augustine as an important predecessor, and in Augustine we confront an extraordinary thinker who was already intellectually and psychologically mature before the conversion experience that altered his understanding of good and bad in human life fairly dramatically. Although Aquinas recognizes the importance of childhood moral education, he can't hold that our characters are going to be pretty well set for us by the time we are young adults, partly because conversion experiences remain a possibility for us. But Aquinas's divergence from Aristotle on thought about when character is fully developed also stems from his sense that, quite apart from dramatic turning points, character development is an ongoing process for us: our very nature is such that even an adult human being with a full complement of acquired virtue is likely to err sometimes, and likely to have reason to regret some things she did or failed to do, said or failed to say, and thought or failed to think. The business of cultivating good character was, in Aquinas's view, ongoing and never entirely completed in an individual human lifetime. Finally, Aquinas recognized some God-given virtues, and there is no reason to suppose that God will time His gifts to line up with stages of life familiar from various literatures on moral development. In other ways besides these, Aquinas was painting on a broader canvas than Aristotle's. The cast of variously morally exemplary figures available to Aquinas included a great many saints who were neither especially privileged nor especially intellectually inclined. In all of these respects, Aquinas's understanding of virtue comes closer to some aspects of contemporary understandings of the challenge of the ethical than did Aristotle's.

Aquinas's work on virtue is of a piece with his theology, and this is part of the reason that he has received less attention than Aristotle from those studying virtue outside the confines of specifically Christian intellectual work. But Aquinas's understanding of what a virtue is and what a virtue does is helpful even if we do not share his faith, and his work on the nature and structure of the virtues takes us beyond what we have in Aristotle, even though Aristotle's work provides much of the material from which Aquinas develops his understanding.²

As a starting point for considering Aquinas's approach to virtue, consider the phrase "darkened intellect, disturbed passions, and disordered will"³ as a description of how things are for human beings generally. For some, the phrase has theological significance and points to the fall from grace. For others who occasionally read the newspaper, watch television, or lament things that family members, friends, neighbors, civic leaders, or other people do, the phrase may be no more than a concise description of our lot.

It is often hard for us to direct our energies toward long-term, lasting good when doing so would prevent us from pursuing more immediate gains, or toward the common good when that looks to be at odds with private advantage. This is a way of summarizing the trouble not just when we lie, cheat, steal, or commit acts like murder, rape, fraud, or torture (on however grand a scale), but also in the thousand small occasions when we are impatient, selfish, moody, dishonest, ungenerous, or foolish. Don't focus on the breathtaking commonality of bad judgment, bad responses, bad habits, and bad deeds. Focus instead on the extraordinary fact that perfectly ordinary people know better. We may not put this knowledge to good use. We may not seek to improve our own characters and actions. But we know better. And because we know better, we also know to be struck by our fellows' patience, kindness, justice, honesty, and courage. Given that one can notice the descriptive accuracy of the phrase "darkened intellect, disturbed passions, and disordered will" *without* advertent to revealed knowledge about God's acts, the fact that we know better should be striking.

It could be objected that this is a merely conceptual point. The phrase is about privation. It is not possible to understand privation without trying to frame some account of the good that is blocked, impeded, or otherwise made less by privation. Perhaps people just pick up on the implicit contrast. That could be. Picking up on the implicit contrast could even be how we know *what* to criticize in others and *ourselves*. Anyone who has deployed such material self-critically will understand the peculiar form of apparently self-generated humility that comes of vivid appreciation of her or his own failings.

The obvious way to make sense of this experience is to suppose that we are not utterly benighted. Some spark, some bright corner carries an understanding of the way in which we are, frankly, *a mess* by carrying some sense of what things might be if we were well ordered. Assuming, as seems plausible, that none of us has much experience with an entirely well-governed human being, we should be *at least* as struck by the fact that we know better as we are by the fact that we fall short. For Aquinas, cultivation of virtue helps to remedy disorder in our lives, and even though very few of us will develop harmonious reasonable practical orientations directed at good with or without discipline and training, Aquinas, like Aristotle, takes it that we are nevertheless drawn that way.

Fundamentally, we seek to pursue good and avoid bad,⁴ which is why we have it in us to work to improve ourselves in the first place.

II. BEFORE AND AFTER

For Aquinas, human nature as we know it is fallen nature—we are, he thinks, operating at a loss. Aquinas thought that original sin deprived humankind of original justice (as he says, over and over again).⁵

How did things stand for us before the fall, according to Aquinas?

Eileen Sweeney puts it this way: “What is strange about Aquinas’s view is that a purely ‘natural state’ of humankind has strictly speaking never existed; before the fall nature had a kind of supernatural strength, and after that, nature is somewhat, though not radically, depleted.”⁶

The “supernatural strength” in original justice was a matter of orientation and governance: the human’s higher powers were subject to God, the lower powers to the higher powers, and the body to the soul.⁷ In the prelapsarian condition, perfect rectitude of the will was possible. In the prelapsarian condition, humans could act on their innate love of God without impeding themselves. This is the sense in which the gift of original justice *perfects* human nature: it places our powers in proper order, given the kind of creatures we are.

Now, if we are committed to working on virtue without adverting to any tendentious religious views, it may seem that we should ignore work on fallen human nature—we do not think that there was any prior state of grace from which we fell. We do not think that being able to act from love of God without impediment constitutes the appropriate condition for a human being. Leaving God to the side, however, we could notice that, as far as we know, humans are the most powerful and psychologically complex animals—animals capable of so altering the world in which they find themselves that they change the climate, of finding themselves volitionally and emotionally frozen in the face of a thought, or filled with joy or sorrow or fear over a movie, a story, a song, or the view. Why *wouldn’t* such organisms find self-governance and an overall orderly, positive practical direction hard to achieve, quite apart from the vicissitudes of fortune?

In Aquinas’s view, order is what was lost to the species at its ancestral source through original sin. It seems plausible to suggest that, apart from revelation, there is no reason to think that perfect order was ever our ordinary condition.

If we find ourselves with a darkened intellect, disturbed passions, and a disordered will, our powers are not properly arranged or aligned. Now, it could be argued that inordinate inclinations or passions cloud the intellect seriously enough to pervert judgment, and so *make* the intellect dark. Those clouds are the source of the darkness. Perhaps this is what disorders the will. There are passages in Aquinas that suggest this, and certainly a lot of the symptoms that point to the disarray at issue in the phrase look to involve

excessive or deficient passions or inclinations. I will urge a slightly different interpretation of Aquinas's map of where we land after the fall.

The interpretation is fairly simple—what is lost is original justice; original justice is an ordering of mentality and will that allows us to direct ourselves to good appropriately; the darkening of the intellect *consists* in our finding ourselves in a situation where intellect is no longer directed to good, the lower powers are no longer subject to intellect, and the body is no longer subject to the mind. Just as the first is the most important in original justice, its loss is the most important loss incurred through original sin. Perception, emotion, inclination, passion, and volition no longer effectively operate in and from practical wisdom. Because of this, the passions are disturbed. Although it is most common to emphasize the ramifications of the loss of original justice in terms of the loss of the downward subjections—intellect to good, lower powers to higher powers, body to soul—one could just as easily emphasize the upward inclination toward good that is impeded by the loss of original justice. Impediment, notice, is not the same as obliteration.⁸ The corrective supplied by virtues like temperance, fortitude, justice, and prudence (practical wisdom) is meant to address the loss of the kind of governance proper to our natures, given the kind of creatures that we are, and to begin to reintegrate our powers—or at least to foster cooperation among them—in a way that helps to rectify the will. In effect, for our kind of intellect—the sort that an animal can embody—and for our kind of animal—the sort endowed with intellect *as such* oriented to the highest good possible for us—the darkening of the intellect is the loss of the order in inclination and governance that helps us to direct ourselves to the goods it belongs to us to pursue.

III. HIGHER AND LOWER CREATURES

According to Aquinas, the complexity of human nature as we know it is such that we share some tendencies with other animals and other tendencies with angels. Aquinas, for example, quotes Gregory with approval: “man senses in common with the brutes, and understands with the angels.”⁹ But in trying to get a grip on this and many other passages, it is tremendously important to pin down *what* is supposed to be shared across diverse kinds of creatures, and *how*. And here, I think, the fact that Aquinas recognizes more than one kind of cognition is a tremendous philosophical advantage.

Now, most contemporary philosophers use the terms *reason* and *rational* to cover many aspects of specifically and distinctively human mentality. That is, the term covers at least the whole of what gets translated as *reason*, *understanding*, and *intellect* in Aquinas. The standard philosophical view has it that many species of animals have fundamentally similar powers of sense and appetite, but that humans have an extra power—reason—that is, as it were, added onto the animal to give us the human.¹⁰ Many of us nowadays reject this thought because we think that it is a mistake to treat reason as though it were, in Matthew Boyle's phrase, an “add on.” Boyle distinguishes what he calls “additive” accounts of reason from “transformative” accounts. He writes,

The crucial difference between additive and transformative theorists is not that additive theorists admit, whereas transformative theorists deny, that the minds of rational and nonrational creatures have something in common Additive theorists advocate a certain way of understanding what we have in common with nonrational animals: they hold that there must be a distinguishable factor in rational powers of perception and action which is *of the very same kind* as the factor which wholly constitutes merely animal powers of perception and action. Transformative theorists, by contrast, locate the similarity between rational and nonrational mentality in a different sort of explanatory structure. They hold that rational mentality and nonrational mentality are different *species* of the *genus* of animal mentality. What the two “have in common,” on this view, is not a separable factor that is present in both, but a generic *structure* that is realized in fundamentally different ways in the two cases. Rational and nonrational animals do not share in the sensory and conative powers of *nonrational animals*; they share in the sensory and conative powers of *animals*, where this is a generic category of power that admits of two fundamentally different sorts of realization.¹¹

This is a very different understanding of the way in which we “sense with the brutes” from the way that holds that the cats and humans who live in my apartment have the same animal mentality, but that the humans have reason added on top of this in some way that accounts for the difference between ordering a burger at the restaurant and meowing when hungry.

There are passages in Aquinas that look to be amenable to an “additive” interpretation of Aquinas’s account of human mentality. But crucial passages resist this reading. Some of the clearest are in Aquinas’s discussion of why Christ was a human being but not a human person. Aquinas writes,

[F]rom the union of the soul and the body in Christ a new hypostasis or person does not result, but what is composed of them is united to the already existing hypostasis or Person. Nor does it therefore follow that the union of the soul and body in Christ is of less effect than in us, for its union with something nobler does not lessen but increases its virtue and worth; just as the sensitive soul in animals constitutes the species, as being considered the ultimate form, yet it does not do so in man, although it is of greater effect and dignity, and this because of its union with a further and nobler perfection, viz. the rational soul . . .¹²

And when Aquinas discusses, for example, the powers of the soul, it is fairly clear that his focus is on what Boyle calls “generic categories” that admit of fundamentally different kinds of realization. Consider, for example, the varieties of realization at issue in inclination or tendency or appetite for Aquinas. Even if, as Anthony Kenny recommends,¹³ we confine our attention to Aquinas’s thought about living things and reject the Aristotelian metaphysics that gives us fire tending toward heaven and stones tending toward earth—and it is not clear to me that any account of movement or change involving middle-sized physical objects can dispense with tendencies, even if we recognize different tendencies than Aristotle did—Aquinas seems to have what Boyle calls general

categories of processes in view, and to be alive to radical differences in the ways these are realized in different kinds of creatures.

Aquinas even has the material necessary to hold that *reason* (as contemporary philosophers use the term) is also a category that admits of what Boyle calls “fundamentally different sorts of realization.” Angelic intellect, for example, is fundamentally different from human intellect in Aquinas,¹⁴ and Aquinas allows for varieties of nonhuman animal reason as well.¹⁵ Angels may be the only nonhuman creatures endowed with what Aquinas calls *intellect*, and are certainly the only nonhuman creatures he credits with free will, but they are *not* the only cognitively complex nonhuman creatures.

It is not that our somehow *nonhuman* modes of appetite and sense took the reins through original sin, and so clouded the clean, cool operations of our distinctively human reason. I may become ferocious over some things, but my fury is human fury, not the ferocity of a mother bear protecting her cubs. On the transformative interpretation, if I am by turns cowardly and foolishly bold, I am experiencing and acting from specifically human cowardice and specifically human rashness. Notice that what counts as cowardly in one of us may have *no* counterpart among other animals. Consider: adult human beings can make themselves sick with worry over the prospect of hurting someone’s feelings, or can convince themselves that the need to avoid such a calamity is reason enough to tell lies. Even if other kinds of animals sometimes deliberately mislead, it is hard to imagine a nonhuman animal doing so for fear of hurting someone’s feelings.

I have focused on inordinate irascibility. The same holds true, I think, for inordinate concupiscence. Narrowly, on the best account I can see of it, and the one frequently at work in Aquinas, concupiscence concerns the appetite for delight as such, with special emphasis on sensual delight. It helps to remember that temperance is supposed to *moderate* sense appetite, not obliterate it, just as fortitude is supposed to *moderate* irascibility rather than destroy it. Aquinas takes it that there cannot be such a thing as a natural inclination toward good or away from bad that is somehow inherently wicked. Concupiscence and irascibility are inclinations toward good, away from or against bad (especially sensible good and bad, but on a transformative interpretation, these will be inflected *by* reason, even if they are not obedient *to* reason).

On the transformative interpretation, the force of *inordinate* in discussions of passions and actions is *disorderly*, given the kind of creatures that we are. The point of calling some aspects of our nature “higher” and others “lower,” on the transformative interpretation, is to signal that some aspects of our nature are supposed to at once regulate and attract other aspects. So, for us, *qua* intellectual creatures, the practical requirement to pursue good and avoid bad points to the need to direct ourselves toward what will perfect creatures of our kind, as best we can understand that. Like all organisms, we need to maintain ourselves and to reproduce; like all mammals, we need to care for our offspring (appropriately regulated human desire *ought* to direct us toward what conduces to these things, and turn us away from or against what blocks or impedes them). As human beings, we need the society of our fellow human beings (again, reason and desire suitably directed by justice ought to enable us to enjoy well-ordered human society). As intellectual creatures, we need what reason shows us is the highest good, and

this need is meant to help us regulate, order, and coordinate our activities and pursuits. It is not a separate need that sits off at a distance from the others. *All* of these needs are the needs of imperfect beings for what will complete or perfect them. What will complete or perfect any imperfect being just is what will complete or perfect a being of its kind. The striving toward perfection is not obliterated by original sin. What is lost is, instead, original justice as the condition in which the human's longing for its own fulfillment and completion governed the whole of its operations. The unity of the virtues, on this view, follows straightforwardly from the qualities needed to unify and order human life in pursuit of good.

On the transformative reading of Aquinas, the job of the virtues is to foster cooperation of the specifically human being's higher and lower powers in an overall pursuit of specifically human good, and so offer a partial correction for our disordered mentality, will, and acts. Seven virtues are the most important for Aquinas—four cardinal virtues (practical wisdom/prudence, justice, temperance, and courage), together with three theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity). For non-theist neo-Aristotelian virtue theorists, the cardinal virtues will be the more interesting.

IV. CARDINAL VIRTUES

Aquinas offers an account of four acquired virtues as the principal virtues: practical wisdom/prudence,¹⁶ justice,¹⁷ courage,¹⁸ and temperance.¹⁹ Aquinas spells out in some detail why these are cardinal virtues and how we need all of them to act well without impeding ourselves.

Following Aristotle broadly, Aquinas takes it that a virtue brings the full and appropriate actualization of a human power—one that allows for both the upward inclination of passions and appetite toward reason and the downward governance of passion and appetite by reason actualized in overall pursuit of the good. Michael Pakaluk puts the point this way:

A virtue is a trait that . . . makes someone such that his activity—what he does, what he is responsible for—is reasonable. But there are four basic types of such activity: his thinking itself, as practical and directed at action; his actions ordinarily so-called . . . ; and how he is affected. This last category splits into two, Aquinas thinks, on the grounds that acting reasonably in the realm of the passions involves regulating both the passions by which we are drawn to something and the passions by which we are repulsed from something. These two sorts of passions imply two sorts of tasks or achievements . . . which the ordinary distinction between the virtues of temperance and courage confirms (*ST I-2.61.2* resp.).²⁰

Aquinas's account of virtue relies heavily on these points from Aristotle. Aristotle's work is broadly consistent with treating practical wisdom ("prudence" in Aquinas's terminology) as the virtue responsible for sound practical thinking and judgment—it is a virtue

of the intellect directed to the will. Justice (for Aquinas) is a virtue *of the will* directed at extra-mental actions—primarily those that concern giving each his due.²¹ Jean Porter underscores this point and urges taking its full generality seriously:

As a virtue of the will, justice is the only cardinal virtue which directly concerns the distinctively human capacity for rational desire. Moreover, it is the cardinal virtue directly concerned with external actions, and as such, it includes most of the norms of nonmaleficence and respect for others . . .²²

As Pakuluk noted, temperance and courage are virtues of passions: temperance renders attractions to desirable things reasonable, and courage is charged with reasonable aversion—principally, with controlling our fear so that we can be appropriately steadfast. Crudely, then, prudence corrects for darkened intellect in the practical sphere, temperance and courage for disturbed passions, and justice for a disordered will. Aquinas thinks that he takes from Aristotle an understanding of practical wisdom, justice, temperance, and courage as the four cardinal, principal virtues, all of which must be cultivated if one is to lead a good human life.²³

V. SECONDARY VIRTUE

Now, contemporary virtue theorists recognize many virtues that played no part in Aristotle's work—hope, for example, and humility and gratitude. For Aquinas, hope as a virtue belongs among those strengths of character that are divinely infused. Accordingly, I will leave hope to the side for the moment. Humility and gratitude, however, can count as acquired secondary virtues in Aquinas. Secondary virtues are annexed to cardinal virtues to fortify and assist the operation of the cardinal virtues. For example, at the most general level of description, justice renders external actions (actions that are not merely mental actions) reasonable, especially as these concern giving others their due. A secondary virtue like gratitude disposes me to be alert to what I owe to others, and so helps to focus justice in practice by highlighting a distinctive aspect in which I owe things to others—I owe some recognition of what they have done for me quite apart from the kinds of owing familiar from promises and contracts. In this sense, cultivating gratitude helps to strengthen and focus one aspect of justice in me, by making others' work on my behalf salient for me, and so helping me to cultivate a broader and more nuanced understanding of their due. All acquired virtues—cardinal and secondary—have their source in our efforts to build good character, their object in the proper order of human mentality and action, and their end is a good individual human life, and any quality that counts as a virtue (acquired or infused) counts because it tends to perfect our powers (where perfecting a power is a matter of strengthening it in a way that allows it to work in coordination with other powers toward our good). For Aquinas, all of the acquired virtues (cardinal and secondary) enable their bearer to participate effectively and appropriately

in pursuit of common good. This is how Aquinas takes up Aristotle's point that acquired virtues are political.²⁴

Unsurprisingly, Aquinas treats gratitude as properly annexed to justice.²⁵ The virtue that we name *humility* involves aspects of justice that Aquinas treats under the headings of *religion*, *piety*, and *respectfulness for those in authority*.²⁶ Again, humility helps to direct my sense of what others are due by informing my relationship to my religious community, to God, and to those who have legitimate authority over me, imbuing my understanding of plain duties of obedience with a sense of my proper strengths and limitations in these spheres, and of what I owe to those who give me a place to work, a way to engage in a community of worship and the very stuff of that worship, and, most generally, the natural and supernatural good that may be possible for me. All of these belong to the virtue that directs me to give others their due. But the secondary virtues help to focus, specify, and direct distinctive aspects of my character as it directs me to give others their due, partly by helping me to develop a more fine-grained understanding of the kinds of things that I owe to others and by helping me develop the habits and emotional responses that enable me to honor these things in practice.

As is true for hope in Aquinas, and for any acquired virtue on his scheme, gratitude and humility also may be treated as virtues that go beyond anything we can conjure on our own through discipline and training, and beyond a strength directed at a good life for an individual human being. They may be treated as virtues whose object and aims involve goods beyond temporal happiness. Such are the infused virtues in Aquinas. Hope is an infused virtue for Aquinas—a gift from God, with God as its object and source and with beatitude as its end.²⁷

All of the acquired cardinal virtues have infused counterparts in Aquinas's scheme. This aspect of Aquinas's thought has been the subject of tremendous controversy, even among scholars friendly to Aquinas's work in general.²⁸ I agree with those who argue that infused virtues are indispensable for Aquinas. Given the object, source, and end of infused virtues, non-theist moral philosophy cannot simply adopt Aquinas's work on the topic.

VI. INFUSED VIRTUE

Aquinas has several ways of distinguishing between habits that tend to foster coordination of our powers in pursuit of human good. He notices isolated dispositions to good actions that need not be connected with other such dispositions—good qualities that are not connected in the way that proper virtues are. Think here of the difference between strength-training regimes that result in especially powerful targeted muscle groups without tending to produce overall bodily health and strength. Isolated dispositions to good action are like bulging biceps in an otherwise weak body. Proper virtues, however, are connected in ways that tend to overall strength of character, that is, to coordinated and cooperative powers working harmoniously to guide our pursuit of human

good.²⁹ Acquired moral virtues are governed by, and inclined to be governed by, prudence/practical wisdom. Virtuous dispositions in this sort of case work together—they are connected and coordinated, jointly equipping us for reasonable pursuit of temporal good. Infused virtues, on the other hand, order mentality, will, and actions to supernatural good—to beatific union with God in a resurrected life, to *totious vitae* (eternal life in union with God).

Isolated good habits are imperfect virtues on this scheme. Coordinated, unified good habits governed by prudence/practical wisdom are proper, acquired virtues, and acquired virtues equip us to act from and in accordance with appropriate standards governing reasonable pursuit of temporal good under the circumstances we face, in light of the particular skills and such that we bring to the challenge of leading good lives. Aquinas further distinguished acquired from infused virtue by pointing to the different rules governing human action at issue in the operations of the two sorts of virtue. Angela McKay (Knobel) puts the point this way:

Whereas Aquinas's first distinction has to do with whether or not a virtue brings man into conformity with a rule, his second concerns with *which* standard of action the virtue brings man into conformity. Virtue can either bring man into conformity with the rule of action "*homogenea et propria homini*"—namely, into conformity with right reason—or it can bring man into conformity with a higher rule, "*prima mensura transcendens, quod est Deus*." The two "rules" correspond to the distinction between infused and acquired virtue. Aquinas consistently bases the distinction between infused and acquired virtue on the fact that man needs different virtues insofar as he is brought into conformity with different "rules" or standards of action The virtues that perfect man in a manner commensurate with his created nature are acquired virtues, while those that bring man into conformity with the "*prima mensura transcendens quod est Deus*" must be infused by God. Only the latter, Aquinas states, are virtues *simpliciter perfectae*. The former are perfect only in a sense, insofar as they bring man into conformity with the good commensurate to his nature.³⁰

Some scholars hold that Aquinas has, as Denis Bradley put it, a twofold understanding of human good.³¹ There is the good at issue in the non-accidentally sound production and reproduction of human social life—the good at issue in acquired virtue. Then there is the good made possible by grace through salvation—the eternal good of union with God in a resurrected life. Through the joint operation of acquired and infused virtue, the acquired virtues are, as it were, elevated by contributing to directing individuals to temporal good while keeping eyes fixed on the highest good possible—only made possible for us by the grace of God. Infused virtues are coordinated by *caritas*—God's love. In this sense, *caritas* unites all of our powers and efforts by orienting them to the highest good there is for human beings.

Caritas is often translated as "charity," but *charity* has come to mean something like giving to those in need—a kind of generosity. *Caritas* is God's love, and if I am blessed with *caritas*, I become capable of getting myself far enough out of the way for God's love

to work through me toward others. This could, of course, inspire me to make donations to the Red Cross or volunteer in a soup kitchen, but ordinary benevolence or generosity could do that. *Caritas* is wider and deeper. In *caritas*, something of God's love for his creatures can move through me, creating a situation in which God's love embraces me and others all at once. For example, there are some kinds of forgiveness that look more like the work of *caritas* than the products of human restraint and generosity, and a gift of *caritas* may be what makes it possible for otherwise ordinary human beings to show utter commitment to the lives and well-being of perfect strangers—strangers who are not in any way especially remarkable or attractive, but who have deep need for more than ordinary exercises of compassion, devotion, and love. Although, if you believe in *caritas*, it is easiest to suspect its workings in these circumstances, the gift of *caritas* orders all of the other virtues, giving all of them a source in God's love for creation.

Think back for a moment on the image of human life before the fall when lower powers were subject to (and inclined to be subject to) higher powers, and higher powers were subject to (and inclined to be subject to) God. *Caritas* restores something of this kind of order and coordination in our intellectual, emotional, volitional, and active lives. Human beings can work to become good vessels for God's love, but *caritas* remains entirely gratuitous.

An admittedly inadequate pedestrian example might help here. Consider a man who volunteers a lot of his time working with at-risk children in his community, and suppose that he works from cultivated justice, temperance, courage, and a measure of practical wisdom. He sees the children as his fellow human beings, and has deep convictions about the importance of helping our fellow human beings make their way in the world, especially when they are struggling with very difficult circumstances. And when the children are difficult (as children often are), he draws on a reserve of patience and understanding of the things that can make it hard to work with children in tough circumstances to get him through, even when he knows full well that it is highly unlikely that all of his charges will have good, solid, productive lives, no matter what he does with or for them. Our man's acquired virtue enables his work.

Suppose, now, that our man is a Christian and not only has a cultivated good character, but divine gifts of faith, hope, and *caritas* that jointly imbue his good character with transcendent focus and direction. He and the children are fellow creatures. Every human being he meets is a person for whom Jesus died. Through prayer, communal sacramental practices, and the like, he comes to see the children he helps as people given into his care by God, and senses that these are eternal beings—that he owes them not just the kind of respect owed to all human beings as such, but the subtle shift in respect for dignity that comes of an appreciation of the sanctity of human life. His hope for his charges is infused hope, not just a kind of optimism that some of them might beat the odds and have good lives. He seeks guidance in prayer. And, on the whole, even though he may, in some sense, do many of the same things that any virtuous person might do for the children under the circumstances, he sees his work with the children as expressive of his faith and answerable to a very high standard—a standard that none of us could meet without significant help from God. And something of the state of his own soul is at risk

in his work with the children—he needs to be especially honest, open to correction, fair, wise, and so on because the work has the character of a vocation.

Given Aquinas's understanding of the operation, aim, and source of infused virtue, it is difficult to bring Aquinas's discussion of infused virtue into contact with contemporary non-theistic virtue ethics. I suspect that one aspect of the gratuitous work done for us through infused virtue, however, can find a home in standardly non-theist virtue theory by a kind of rough analogy.

VII. HIGHER GOOD

Return, for a moment, to Aquinas on the loss of original justice. In the more-than-merely-natural state of original justice, *all* the powers characteristic of human nature were well ordered, and this affected *all* the operations of the thereby integrated human being. I take it that the chief sense in which our intellect is darkened through original sin is just this: original sin impedes the ordering of reason to good. As such, it impedes the coordinated operations of all other aspects of human mentality in the service of genuine good. Infused virtue is a gift from God that takes God as its object and union with God as its end. Put into the terms of what Thomists treat as temporal life—human life as we know it and live it—some virtues are oriented to higher goods—goods that go beyond the flourishing, even the capacities, of an individual human being, goods that are inherently transcendent, although only in terms of temporal good.

In this sense, acquired gratitude will focus on the goods we have as specific benefits given to us, personally, by other people. For example, recent empirical research on gratitude treats gratitude as personal and triadic—I owe some specific benefactor gratitude for a specific benefit intended for me in particular.³² The Thomistic framework covers triadic, personal gratitude as an aspect of acquired justice. But the basic framework will also cover cases in which I am grateful for the opportunities that I enjoy because members of past generations made good possible for my generation. This form of gratitude—transpersonal gratitude—finds cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral expressions in my work on behalf of future generations and my understanding that other people whose names I may never know made possible the good that I enjoy. The Thomistic understanding of justice will explain how transpersonal gratitude contributes to my interest in amplifying and carrying forward the good I enjoy because of others' struggles.

Nothing I do can transform acquired virtue into infused virtue. In this sense, there is no link between exceptional, transpersonal, and cross-generationally focused acquired gratitude and infused gratitude. But acquired virtue can be enlarged in its scope and deepened at its foundation in such a way that it exceeds the limits of triadic gratitude without thereby losing all focus on the specific detail and texture of human life as I live it. The enlargement mimics in an incomplete and worldly way the kind of breadth and power that come with gifts in infused virtue. Looking for these kinds of admittedly flawed analogies could provide a useful shift in focus for non-theist virtue ethicists,

perhaps the only thing a non-theist virtue ethicist could gain from thought about infused virtue in Aquinas.

VIII. BY WAY OF A CONCLUSION

I began by pointing out that one didn't need revealed knowledge about God's acts in order to appreciate the descriptive accuracy of the phrase "darkened intellect, disturbed passions, disordered will" as a reasonable diagnosis of how things are with us. I mentioned that I thought that when we make errors in thought, action, judgment, and response, we very often know better, and that the fact that we somehow know better is at least as interesting as the fact that we fail. In this very brief and rapid tour through some of Aquinas's work, I have attempted to use a transformative interpretation of Aquinas on intellect as a way to begin to get at the sense in which we know better, even if the many errors that we make are made routinely by most of the other people with whom we interact. Given this picture of temporal human life, Aquinas develops a strongly corrective account of virtue. I think that since even atheistic philosophers *can* embrace the catchphrase diagnosis of the human condition, and since we understand the whole human person as directed to good, we ought to embrace a corrective account of virtue. One other obvious alternative is to follow Aristotle even more closely than we like and to emphasize that only a handful of exceptionally privileged men can even hope to attain virtue anyway, so widespread disorder is of no great importance. Very few contemporary theorists of virtue are willing to follow Aristotle there.

The monumental task for mainstream neo-Aristotelian ethics will come in giving some account of the nature of the good that is supposed to orient the whole human being, and of how it is that something of this good makes itself felt in beings who find themselves in the kind of mess and muddle that apparently is our lot. It is one thing to point out that we see in ourselves an apparently insatiable appetite for some kind of fulfillment that appears to be forever just out of reach. Nothing is easier than amassing anecdotal evidence for some such point. But it is another thing entirely to give an account of the good at issue that is meant to unify both the person and those specific virtues that help to steady her aim at this good. The challenge of doing so without adverting to divinity is immense.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to Hank Vogler and Jay Schleusener for discussion of earlier drafts of much of the material in this chapter. Various altered partial drafts of the chapter were read at the 2015 annual conference of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues in Oxford, to the Departments of Philosophy at the University of St. Paul and Wheaton College, and at the

Metaphysics of Morals Conference at the New York University Catholic Center in winter and spring of 2015. Audiences at those events helped me to shape and revise some of the material in this chapter.

2. In what follows, I will make reference to various of Aquinas's works: *Sent*: Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard (*Scriptum super libros Sentiarum*) (1252–1256); *SCG*: Summa Contra Gentiles (*Tractatus de fide catholica, contra Gentiles [contra errors infidelium]*) (1261–1263); *ST*: *Summa Theologiae* (1265–1273); *De Malo* (*Questiones disputatae de malo*) (ca. 1272); *SLE*: *Nicomachean Ethics* (*Sententia libri Ethicorum*) (1271–1272); *Exposito in Epist. ad Roman*: Commentary on the Book of Romans (*Exposito in s. Pauli Epistolas*) (ca. 1273); *Compendium Theologiae* (*Compendium theologiae ad fratrem Reginaldum socium suum carissimum*) (ca. 1273).
3. The phrase has something of the status of a slogan these days. It may have appeared initially as a distillation of some of the phrases used by St. John of the Cross (1542–1591) to describe the soul's journey, but St. John of the Cross was likely drawing on turns of phrase already familiar in the early sixteenth century.
4. See, for example, Aquinas, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, lect. 1; and Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, q. 94, a. 2.
5. According to M. Grabmann's chronology (*Die Werke des Hl. Thomas von Aquin*, 2nd ed. [*Beträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters*, Band XX, 1–2, (Münster: Aschendorff, 1931)]), the order of the chief texts in support of the view that the fall deprived us of original justice is the following: (1) II *Sent.*, d. 20, q. 2, a. 3; d. 29, q. 1, a. 2; d. 32, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1; (2) IV *SCG*, c. 52; (3) *ST*, I, q. 95, a. 1, c and ad 5; q. 100, a. 1, c and ad 2; (4) *De Malo*, q. 4, a. 2, c and ad 1 and 2 (*e tertia serie obi.*); q. 5, a. 1; (5) *ST* I–II, q. 82, a. 3; (6) *Expositio in Epist. ad Roman*, c. 5, lect. 3; 7) *Compendium Theologiae*, c. 186, c. 192, and c. 196. See De Letter, "Original Sin, Privation of Original Justice," *Thomist* 17 (1954): 469–509, for a strong defense of this claim that Aquinas held that original sin deprives the human being of original justice. Some newer translations of the *Summa Theologiae* render *iustitia originalis* as "original righteousness" rather than "original justice." And, in a move that may have nothing to do with Aquinas, the Catholic Church now teaches that original sin deprives humankind of sanctifying grace. These points may well be connected ("righteousness" sounds like something that belongs to an individual person, and sanctifying grace is a personal gratuity). I will work with the older translation.
6. Eileen Sweeney, "Vice and Sin (Ia IIae, qq. 71–89)," in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, edited by Stephen J. Pope (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 158.
7. Aquinas, II *Sent.* d. 20, q. 2, a. 3; IV *SCG*, c. 52; *De Malo*, q. 4 & 5; *ST* I, q. 95, a. 1, q. 100, a. 1; *ST* I–II, q. 82, a. 3. Aquinas adds a fourth subjection in his commentary on Romans: before the fall, exterior things were subject to humankind such that they served the human and the human was not harmed by them (*Expositio in Epist. ad Roman*, c. 5, lect. 3).
8. I am grateful to Jay Schleusener for pressing me on this point.
9. Aquinas, *ST* I, q. 54, a. 5: *Homo sentit cum pecoribus, et intelligit cum angelis*.
10. Anselm Winfried Müller calls this kind of view "the new dualism." See Müller, "The Concept of a Person in Bioethics," in *Philosophy and Medicine*, 2011, Vol. 111, Pt. I: 85–100.
11. Boyle, "Additive Theories of Rationality: A Critique," September 2011 manuscript, 6–7. An earlier draft of the manuscript circulated under the title "Tack-On Theories of Rationality."
12. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, q. 2, a. 5.

13. Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind* (London: Routledge, 1993), 59–63.
14. See, for example, Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, qq. 54–58.
15. See, for example, the sketch of brute animal judgment and how it differs from human judgment, Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, qq. 83.
16. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, qq. 47–56.
17. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, qq. 57–122.
18. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, qq. 123–140.
19. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, qq. 141–170.
20. Michael Pakaluk, “Structure and Method in Aquinas’s Appropriation of Aristotelian Ethical Theory,” in *Aquinas and the Nicomachean Ethics*, edited by Tobias Hoffmann, Jörn Müller, and Matthias Perkams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 39.
21. As in scholarship on Aristotle’s treatments of justice, scholarship on Aquinas’s attempts to develop Aristotle’s work on justice is deeply divided and controversial. For a good survey of the relevant fields of dispute, see Jeffrey Hause, “Aquinas on Aristotelian Justice: Defender, destroyer, subverter, or surveyor?” in *Aquinas and the Nicomachean Ethics*, edited by Tobias Hoffmann, Jörn Müller, and Matthias Perkams, editors (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 146–164.
22. Jean Porter, “The Virtue of Justice (IIa IIae, qq. 58–122)” in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, edited by Stephen Pope (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 272.
23. For detailed discussion of Aquinas’s reading of Aristotle, see, for example, T. H. Irwin, “Historical Accuracy in Aquinas’s Commentary on the Ethics,” in Tobias Hoffmann, Jörn Müller, and Matthias Perkams, editors, *Aquinas and the Nicomachean Ethics*, 13–32.
24. For an excellent discussion of Aquinas and Aristotle on this point, see Brian J. Shanley, O.P., “Aquinas on Pagan Virtue,” *The Thomist* 63 (1999): 553–577.
25. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, qq. 106–107.
26. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, qq. 101–105.
27. For an excellent historical discussion of the detail of Aquinas’s categorization of the virtues in terms of their objects, their sources, and their ends, see William C. Mattison III, “Thomas’s Categorizations of Virtue: Historical background and contemporary significance,” *The Thomist* 74 (2010): 189–235.
28. For a good summary of the controversies surrounding discussions of the relation between infused and acquired virtue in Aquinas, see Angela McKay Knobel, “Two Theories of Christian Virtue,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84(3) (2010): 599–618. See Michael S. Sherwin, “Infused Virtue and the Effects of Acquired Vice,” *The Thomist* 73 (2009): 29–52, for a defense of the claim that Aquinas is importantly committed to the view that there must be infused counterparts to acquired cardinal virtues.
29. For a discussion of this point in connection with understanding Aristotle on the mean and on unity of the virtues, see Anselm Winfried Müller, “Aristotle’s Conception of Natural and Ethical Virtue: How the Unity Thesis Sheds Light on the Doctrine of the Mean,” in *Was ist das für den Menschen Gute?*, edited by Jan Szaif and Matthias Lutz-Bachmann (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 18–53.
30. Angela McKay, “Prudence and Acquired Moral Virtue,” *The Thomist* 69 (2005): 535–555.
31. See Denis J. M. Bradley, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997).
32. See, for example, J. B. L. Feitas, M. A. M. Pieta, and J. H. R. Tudge, “Beyond Politeness: The Expression of Gratitude in Children and Adolescents,” *Psychologia* 24 (2011): 757–764.

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CHAPTER 12

VIRTUE IN HUME AND NIETZSCHE

CHRISTINE SWANTON

I. INTRODUCTION

At first sight at least, Hume and Nietzsche are starkly different in their approaches to ethics: so much so that it may appear odd to treat them together within a collection on virtue. Hume's "sentimentalism" has been seen to be a forerunner or inspiration to an ethics of care or compassionate love, or on utilitarian readings, benevolent concern for humanity as a whole (what Hume terms 'mankind').¹ Nietzsche, by contrast, is seen as an egoist of a rather unattractive kind, denigrating altruism, self-sacrifice and "bourgeois" virtues such as "public spirit, benevolence, consideration, industriousness, moderation, modesty, forbearance, pity."²

In defending a virtue ethical reading of these philosophers, my book *The Virtue Ethics of Hume and Nietzsche* treated them for the most part separately;³ here I wish to draw comparisons focusing mainly on their similarities. In this comparison, the primary aim is to open up an appreciation of these thinkers as central figures in normative ethics within a suitably realist and objectivist tradition, as opposed to their being some form of subjectivist, irrationalist, or skeptic. To achieve this, it is essential to understand the centrality of virtue and vice concepts in their thought, and the sophisticated naturalistic accounts of properties denoted by those concepts. In the case of Hume, this understanding is achieved through close reading of the rich psychology of the passions contained in Part II of the *Treatise*, "The Passions," previously neglected in older interpretations of Hume as a moral philosopher, and in those focusing on his later work, the *Enquiries*, where much of the riches of the *Treatise* was eliminated.⁴ In the case of Nietzsche, the relevant psychology is the depth psychology heralding the psychoanalytic movement.⁵ In particular, such understanding involves taking seriously what Nietzsche calls his "developmental theory of will to power."⁶ This 'theory' has normative implications, most

saliently the multifarious distortions and vicissitudes of the “will” or the developmental need to grow and expand, as manifested in many forms of vice.

The following discussion shows how both Nietzsche and Hume should be read as response dependence theorists within a naturalistic framework. Their conception of the ethical is considerably broader than that which (to my mind) mars the analytic tradition, with its focus on narrow notions of the “moral.”⁷ That breadth is marked by the remarkable number of virtue and vice concepts that populate their writings, particularly those of Nietzsche.

II. PLURALISM AND ANTI-SYSTEMATIZATION

Let us first provide some inkling of the range of the ethical in Nietzsche and Hume, which contrasts so markedly with modern writing in ethics. As Haidt notes, with the change in intellectual climate in the industrial era, utilitarianism and deontology embodied in the thought of Bentham and Kant “became far more appealing to ethicists than Hume’s messy, pluralist, sentimentalist approach.”⁸ We might note that Nietzsche is even messier and more pluralistic than Hume, and was vitriolic against simplification, abstraction, and systematizing tendencies in philosophy generally.

Hume’s efforts to put ethics on a more scientific footing should not be seen as a plea for systematicity and increasing abstraction: on the contrary, his attack on the theological rationalists is targeted at the search for “immutable eternal fitnesses” and the efforts to secure moral certitude through ‘demonstration’:

There has been an opinion very industrially propagated by certain philosophers, that morality is susceptible of demonstration; and tho’ no one has ever been able to advance a single step in those demonstrations; yet ’tis taken for granted, that this science may be brought to an equal certainty with geometry or algebra.⁹

Hume’s overriding desire was to make ethics subject to empirical investigation. Nonetheless, “the attack of the systematizers” is still in full swing, and it is only with the welcome and increasing penetration of philosophical ethics by psychology of various kinds (such as attachment theory, social and social cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, and psychoanalysis) that the domination of ethics by abstract conceptual and logical tools alone has suffered inroads.¹⁰ In this quiet revolution, the thought of Hume and other sentimentalists, notably Adam Smith, is becoming central, and on the psychoanalytic front, that of Nietzsche.¹¹

How then does “messiness and plurality” manifest itself in Hume and Nietzsche, and how can this be seen as a welcome sensitivity to the complexity of normative reality? In his *The Righteous Mind*, Haidt makes the following claim:

Moral judgment is a kind of perception, and moral science should begin with a careful study of the moral taste receptors . . . Hume got it right. When he died in 1776, he and other sentimentalists had laid a superb foundation for “moral science,” one that has in my view, been largely vindicated by modern research.¹²

In particular, Hume countenances all the moral taste receptors recognized by Haidt, and more, discussing, as does Haidt, the passions and virtues associated with them. Here is Haidt’s list of what he calls the “moral foundations.”¹³

Care/Harm: compassion; caring, kindness.

Fairness/Cheating: anger, gratitude, guilt; fairness, justice, trustworthiness.

Loyalty/Betrayal: group pride, rage at traitors; loyalty, patriotism, self-sacrifice.

Authority/Subversion: respect, fear; obedience, deference.

Sanctity/Degradation: disgust; temperance, chastity, piety, cleanliness.

Haidt later adds a sixth foundation:¹⁴

Liberty/Oppression

Hume recognizes all these foundations and engages in rich discussions of their associated passions. Cleanliness, (appropriate) deference, modesty, and chastity are all virtues for Hume. Liberty for Hume is a “foundation,” for it is not itself a virtue but a basic condition necessary for the exercise of the will and the possibility of the choice that makes our lives meaningful. There are associated virtues and vices—non-virtuous exercise of liberty is licence; vices of oppression include injustice and cruelty, and on the side of the subject owing allegiance, over-eagerness to resist or rebel without a natural “repugnance to practise resistance ourselves.”¹⁵

Hume’s ethical reach is even more wide ranging than Haidt’s, for he also recognizes joy, hope, and love (of many kinds). Continuing with Haidt’s terminology, we might say that the Hope/Despair foundation recognizes a fundamental human need for basic hope in the future and the security of our environment; the Joy/Curmudgeonliness foundation testifies to the importance for a good life of joyous appreciation of the beautiful, the pleasurable, and the sublime and the need to avoid what Hume calls the “monkish” vices. The Love/Hate foundation, with its associated virtues of tenderness, kindness, affection, and gratitude, and vices such as envy and malice, recognizes the fundamental human need for bonding and attachment, and is not reducible to the Care/Harm foundation. Love, as Hume makes clear in the *Treatise*, is not reducible to benevolence (desire for another’s good) or even care, being a quite complex “indirect” passion.¹⁶

What is noteworthy is that both Hume and Nietzsche recognize disgust as a ‘taste,’ homing in on degradation/contamination not reducible to harm in the standard wellfarist sense.¹⁷ Many things are “disgustful” to the person of refined educated taste for Hume, including “abjectness of character” (see later discussion) and “dissolute mirth”:

Cheerfulness could scarce admit of blame from its excess, were it not that dissolute mirth, without a proper cause or subject, is a sure symptom and characteristic of folly, and on that account disgusting.¹⁸

Nietzsche is even more serious about disgust, recognizing it as something to be “overcome” in our search for greater strength. Rather than these thinkers treating disgust as something totally outside the range of the ethical, they recognize the “taste” as something not necessarily reliable; one may be too easily disgusted, or one may be disgusted at the wrong things.

A difficulty with Haidt’s emphasis on moral taste *receptors* inspired by Hume causes him, however, to miss out on aspects emphasised by Nietzsche. This is the aspect of ethics concerned with the will, notably the will involved in creativity and productivity with their associated virtues and vices. Taking seriously Nietzsche’s emphasis on the “ethics of creativity” and dependent virtues such as discipline and hardness as central to the good *productive* life encourages the introduction of another “foundation”: the Creativity/Sloth foundation, where the extreme of vice for Nietzsche on the Sloth side is “will-lessness.”¹⁹

Despite problems with the idea of taste “receptors,” Humean sentimentalism reflects the contemporary preference (by no means universal) for perceptual rather than judgmental models of emotion, which for both Hume and Nietzsche lie at the heart of virtue and vice. On the perceptual model, by contrast with the judgmental, the content of an emotion is not a proposition, and the emotion is thus not an attitude toward the proposition. Rather, it is an appearance of a certain kind, and the appearance is cognitive, that is, targeted at and revelatory of truth.²⁰ The snarling dog appears to us as frightening, fearsome, an appearance that is subject nonetheless to rational appraisal as, for example, wholly justified, exaggerated, illusory, neurotic, accurate, and so forth. In other words, emotions have a rational role for the perceptualist, as they do for Hume: indeed, the following explication from Doring nicely captures Hume’s own view:

My claim is . . . that the emotions’ rational role is analogous to that of perception in that the contents of emotions are non-inferentially related to the contents of other mental states, including other emotions. Only in this sense I say that emotions are perceptions. There are a number of obvious disanalogies between emotions and sense perceptions, starting with the fact that emotions do not have organs or transducers. None of these disanalogies undermines the analogy, since all that it requires is that both sense perceptions and emotions have an intentional content of a certain kind, thanks to which they play a non-inferential role in justifying relations.²¹

This is completely consistent with Hume’s much misunderstood view that the passions do not represent. He means by this that the content of an emotion is not a proposition, not that they cannot have intentional content or play a rational role in one’s beliefs.

Nonetheless, the basic account of emotional perceptualism: “. . . to fear *x* is to perceive *x* as fearsome” still looks altogether too passive and receptive, but this

problem is overcome, I believe, with Roberts's perceptual-construal account of emotion.²² Construal is an active process involving judgmental and conative states and can well apply to the "will"-oriented emotions so emphasized by Nietzsche. The significance of differing construals and interpretations of aspects of reality is particularly marked in Nietzsche, with his constant contrasts between the construals of the weak and the strong; the life affirming and the life denying; the neurotic and the healthy. In fact, for Nietzsche all emotions have an interpretive and conative dimension; hence he speaks frequently of a variety of different "wills," for example, the "will to truth," where the weak manifestations of that will manifest vice, notably the resignatory intellectual vices of the philosopher who craves abstraction and purity, and interprets the world accordingly.

Contemporary cognitive psychology bears out Roberts's "construal" account of emotion. Particularly salient in the marriage of virtue theory and psychology is the emergence of literature on CAPS traits (personality as cognitive affective processing systems) and their application to the study of character. These facilitate construals of situations such that "the repeated activation" of sets of variables comprising the traits (such as beliefs, expectations, goals, emotions) "can result in stable personality structures—traits or dispositions."²³

III. THE NATURE OF VIRTUE IN HUME AND NIETZSCHE

Virtues are normally understood as complex dispositions of character involving ratiocinative, affective, and motivational states that bear on specific areas of life: the fields or domains of concern of the various virtues. For a trait to be a virtue, one must be well disposed in respect to these states: that is, a virtue is a good or excellent trait of character. It is normally thought to be the case that for this to be so, there must be some integration between the virtues, but for Hume and Nietzsche this is a far cry from espousal of a strong version of the "Unity of the Virtues" thesis associated with Aristotle: to have one virtue you must have them all. Both Hume and Nietzsche eschew one model or exemplar of virtue.²⁴ Furthermore, not only is there "great variation in the way that virtues and vices may be combined and integrated in the same person," but it is also the case that "all kinds of virtue and vice run inevitably into each other, and may approach by such imperceptible degrees as will make it very difficult if not impossible to determine when one ends, and the other begins."²⁵

The fields of the virtues include the full range of concerns that make for a good life and include the welfare of others, dealings with the environment, conversation (the field of the dialogic virtues), promises and entitlements, and dangerous or threatening situations. It is characteristic of virtue ethics to give centrality to the thick concepts in ethical theorizing, so that the welfare of others, for example, is not just a matter for benevolence, but also for kindness, caring, sensitivity, compassion, generosity, and so on. For Hume

and Nietzsche, particularly the latter, there is a very large range of concerns proper to virtue, with a correspondingly large range of virtues both in number and scope. Since Hume's virtues are more accessible within taxonomies (see later discussion), let me illustrate with a number of Nietzsche's (including corresponding vices).

- (i) Virtue: (OVERFLOWING) GENEROSITY
The "gift giving" virtue(s).
Vice: PITY
Escape from sense of personal vulnerability
- (ii) Virtue: FORGETFULNESS
Strong ability to forget slights and harms.
Vice: VENGEFULNESS
Revenge for humiliation.²⁶
Vice: BITTERNESS
Not being able to let go of anger at sense of being wronged.
Vice: WEAK FORGETFULNESS
Repression of, disowning of, the unpleasant.
- (iii) Virtue: SOLITUDE
"Escape from the sick."²⁷
Vice: LONELINESS
"Escape of the sick."²⁸ Escape from sense of impotence—the feeling of being unable to cope with others.
- (iv) Virtue: SOLITUDE or (LIMITED) FRIENDSHIP
Vice: EXCESSIVE SOCIABILITY
Escape from being yourself.
- (v) Virtue: MORAL/INTELLECTUAL COURAGE
Not being slavishly imitative.
Vice: MORAL/INTELLECTUAL COWARDICE
Fleeing one's uniqueness
- (vi) Virtue: STRONG ASCETICISM; SUBLIMATION/SELF-DISCIPLINE
Vice: SELF-PUNISHING ASCETICISM
Self-hate, especially of one's body, with resultant need to escape the flesh.
- (vii) Virtue: TRUTHFULNESS, HONESTY
Vice: HYPOCRISY
- (viii) Virtue: TRUTHFULNESS/DISPOSITION TO SEEK TRUTH
Vice: THE "ABSOLUTE WILL" TO (ABSOLUTE) TRUTH
- (ix) Virtue: TRUTHFULNESS/HONESTY
The recognition of the need for self-overcoming.
Vice: COMPLACENCY, SELF-SATISFACTION
Escape from freedom into life of comfort, safety, ease.
- (x) Virtue: TRUTHFULNESS (in social presentation)
Vice: VANITY
Escape from unpleasant facts about oneself.

- (xi) Virtue: WISDOM
Vice: RESIGNATION (INTELLECTUAL)
Escape from world: from its impurity, complexity, messiness.
Philosopher's vice: Neediness for transcendent metaphysics.
- (xii) Virtue: SELF-PROTECTION
Vice: CALLOUSNESS/CRUELTY
Expansionist "triumphalist" externalized form of escape from self-contempt.
- (xiii) Virtue: (Strong) CREATIVITY
Vice: GRANDIOSITY
Escape from one's limitations, denial of truthfulness (self-knowledge).
- (xiv) Virtue: (Strong) CREATIVITY
Vice: IMITATIVENESS
Escape from freedom, one's uniqueness.
- (xv) Virtue: STRONG OVERFLOWING SELF-SACRIFICE
Loss of sense of self not through self-hate but from self-love, which externalizes into love of others.
Vice: WEAK SELF-SACRIFICE
Loss of sense of self through self-hate.
- (xvi) Virtue: PROPER MODESTY
Sense of proper place in the world, for example, in relation to the environment.
Vice: HUMILITY, MEEKNESS
Escape from sense of inferiority.
- (xvii) Virtue: JOYFULNESS, ZEST
Vice: LAZINESS
Escape from effort.
- (xviii) Virtue: TAKING RESPONSIBILITY
Vice: IRRESPONSIBILITY
Shifting blame from self-contempt.
Vice: EXCESSIVE SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY
- (xix) Virtue: INDEPENDENCE/COURAGE
Varies according to strength.
Vice: EXCESSIVE RECKLESSNESS/DARING
In the weak: escape from self.

In recent times, there has been much ado about the very existence of character traits within the context of the "situationist" debate in psychology.²⁹ In relation to Hume and Nietzsche, the debate has little importance since they do not espouse the demanding "global" and relatively immutable conception of character under attack by the character skeptics, as do supposedly Aristotle and the Aristotelians. Indeed, Slingerland argues in general against a dichotomy between "global" and "local" traits, claiming that

[a]nything that we can call a "trait" or a "disposition" is already more or less global or broad, which seriously undermines the blanket dismissal of "local traits" or "narrow

dispositions” as ethically irrelevant . . . local and global mark off opposite ends of a spectrum of abstraction rather than the sort of analytic dichotomy that the anti-globalist critique needs.³⁰

Certainly it is unclear just how “global” a trait needs to be for Hume or Nietzsche to call it a character trait, nor how enduring and robust it must be. Both thinkers understand virtue and vice as “human all too human” (Nietzsche) and relative to what is “common and usual” in human nature (Hume), and if the Aristotelian conception of character as a settled state of virtue or vice does not conform to human nature but is something of an idealization or ideal of perfection, then the notion of character will be correspondingly humanized for these thinkers. Hume does, however, distinguish character from motive, claiming that character is something durable or constant in the person. Furthermore, although action can be blamable for Hume, character is much more central to attributions of merit:

Actions are by their very nature temporary and perishing; and where they proceed not from some cause in the characters and disposition of the person, who perform'd them, they infix not themselves upon him, and can neither redound to his honour, if good, nor infamy, if evil.³¹

Nietzsche introduces many more complexities into his notion of virtue such that virtues are differentiated not only according to cultural and historical factors, but, given variability in personality, roles, and narrative particularity, are even claimed to be individual to the person who has them. Thus Nietzsche claims, “My brother, if you have a virtue and she is your virtue, then you have her in common with nobody.”³² These complexities are increasingly being recognized in the empirical literature, vindicating Nietzsche’s views. First, personality psychology recognizes broad dimensions of personality according to such factors as introversion/extroversion, threat sensitivity, agreeableness, and conscientiousness.³³ On my view, these broad dimensions of personality are not themselves virtues or excellences of character, but predict individual variation within the virtues (and corresponding vices) possessed by individuals. We can have the conscientious Nazi as well as the virtuously conscientious teacher, and the neurotically dependent but altruistic character high on agreeableness, as well as the self-loving, strong, altruistic type. Further, the individual nature of virtue (and its role, nature and salience in individual lives) will vary according to what McAdams and Haidt call the second level of personality: adaptations people make (to, e.g., abusive situations, poverty, expectations of parents on their offspring to go to university) as responses to the environment people live in, and the problems that they face. Finally, at the third level, “life narratives,” according to which people make sense of their lives and construct an identity, will individualize both virtue and vice.³⁴ As Nietzsche claims in a famous passage, one must “‘give style’ to one’s character” by fitting the strengths and weaknesses of one’s nature “into an artistic plan.”³⁵

IV. OVERCOMING SKEPTICAL READINGS

The chief reason for failure to take Hume and Nietzsche seriously as thinkers in normative ethics is the various types of skeptical reading that undermine appreciation of the central role played by their discussions of virtue and vice. Once these readings are questioned, we are in a position to understand that centrality as attaching to their *normative* thought, as opposed to “mere” psychology.

Consider first Hume. In his case, the main problem is the assumption that ethics is a matter of “sentiment” *rather* than reason. The *Treatise of Human Nature* has a section entitled “Moral distinctions deriv’d from a moral sense,” where Hume says “. . . since vice and virtue are not discoverable merely by reason, or the comparison of ideas, it must be by means of some impression or sentiment they occasion, that we are able to mark the difference betwixt them.”³⁶ How are we to understand this claim? The way sentiment features at the foundation of ethics is in a response-dependent way, a way that is compatible with a critical normative perspective on emotions, desires, and character traits.³⁷ Pride can be overweening, joy can manifest a disordered excessive enthusiasm, anger can be excessive, tenderness engaging, deference can manifest servility and general abjectness of character. Sentiment is not just a psychological given for Hume: it can be worthy of, or what he calls “naturally fitting” to, its object, or it can be in various ways disordered or inappropriate to its object, and criticizable accordingly. Where such disordered passions lie at the core of traits, the traits themselves constitute vice.

“Natural” fittingness presupposes a conception of naturalism applicable to Hume. Hume, as is well known, is an empiricist, more precisely subscribing to conceptual empiricism, the view that the content of all concepts can be traced to experience.³⁸ He also subscribes to what Price calls spare naturalism: “the view that natural science constrains philosophy . . . and that philosophy properly defers to science, where the concerns of the two disciplines coincide.”³⁹ As Hume claims,

. . . the most abstruse speculations concerning human nature, however cold and uninteresting, become subservient to *practical morality*; and may render this latter science more correct in its precepts, and more persuasive in its exhortations.⁴⁰

Though spare naturalism is compatible with metaphysical and religious postulates violating conceptual empiricism, much of Hume is devoted to rejecting these postulates. Hume then is both an empiricist and a spare naturalist. He does not, however, adhere to what McDowell calls “scientistic naturalism,” the view that the claims of ethics can be *derived* from and rendered true by the findings of natural science alone, that is, derived from scientific natural laws.⁴¹

The key to understanding the compatibility of Hume’s non-scientistic naturalism and his empiricism is his response-dependent sentimentalism. The way response dependence (RD) features in Hume’s meta-ethics can be summarized in the following view:

RD: An ethical property is response dependent if and only if the property is open to certain responses or construals in responders having appropriate sensibilities, and these responses or construals are what make the property intelligible as an ethical property. Without that mode of intelligibility, the property (such as being courageous, being generous, being amiable, or being patient), could not exist as an *ethical* property (namely a virtuous trait), though it could exist as a property determined by other modes of intelligibility.⁴²

RD is a thesis about the existence of ethical properties as *ethical* properties; in other words, it is a thesis about the very intelligibility of ethical properties. As Hume makes clear in his discussion of the aesthetic as opposed to the mathematical properties of a circle, properties are intelligible only through modes of intelligibility: for the aesthetic qualities of a circle we need an aesthetic sense; for the ethical mode of intelligibility we need a moral sense.⁴³ That is, Hume's naturalism is not of the scientistic sort: not all modes of intelligibility are reducible to the mode of the natural sciences.

What then is the moral sense? For Hume the moral sense is a sentiment of love (as a "calm" passion) of virtue and hatred of vice, but that sense exists only if its conditions, proper to human beings, exist. These are a general benevolence that is sufficiently extensive through the operation of sympathy, and a self-love which constrains that benevolence.⁴⁴ It is in this sense that sentiment lies at the foundation of ethics, but this does not mean that reason plays no role in ethical judgment or that such judgment cannot be warranted.

Confusion arises because "reason" is normally understood by Hume in a narrow sense where "Reason" is the Reason of the Understanding—a faculty that is conceived entirely independently of the passions and pleasure and pain. Such a faculty cannot judge what is reasonable in human conduct for which experience of appropriate emotion and other sentiments (notably benevolence combined with empathy and constrained by self-love), pleasure, and pain are needed. Hence (in notorious but much misunderstood passages) Hume claims,

Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger.⁴⁵

and

Tis not contrary to reason for me to chuse my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an *Indian* or person totally unknown to me.⁴⁶

Though such views are compatible with a Reason that is entirely abstracted from any properly human sensibility, they would not recommend themselves to one with a moral sense (a mode of intelligibility not possessed or even able to be possessed by fictitious beings endowed with Reason alone). For Hume views of that kind are pathological, monstrous, and inhuman, as he makes clear in several places, for example,

... where one is born of so perverse a frame of mind, of so callous and insensible a disposition, as to have no relish for virtue and humanity, no sympathy with his fellow-creatures, no desire of esteem or applause; such a one must be allowed entirely incurable, nor is there any remedy in philosophy.⁴⁷

Not everyone with a moral sense has an authoritative moral sense. For a moral sense to be authoritative, a number of further properties are required, notably a broad range of epistemic virtues. She with an authoritative moral sense is not prey to a number of epistemic vices discussed by Hume: credulity, obstinate incredulity, disorders of the imagination caused by and causing disordered passions and affecting both sentiment and belief. These include chronic melancholy and frenzied enthusiasm. Also looming large in epistemic vice is prejudice, partiality which blinds, inappropriate self-interest, lack of discernment, and general ignorance. She with an authoritative moral sense is likely to make warranted judgments about virtue and vice, but they are not necessarily true, on Hume's view. Facts necessary for true judgments about virtue (such as the actual systematic tendencies of traits to the "good of mankind") may not be known at a given time.

Let us turn now to Nietzsche. The two major skeptical readings of Nietzsche inhibiting appreciation of him as a serious moralist are reading him as an immoralist as a result of his attack on altruism, and reading him as a perspectivist where this is understood as a form of relativism. Let us briefly consider each of these readings in turn. Much has been written about the sense in which Nietzsche is an immoralist, and its compatibility with a kind of morality, albeit a revisionary one.⁴⁸ But Nietzsche's self-ascriptions as both an immoralist and an egoist do not help matters if we wish to see him as a philosopher having something to offer substantive moral theory:

... we shall restore to men their goodwill towards the actions decried as egoistic and restore to these actions their *value*—*we shall deprive them of their bad conscience!*⁴⁹

However, matters are not helped either if we do not pay close attention to the senses in which he decries altruism and valorizes egoism. In particular, I claim, the kind of egoism advocated by Nietzsche is what he calls a "mature" egoism ("the morality of the mature individual")⁵⁰ to be contrasted with a number of forms of immaturity: the immature egoism of instant gratification, an unsocialized egoism, and the self-sacrificing kind of altruism in which the self "wilts away"⁵¹ (see further Swanton 2014b, 2015a). To understand mature egoism in turn, it is necessary to understand both the virtues that characterize it, and the vices of immaturity and self-sacrifice constituting escape from self with which mature egoism is contrasted. For this, it is necessary to appreciate what are for Nietzsche the characteristic depth psychological springs of both virtue and vice as dispositions, as well as the depth motivations which those dispositions express when manifested on a specific occasion of action. (There is, of course, a danger of over-interpretation here.) The importance of these points is displayed in the following passage:

Let us for the time being agree that benevolence and beneficence are constituents of the good man; only let us add: “presupposing that he is first benevolently and beneficently inclined *towards himself!*” For without this—if he flees from himself, hates himself, does harm to himself—he is certainly not a good man. For in this case all he is doing is rescuing himself from himself *in others* . . . to flee from the ego, and to hate it, and to live in others and for others—that has hitherto, and with as much thoughtlessness as self confidence, been called “*unegoistic*” and consequently “*good*.”⁵²

Escape from self in various ways is a constant theme in Nietzsche since for him it is the root of vice. But escape from self (and the world) is a depth psychological construct for Nietzsche and the motivations characterizing such states are not to be read from “surface intentions.” Rather, we need to venture into the depths of the human psyche, for conscious psychological states are only a fraction of our psychological states in general:

For the longest time, conscious thought was considered thought itself. Only now does the truth dawn on us that by far the greatest part of our spirit’s activity remains unconscious and unfelt.⁵³

For Nietzsche, then, venturing into the depths must be central to a normative analysis of the psychological states at the heart of virtue and vice if our moral thought is not to be timid, shallow, and superficial: what has “decisive value” in action lies in its depths, rather than in its surface intention.⁵⁴ Like Freud’s dynamic theory of human psychology, Nietzsche’s postulates drive as energetic psychological forces that conflict with each other: “. . . every single one of them [drives] would be only too pleased to present *itself* as the ultimate goal of existence and as the legitimate *master* of all the other drives. For every drive is tyrannical . . .”⁵⁵ Such conflict, often waged at the unconscious level, is a natural feature of the human condition, and here Nietzsche is at odds with Aristotle, for whom psychic harmony is necessary for virtue.⁵⁶ For Nietzsche, what marks virtue from vice is not absence of psychic conflict, but the relative absence or otherwise of distorted resolution of it, such as regression to immature states (as in the perverted immature cruelty of the “nobles”), neurotic resentment, and escape from self and world characterizing the ascetic “ideal.”

Turn now to another feature provoking skeptical readings of Nietzsche: his perspectivism. In a well-known passage Nietzsche claims,

Perspectival seeing is the only kind of seeing there is, perspectival knowing the *only* kind of knowing and the *more* feelings about a matter which we allow to come to expression, the *more* eyes, different eyes through which we able to view this same matter, the more complete our “conception” of it, our “objectivity” will be.⁵⁷

It is clear that rather than deny the possibility of some objectivity, Nietzsche decries what I have called elsewhere “hyperobjectivity,” that is, the “view from nowhere,” the “point of view of the universe,” and so on.⁵⁸ Properly human objectivity—objectivity as a virtue—presupposes that we, limited as we are by our restricted perspective, must

counter this limitation by open-mindedness (a virtue for Nietzsche), that is, a willingness to see things through different eyes. Though Nietzsche does not say much about how different perspectives should be integrated, an issue addressed later by hermeneutic thinkers such as Heidegger's student Gadamer, this view is a far cry from relativism. Indeed, as Nietzsche frequently claims, some perspectives, notably the theological, are positively pernicious: "it is the most widespread, really *subterranean*, form of falsehood found on earth."⁵⁹

V. VIRTUE AND THE "MORAL"

One cause of the view that neither Nietzsche nor Hume is doing serious moral theorizing is that there is no clear role played by the concept of the "moral" in their discussion of virtue and vice. This encourages the view that they are interested only in the psychology of virtue. There are at least three reasons for the lack of salience of the "moral":

- (i) The very large range of virtues and vices.
- (ii) Rejection of the claim that the moral is essentially other regarding.
- (iii) Rejection of the view that morality is essentially impersonal and impartial.

We consider each of these features in turn. I have already noted the very large range of virtues and vices in both Nietzsche and Hume. What Russell calls "openhandedness" in relation to the virtues has caused a problem for virtue ethics—a problem applying to Hume and Nietzsche in particular.⁶⁰ This is what Russell calls in his excellent discussion the "enumeration problem," the problem that if virtues are infinite or uncountable and if accounts of right action and the virtuous agent depend on a notion of overall virtuousness, then we cannot determine which actions or agents are virtuous. I would prefer to say that for Hume and Nietzsche the virtues are indefinitely many, not just because they are too numerous for anyone to construct a complete list at a time, but because language is fluid, societies' interests and concerns change, and in this way virtues are culturally and historically situated within traditions (particularly for Nietzsche).

One way of dealing with the enumeration problem is to confine the virtues to a distinctive class of "moral" virtues—a solution that provides some sort of limit to openhandedness—but this potential way out is not available to Hume or Nietzsche. What is important for them is not hierarchy or even structure, but contextual determination about what virtues are in play in a given situation and which are salient, more important or stringent *in those circumstances*. What virtues are relevant in a *given* situation of action, for example, is countable from the point of view of the epistemically justified agent, even if we cannot specify at that time (or any other) all the possible virtues. In other words, we can be justified in calling a specific action overall virtuous even if it is not logically possible that all possibly relevant factors be "checked" (such as all the virtues and vices in an uncountable set).⁶¹ If this is so, we do not need a hierarchy containing

primitive or cardinal virtues from which others are derived (as Russell believes is necessary for solving the enumeration problem), and neither Hume nor Nietzsche provides such a hierarchy. In Hume's list of benevolent virtues, for example, virtues whose core passion is benevolence are not ranked higher or lower than those multifarious virtues whose core passion is that of love.

Though neither Hume nor Nietzsche admits a hierarchy of virtues, they (particularly Hume) provide taxonomies. Hume has three major very broad based taxonomies. The most important is the classification of virtues into those useful or agreeable to self or other, but as I argue, these features should not be seen as criteria (otherwise vices could be called virtues, as Hursthouse points out).⁶² The criteria, specifying what features make traits of character virtues, can be divided into consequentialist (C1) and non-consequentialist (C2), and are in their most general formulation described thus:

(C1) A trait is a virtue if it tends to the happiness of mankind.

(C2) A trait is a virtue if it has properties, not reducible to consequences for happiness, which make it appropriate or "fitting" that what Hume calls its "species" or "appearance" causes "this immediate taste or sentiment" giving rise to approbation.⁶³

A second important taxonomy in Hume is that between the natural and artificial virtues: the latter including justice and fidelity (such as the disposition to keep promises). These require for their understanding as virtues the existence of convention (such as property conventions) that in turn require the existence of institutional rules whose ultimate justification lies in the long-term interests of society as a whole. But the personal virtues themselves are deontological in nature and consist in the disposition to respect rules. A person, however benevolent in disposition, who makes her own judgments of private or public utility and is willing to break the rules for that sake may not be "base" like the free-riding "sensible knave," but, like the "young and inexperienced"⁶⁴ "benevolent rule breaker" Cyrus (discussed by Hume), lacks the virtue of justice.⁶⁵ Finally, the *Enquiries* introduces a classification of virtues into the benevolent and the heroic.⁶⁶ Here there is recognition that virtues can be differentiated according to roles such as that of a general or a ruler. Nietzsche recognized a rather similar distinction: that between the "bourgeois" virtues of the "herd," which are somewhat scorned, and those proper to the higher or stronger type.

One taxonomy not to be found in either Hume or Nietzsche is that between the moral and the non-moral virtues. In Hume at least, the lack of a distinction between the moral and non-moral virtues has caused concern since the problem of promiscuity in the virtues is severely exacerbated by his apparently including talents among the virtues. Notice, though, that virtues are for Hume "mental qualities," so that *mere* athleticism is not a virtue; however, Hume would have no problem including sporting virtues as role virtues in sports people. Here athleticism is bound up with mental qualities such as judiciousness and intelligence in one's play, and sense of fair play. In general, as is often pointed out, the central guiding thought in virtue ethics generally is that virtues are indispensable or desirable for the leading of a good life, and this is no less

true of Hume and Nietzsche. The virtues are individuated according to their fields, and such individuation can be flexible or contested depending on such issues as specificity, compartmentalization, or importance. Hence the debate about whether or not (appropriate) wit (or we might add, charm) can be virtues (there are non-virtuous forms of both).⁶⁷ Both are virtues for Hume and Nietzsche since they feature in a good life, although of course not centrally. But to a modern sensibility, with its view that having virtue must be available to everyone (a view shared by neither Hume nor Nietzsche), and the tie between virtue and “moral,” the very idea of these being virtues often borders on the offensive.

The second and third reasons for the lack of salience of the idea of “moral” virtue in the work of Hume and Nietzsche can be treated together. One mark of the “moral” is the idea of impersonality and/or impartiality, presupposed, for example, in the idea of the common good, a good impersonally conceived and where each counts for one and only for one. In rejecting these putative essential features of the moral, Nietzsche also rejects the idea of “moral” virtues where these are seen as essentially other-regarding. For Nietzsche, for whom self-love properly understood is at the core of virtue, the good life is intensely personal, for such a life is a creative life where one exercises one’s own genius in a way that is not slavishly imitative, and not necessarily serving some idea of the common good. Though Nietzsche describes the mature “egoist” as a “collective individual,” the weak altruist is turned into an instrument of someone else’s vision of what good (“common” or otherwise) is to be served.⁶⁸ Indeed, for Nietzsche the idea of the “common good” is at best a recipe for mediocrity and at worst a nonsense:

... how could there exist a ‘common good’! The expression is a self-contradiction: what can be common has ever but little value. In the end it must be as it is and has always been: great things are for the great, abysses for the profound, shudders and delicacies for the refined ...⁶⁹

The creative life has its own virtues, as we have seen, but it is not the case that the point or rationale of such virtue is the good of the agent. The idea that self-love is at the heart of virtue in general does not imply that all virtue is *targeted* at self-benefit: such a narcissistic view would be anathema to Nietzsche. For him, as Solomon points out, many virtues have an overflowing quality where one’s outward focus causes one to lose sight of the self entirely;⁷⁰ a state which is a far cry from the self-sacrificing tendencies of the deplored form of altruism, where one is afflicted by a sense of personal worthlessness and neediness to be an instrument of someone or something else.

Turn now to Hume. Virtue-centered non-consequentialist readings of Hume discourage the previously prevalent reading of Hume as some kind of ideal observer theorist of the proto-consequentialist kind. She with an authoritative moral sense has the capacity for “*steady* and *general* points of view.”⁷¹ Here the sentiments are corrected for biases of distance and partiality, but this correction does not yield “impartial moral judgments as seen from the viewpoint of an impartial spectator.”⁷² Rather, as Hume claims, these corrected sentiments yield judgments that constitute the “approbation[s] ... of a judicious

spectator.”⁷³ Such a spectator is part of the “usual and natural” class of human being, and will hence approve reasonable favoring of the near and dear:

... we always consider the *natural* and *usual* force of the passions, when we determine concerning vice and virtue; and if the passions depart very much from the common measures on either side, they are always disapproved of as vicious. A man naturally loves his children better than his nephews, his nephews better than his cousins, his cousins better than strangers, where everything else is equal. Hence arise the common measures of duty, in preferring the one to the other. Our sense of duty always follows the common and natural course of our passions.⁷⁴

Finally, Hume devoted an entire Appendix to the *Enquiries* to self-love, arguing that both self-love and benevolence are “original instincts” inherent to our frame and constitution. Both fundamental instincts are at the core of the moral sense and thereby to virtue. Indeed, proper pride is a virtue where pride as a passion is well honed, and is to be contrasted with a selfishness marring virtue, and improper partiality and self-interest:

... a genuine and hearty pride, or self-esteem, if well conceal'd and well founded, is essential to the character of a man with honour ...⁷⁵

By contrast:

An abjectness of character. . . is disgusting and contemptible Where a man has no sense of value in himself, we are not likely to have any higher esteem of him. And if the same person, who crouches to his superiors, is insolent to his inferiors (as often happens), this contrariety of behaviour, instead of correcting the former vice, aggravates it extremely by the addition of a vice still more odious.⁷⁶

VI. CONCLUSION

Despite the appearance of being poles apart in their normative ethical stances, the one cold and egoistic, the other warm and altruistic, a virtue-centered reading of Hume and Nietzsche allows one to appreciate that they have a lot in common. Most important, morality for them is nothing like the “morality system” so criticized by Williams;⁷⁷ rather, for both, morality is replaced by what Williams calls “ethics.” Here the thick virtue and vice concepts are central, whether these are applied to emotions (e.g., feeling generous), to emotional dispositions (e.g., dispositions to feel generous), to virtues of character (e.g., having good or excellent dispositions of action, motivation, and feeling in regard to generosity), or to actions (e.g., generous action).⁷⁸ Importantly, ethics, far from being essentially other-regarding and impersonal, has for both Nietzsche and Hume core partial and self-regarding features. There are self-regarding virtues; self-love

is at the core of virtue or constrains virtue; and bonds to one's projects and to near and dear feature prominently.

Both thinkers have been subject to skeptical interpretations lessening their impact on substantive normative ethical theory, but the relatively recent virtue theoretic turn in ethics and subsequent recognition of the virtue centeredness of their ethics have enabled them to be incorporated into an objectivist tradition. Hume and Nietzsche are by now important contributors to virtue ethics, capable of bringing unique insights to contemporary discussions.⁷⁹

NOTES

1. Michael Slote, *Morals from Motives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Anne Jaap Jacobson, ed, *Feminist Interpretations of David Hume* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000); Christine Swanton, *The Virtue Ethics of Hume and Nietzsche* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015a); Roger Crisp, "Hume on Virtue, Utility, and Morality," in *Virtue Ethics, Old and New*, edited by Stephen M. Gardiner (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 294–336.
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CHAPTER 13

KANT ON VIRTUE

Seeking the Ideal in Human Conditions

THOMAS E. HILL, JR. AND ADAM CURETON

THE early Latin and Greek terms for virtue, Kant notes, originally meant courage, strength, and valor in the face of a strong but evil enemy.¹ The symbol for virtue was thought to be Hercules, who bravely subdued all vice in the form of the hydra.² Kant returns to this ancient understanding of virtue by defining it as a kind of strength and resoluteness of will to resist and overcome obstacles that oppose fulfilling our moral duties.³ The obstacles on which Kant focuses are the tendencies we have to indulge our natural desires, impulses, and inclinations when they tempt us to act in ways that conflict with moral demands.⁴ Although we may speak of many virtues (corresponding to different kinds of duty), there is only one true virtue, which is the wholehearted commitment and effective capacity to fulfill our moral duties out of respect for the moral law, despite our tendencies to indulge our opposing natural desires.⁵

Moral laws, on Kant's view, are objective, unconditional, and necessary principles of reason. Principles of *right* concern external acts that can be coercively enforced by others. Principles of *ethics* concern the ends and maxims that we ought to adopt even though we cannot be forced by others to do so. Among Kant's ethical principles are specific duties of beneficence, respect, and gratitude, as well as prohibitions on suicide, lying, and servility. Also we must comply with all moral requirements simply because they are demands of authoritative moral laws.⁶ These juridical and ethical principles are ways of interpreting and applying the Categorical Imperative to human conditions.⁷

Human beings, according to Kant, are subject to natural and rational motivations that often conflict with one another, but he also thinks we have a free power of choice, which is susceptible to competing natural and rational desires but not necessarily determined by any of them.⁸ All rationally competent persons inevitably recognize moral principles as authoritative, but each individual must decide whether to fulfill or to violate them.⁹ Moral *duties* and *imperatives*, in Kant's view, are principles of morality addressed to rational agents who are disposed to comply with them but who can also choose to indulge their opposing inclinations instead.¹⁰ Kant thinks that human persons

are always reluctant to break the moral law, even when we nonetheless choose to do so, because we experience our rational desires as constraints that oppose our natural inclinations; yet he also thinks that our natural inclinations often make us reluctant to follow the moral law as well when, as often happens, they oppose our doing so.¹¹

We can exercise our power of choice by adopting and revising policies, commitments, and principles for how we resolve to conduct ourselves. These resolutions, according to Kant, can be regarded as something like promises we make to ourselves.¹² We also have the power, in Kant's view, to decide on particular occasions whether or not to execute or live up to the principles and policies that we have settled on.¹³ A human person with a *good will* has adopted a commitment to morality and has made it her most basic life-governing standard.¹⁴ A fully *virtuous* person not only has a good will, but also maintains and executes this policy on every occasion, despite temptations she may have to the contrary.¹⁵ Our natural desires, according to Kant, can interfere with both aspects of moral perfection, that of having a good will and of being virtuous. They can lead us to question and alter our basic moral commitments in the service of other ends or principles that we favor, thereby leading us to abandon our good will. And our natural desires can dissuade us from living up to the moral commitments we have adopted for ourselves, thereby exposing our moral weakness or lack of virtue.

Kant claims that it is impossible for human beings to eliminate our natural desires and our tendencies to indulge them in immoral ways, so even virtuous people will at times be tempted to alter or violate their moral commitments.¹⁶ He also argues that the best that human beings can hope for is continual and unending progress toward virtue that "can never settle down in peace and quiet with its maxims adopted once and for all."¹⁷ Although virtue can never be fully achieved in this life by our own efforts, Kant claims that we have reason to strive for it and hope that achieving perfect virtue is nevertheless possible in ways that we cannot comprehend.¹⁸

In Kant's works on pedagogy and practical anthropology, he describes some of the empirical conditions that he thinks will help to prepare children for virtue. Children, Kant claims, are born with a moral predisposition or "germ" that parents and teachers must help to nurture and develop.¹⁹ Initially, children must be subjected to discipline that sets constraints on their "lawless freedom," but once they reach the age of reason, children must be taught to "make good use of [their] freedom."²⁰ A child's natural desires for honor and love can be used as "aids to morality" while the child's latent notion of dignity should be made "perceptible" to her.²¹ The Socratic method should also be used to elicit a "dry and earnest representation of duty" from the child, to help her refine her powers of moral judgment, to lead her to admire those who display a firm and steady resolve to do their duty from duty, and to bring out an awareness and exaltation of her ability to master her inclinations and to govern herself by reason.²²

Once a person has reached the stage in which her rational capacities are sufficiently developed that her actions can be fully imputed to her, she is then under a self-regarding and imperfect duty to continue developing her own moral powers.²³ Scrutinizing our motives and principles, listening to our conscience, practicing virtuous acts, and keeping the basic moral law before our minds can all help us to strive for moral perfection.²⁴

But, in Kant's view, there are no specific steps or empirical conditions that can guarantee progress toward moral perfection because this is ultimately a matter of freely adopting, maintaining, and executing a basic commitment to morality.²⁵

I. THE PLACE OF FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS IN A VIRTUOUS LIFE

Although Kant held that feelings and emotions are often obstacles to clear thinking and good moral decision-making, he claimed that some feelings are simply aspects of all moral experience, and others should be cultivated aids in our efforts to avoid wrongdoing and to promote moral ends. Kant's position is complex and often misunderstood.

Consider, first, the context of moral decision-making. Here Kant calls attention to the fact that our passions often cloud our judgments and seduce us away from what we know is the right path. Some emotions, such as malicious envy, are bad in themselves, but even inherently good or innocent feelings, such as affection for a friend, can on occasion tempt us to neglect our moral responsibilities. Few would deny these elementary observations, but Kant's explanation points to a deeper philosophical controversy about the nature of moral judgment and motivation. What enables us to tell the difference between right and wrong? And why does the distinction matter to us? Kant argues that particular moral judgments are ultimately based on principles of practical reason, not on human sentiments. In making particular moral judgments, of course, we need to try to understand the empirical facts of the case at hand. As philosophers, in using the basic moral principles (as expressed in the Categorical Imperative) to articulate and defend more specific (mid-level) principles for recurring human conditions, we need also to take into account general anthropological facts about human nature. Facts about feelings and emotions can be relevant as data at both stages. The aim is to determine what we ought to do, that is, what we imperfectly rational agents have compelling moral reason to do. Kant argued that common morality presupposes that we can make judgments from this moral point of view and that insofar as we are rational agents, we can act on the basis of these judgments. When our strong passions distort our judgment and prompt us to abandon our good will, this is not (as Hume famously argued) because violent passions overwhelm the "calm passions" aligned with morality. Rather, we allow our emotions to cloud our rational judgment, and we choose to follow our feelings rather than reason.

Consider now the contexts of moral assessment and aspiration. To assess whether a person was virtuous or whether her particular act had "moral worth," we would need to know what motivated the person, and Kant repeatedly warns that we can never know for certain what maxims a person was acting on. Nevertheless, Kant thought that the *ideas* of virtue and morally worthy actions can prod our consciences and inspire us to respect the priority of morality over self-love. The primary question in ethics for each person

is “What ought *I* to do?” The question arises from a first-personal perspective, focused on one’s alternatives for choice now and for the future, rather than on third-personal judgments of praiseworthiness or blameworthiness for past acts or character. From the agent’s first-personal perspective, the *ideas* of perfect virtue and morally worthy acts can inspire us toward moral improvement, even though our progress cannot be measured. In Kant’s view, we must rely on reason, not sentiment, to determine what we ought to do now, what we ought to resolve for the future, and what sort of persons we should try to become. The rational ideas of perfect virtue and morally worthy action can help to guide our judgments and constrain our acts independently of how we are disposed to feel. Our feelings and emotions, though potentially relevant, do not provide the answer to the primary ethical question.

More positively, what role do feelings and emotions play in a moral life? First, Kant held that the feeling of respect for the moral law is an experiential expression of our incapable recognition of moral requirements. The feeling is the product, not the cause, of our moral consciousness. A feeling of respect for the moral law, as we might say, is concept-dependent because it cannot be understood apart from its reference to an authoritative standard. Other moral feelings, such as guilt, shame, and the satisfaction of having done one’s duty, are similar in these respects. Second, Kant notes that positive feelings of caring for others can counteract contrary inclinations, and so such affectionate feelings should be cultivated as an aid in our efforts to avoid wrongdoing. Finally, the healthy feelings and emotions, when morally constrained, are integral to human happiness, and, Kant argues, we have an imperfect duty to adopt the happiness of others as an end, as well as a permission and an indirect duty to pursue our own happiness. Even when we act well in other respects, if we do so grumpily, wallow in self-pity, or indulge our needless fears, malicious envy, or bitter resentments, we will inevitably diminish others’ happiness as well as our own.

II. THE PLACE OF THE MOTIVE OF DUTY IN A VIRTUOUS LIFE

In Kant’s view, *law* makes demands on what we do and enforces these demands (for example, by threats of punishment), but for the most part law is not concerned with why we conform to its demands.²⁶ State laws, for example, can require citizens to pay taxes but not that they do so eagerly, lovingly, or from duty. The fundamental aim of a just legal system is not to make citizens virtuous, but rather to affirm and secure citizens’ equal freedom to act without wrongful interference from others. *Ethics*, in contrast, requires not only that we behave in the right way, but also that we do so for the right reasons. We have an indirect ethical duty to conform to legal duties, but we have direct “duties of virtue” to adopt two fundamental ends: one’s own perfection and the happiness of others. The ethical duties are not merely to behave in ways that in fact promote these ends, but

also to make it a principle (or maxim) to promote them. Moreover, we must make this our principle because it is right (i.e. out of respect for moral law), not simply because it makes us happy or promotes our personal ends. If we are fortunate, adopting “the ends that are duties” may contribute to our happiness and encourage others to help us in our own personal projects, but for a virtuous person the fact that adopting and pursuing these ends is morally obligatory is a sufficient reason by itself to do so. We must strive to develop and improve in virtue, which is understood as an effective capacity to promote these ends and avoid all wrongdoing “from duty.”²⁷

Understandably, readers are puzzled and sometimes repelled by Kant’s frequent references to doing one’s duty *from duty*, and so it is important to separate several different claims that might be thought to be involved. Consider the extreme claim that (1) we ought always to be thinking explicitly of *the moral law* and moved by that thought whenever we conform to duty. If acting from duty means being moved at that time by an explicit thought of some formula of the Categorical Imperative, then (1) is an unrealistic demand and arguably we should not even try to fulfill it. Consider, for example, negative duties. We are constantly *conforming* to negative duties whenever we do not engage in fraud, murder, and rape. Decent people avoid these crimes routinely and without needing to think explicitly of the Categorical Imperative or any other abstract foundational principle. Normally the question of whether or not to do these things does not arise, and if it did, decent people would not be tempted. They stand ready to refuse any proposal to use these as means even to good ends because they see these acts as wrong. If pressed, they might struggle to articulate the basic reasons in the way that would satisfy philosophers, but even if they could not do so, they would nonetheless understand and deeply care that fraud, murder, and rape are morally wrong. Similarly, when good people conform to a positive duty, such as helping a friend or teaching a favorite class, they do not (and probably cannot) always have a formula of *the moral law* explicitly in mind. Normally they help friends and fulfill their contracts gladly without explicit thought of abstract principles, even though they understand that they are doing something obligatory.

Suppose, then, that we need not always be thinking explicitly of a formulation of the moral law when we fulfill our duties. A more limited thesis that may be closer to Kant’s intentions would be (2) that in conforming to duty, a perfectly virtuous person always would, and so ideally we should, recognize and be moved by the thought that our conformity is morally obligatory.²⁸ This does not require having an explicit formulation of the moral law in mind. To think that an act is a *duty* is to think that whether or not one happens to be inclined to fulfill it, there are good and sufficient moral reasons to do so, but we can (and ordinarily do) think this without having ready a full explanation that refers back to the moral law as the ultimate ground of all moral judgments. So (2) seems more tenable than (1), but (2) is still at odds with common opinion for many cases. Intuitively, when we conform to duty, sometimes we should be consciously thinking of duty and sometimes not. For example, as a conscientious juror deciding how to vote, one should keep in mind a juror’s moral duty to make a fair and informed decision, but as a parent giving loving care to one’s children, normally not thinking of duty at the time does not show that one is deficient in virtue.

Kant's texts sometimes suggest the intuitively implausible (1) and (2), and perhaps he meant to affirm at least (2) for cases in which the choice between duty and inclination is evident. Arguably, however, his important core claim is simply that (3) we ought always to treat moral duty as a sufficient reason for conforming to its requirements.²⁹ That is, we should maintain the *steadfast attitude* that if an act is wrong we will not do it, and if it is a positive duty then we will do it. This steadfast attitude, in Kant's theory, is a *good will* or, in other words, a wholehearted commitment to the fundamental life-governing maxim that moral requirements have priority over self-love or any other competing maxims.³⁰ Serious commitment to this attitude (a good will) implies that we will take the necessary means to implement it. This requires, first, listening to warnings of conscience and, when reasonable doubts arise, being diligent in determining, without self-deception, what is really right.³¹

III. THE PLACE OF EXEMPLARS IN A VIRTUOUS LIFE

What is the role of exemplars of virtue in moral theory and in everyday life? According to Aristotle and contemporary virtue ethics, it is important to have real models of virtue to emulate so that we can acquire virtues by practicing what the exemplar does until it becomes habitual ("second nature").³² Also many believe that we should use stories about legendary leaders and heroes of extraordinary courage, wisdom, and magnanimity to teach and inspire both children and adults by their example. In addition, some say, exemplars can serve to guide moral judgment because the right thing to do can be defined as doing what a virtuous person would do in the context.³³ Kant disagreed on all three points. He took a more qualified view of the role of exemplars in moral education, he opposed the use of examples of super-heroic deeds to inspire moral conduct, and he flatly rejected the idea that we can determine what we ought to do by observing people of exemplary virtue.

First, although Kant agreed that having a good role model can be important in early education, he resisted any suggestion that acquiring virtue is simply a matter of acquiring *habits* of correct behavior and apt feelings.³⁴ Virtue requires doing what is right for the right reasons. Kant understood that good teachers can help to protect and cultivate the innate capacity of *children* to live a moral life, but to be virtuous one must have a good will, which is a will to do one's duty from duty.³⁵ This requires an implicit grasp of the fundamental principle of morality ("the moral law") and a personal commitment (or "will") to conform to its requirements because one recognizes them as authoritative "commands of reason" rather than merely accepted social norms, prudential advice, or demands from one's parents, legal authorities, or an all-powerful deity.³⁶ Only adults are mature enough to have the basic understanding needed for them to be responsible moral agents, and whether one has a good or bad will, in Kant's view, is not the product

of natural and social forces, but is due to the free (and ultimately inexplicable) choice of each person.³⁷ Virtuous persons would *invariably* choose to do what is right, but their constancy as responsible adults is not to be explained by citing their good *habits* generated by practice in emulating exemplars.³⁸

Second, Kant objected to trying to cultivate virtue by focusing attention on extraordinarily saintly and heroic deeds.³⁹ The moral task is to do one's duty in every context, no matter how ordinary and undramatic this may be. This is hard enough, especially given that virtue requires one to do one's duty out of respect for the moral law. Although even ordinary people may sometimes face challenges that call for extraordinary strength of will, focusing our attention on the grand accomplishments of saints and heroes, as we imagine them, tends to distract us and divert our energies from the less spectacular but real moral tasks that we face every day.

Third, Kant's standard for morally right conduct was the Categorical Imperative, which expressed his basic principles regarding how we ought to act and what ends we ought to adopt. We have a *good will* if we resolve wholeheartedly to do what we morally ought to do because it is right, and we have *virtue* if our will to carry out this resolve is strong enough to overcome temptations that might undermine our efforts to carry it out successfully. So in Kant's view the *definition* or *basic standard* of morally right action cannot be *doing what a virtuous person would do*, for there is no standard of virtue (or the virtues) that is independent of the moral law expressed in the Categorical Imperative. A virtuous person, of course, will act rightly, and we should do so as well. In this trivial sense, we should always do what a virtuous person would do in our situation, but any virtuous person would do what is required by Kant's fundamental principles, which set the standard for moral choice.

Kant could not appeal to exemplars in just the way that virtue theorists have done because he was skeptical that we could ever find an actual example of a perfectly virtuous person. Kant repeatedly warns that it is impossible to fathom the depths of our own hearts, and our observations of other apparently good people are never sufficient to ensure that their motives are pure.⁴⁰ Even if (as many suppose) there has existed a perfectly virtuous person, we could not derive our moral standards from that person because we must use our moral standards to identify the person as virtuous.⁴¹ The advice "Do what Jesus (or Muhammad) would do!" may remind religious people of the moral values that led them to identify the inspirational role model as virtuous, but it relies on their prior grasp of the standards that their exemplar represents to them.⁴²

Although Kant rejects the use of actual exemplars in the ways that other theorists recommend, he does not deny that examples of (apparently) good (and bad) people can be useful in some contexts.⁴³ More important, however, in Kant's theory the *ideas* of a person of good will and perfect virtue serve as exemplars-in-thought, partly analogous to actual exemplars in other theories.⁴⁴ In the first section of the *Groundwork*, for example, Kant begins with the assertion that only a good will can be conceived as good without qualification. He attributes the *idea* of a person who has this unqualifiedly good will to common rational knowledge of morality, and he uses this idea in his initial attempt to "seek out" the supreme principle of morality.⁴⁵ He argues that by his analytical method

he can uncover the standard of morally worthy action implicit in this common moral idea, but he acknowledges that this method does not establish or prove the validity of the supreme principle. Here, in effect, Kant appeals to the common *idea* of a *morally good person* in order to reach a principle (the Categorical Imperative) that, among other things, can guide moral decision-making, but in Kant's view the standard is implicit in the idea, rather than drawn from actual examples. Later, in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant holds out the idea of a *person of perfect virtue* as exemplifying the kind of person that we should aspire to be, even though life is at best an endless attempt to improve in virtue, and we have no measure of our progress.⁴⁶ Here the idea of a perfectly virtuous human being serves not only to inspire us, but also to guide insofar as it represents an instantiation of the formal aim of morality—always to do one's duty from duty. Kant also writes of the "idea" and "ideal" of "humanity" as representations of human capacities and their perfection, not as a list of properties, but ideas of them as combined in an individual.⁴⁷

These ideas of a good will, perfect virtue, and humanity are not empirical concepts, abstracted from our experience with actual human beings, but ideas of reason by which we judge how we ought to think and act.

IV. THE PLACE OF COMMUNITY IN A VIRTUOUS LIFE

What is the role of communities in a moral life? Kant's ideas about the moral and non-moral value of communities are quite rich and nuanced. Communities of various kinds, according to Kant, are both the greatest obstacles, as well as the best means, to approaching perfect virtue. This is often missed by critics who object that Kant denied or downplayed the value of community and the essential role that communities of various kinds play in giving shape and meaning to our lives and in developing our moral capacities and other worthwhile traits and skills.⁴⁸

Human beings, according to Kant, have a variety of sociable desires and inclinations that tend to lead us to value close personal relationships, community ties, and joint-projects, which for many of us are inextricably bound with our conceptions of happiness and meaning in life.⁴⁹ Yet Kant thinks that human nature also includes many unsociable desires and inclinations that are destructive to personal relationships, communities, and societies.⁵⁰ Our unsociable inclinations have a tendency to destabilize personal relationships and community bonds.⁵¹ And, as we shall see, Kant regards our unsociable propensities as significant impediments to moral progress.

Kant thought that associations and communities of various types are morally good as effective and in some cases as essential means to the development and full realization of our rational capacities.⁵²

First, when we are in associations, we tend to develop and exercise taste, which is the faculty to make judgments of beauty on the basis of disinterested pleasures that can be

communicated and shared by all. As this faculty develops, a person tends to have less concern for an object of his crude and vehement inclinations if he cannot “feel his satisfaction in it in community with others.”⁵³ This sort of training, which calls on our higher powers of imagination and understanding, helps us to develop our capacity to freely choose our own ends by reducing “the tyranny of sensible tendencies,” and it paves the way for morality by preparing “humans for a sovereignty in which reason alone shall have power.”⁵⁴

Second, certain communities, associations, and societies tend to help people to develop the natural talents and abilities that allow them to pursue whatever ends they may freely choose. Such groups often provide opportunities for experimentation, practice, and instruction, which are necessary for human beings to perfect our natural abilities over many generations.⁵⁵

Third, there is one sort of community that Kant thinks is absolutely essential for us to become truly virtuous, namely an ethical commonwealth. The most challenging obstacles we face to achieving moral perfection are, according to Kant, other human beings, and in particular the ways they tend to enliven our unsociable inclinations when we are in association with them.⁵⁶ Even if someone, by his own efforts, managed to achieve some degree of virtue, “he would still be held in incessant danger of relapsing into” an immoral character because his moral predispositions are “incessantly attacked by the evil which is found in him and in every other as well.”⁵⁷ To the best of our knowledge, Kant thinks, the only way human beings can counteract these dangers is by establishing an ethical commonwealth, which is “an enduring and ever expanding society, solely designed for the preservation of morality by counteracting evil with united forces.”⁵⁸ Everyone has a duty to establish or join an ethical community because the only way for people of good will to come close to moral perfection is “a union of such persons into a whole toward that very end”;⁵⁹ that is, human beings must come together in an ethical community in order to create the circumstances in which we can approach perfect virtue and maintain the virtue we have achieved.

In an ethical community, people are united by public laws of virtue that cannot be externally coerced by other people because they require the adoption of maxims and ends.⁶⁰ We must therefore figuratively suppose that someone else exercises constraint in an ethical community by representing it as a sort of religious family under divine laws.⁶¹ In order for us to develop actual ethical communities that approach this ideal, human beings need to establish traditions, rituals, and institutions that bind them together against their unsociable inclinations.⁶²

V. THE ROLE OF MORAL RULES IN A VIRTUOUS LIFE

Although in Kant's ethics nothing is more important than cultivating and living in accordance with virtue, his theory is often mistakenly taken to be a paradigm of a “law

conception of ethics,” one that is exclusively concerned with overriding duties and obligations, that provides a comprehensive system of impartial, exceptionless, and universally applicable moral principles, and that gives an algorithmic decision-making procedure that anyone can use for generating and applying those rules.⁶³

Undeniably, Kant aimed to find or construct a framework for making objective moral judgments that is rooted in our nature as rational beings and that enables everyone to reach free and reasoned agreement in our moral judgments on the basis of mutually recognized principles and evidence. Across his ethical writings, he describes a complicated moral structure that consists of various levels, distinctions, and application procedures. Rather than applying the Categorical Imperative directly to everyday contexts, Kant claims that “principles of application” are needed “to *show* in [human nature] what can be inferred from universal moral principles.”⁶⁴ The two most basic principles of application, which are supposed to express different aspects of the Categorical Imperative as it applies to human beings in the natural world, are the Universal Principle of Right and the Supreme Principle of the Doctrine of Virtue.⁶⁵ These principles in turn generate more specific duties of right, as well as duties of ethics and virtue.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, Kant shares some of the concerns that virtue ethicists have raised about the proper role of moral principles in a virtuous life. In Kant’s system, moral principles vary in how precisely they specify the actions that are required or forbidden. Although narrow and perfect duties require or forbid very specific actions, wide and imperfect duties leave significant latitude in deciding how to fulfill them.⁶⁷ For example, Kant thinks the duty not to lie is narrow and perfect because it precisely defines a kind of action we may not perform, while the duty of beneficence is wide and imperfect because it requires us to set the happiness of others as one of our ends without specifying exactly how much help and assistance we must provide. Kant is also skeptical of pedantry and purism with regard to the fulfillment of wide duties, which should not be treated as if they were narrow duties.⁶⁸ He chastises the “fantastically virtuous” who allow “*nothing to be morally indifferent*” and who “turn the government of virtue into tyranny.”⁶⁹ Kant wants to avoid the “tyranny of popular mores,” he cautions against a “mania for spying on the morals of others,” and he argues that many moral principles cannot be coercively enforced by others because they govern our internal commitments, goals, and aspirations.⁷⁰

Moral principles and duties, according to Kant, establish a general, multi-faceted, and limited framework of thought for agents who must rely on their powers of deliberation, judgment, and conscience to determine what they ought to do in concrete cases.⁷¹ We are morally required to develop these moral powers, gather relevant facts, understand what duties are at stake in given cases, take due care in our deliberations, and scrutinize our own motives.⁷²

Kant emphasizes that *ethical duties* are “of wide obligation.”⁷³ Principles that require us to set ends or adopt ideals do not specify exactly what we must do with regard to them. And for those moral principles that require the adoption of maxims, “one can always ask for yet another principle for applying this maxim to cases that may arise,” so judgment is needed to determine how to satisfy such principles.⁷⁴ Kant’s discussions

of ethical duties of both kinds often emphasize the ways that certain ends, ideals, and maxims are indeterminate, epistemically inaccessible, or characterized by thick moral concepts.⁷⁵

The *duties of right* that Kant presents, by contrast, do seem to invite the charges of rigorism that virtue ethicists aim to avoid. The Universal Principle of Right, Kant says, aims for “mathematical exactitude” in specifying reciprocal relations of equal freedom under universal laws.⁷⁶ Kant argues, however, that there is significant room for indeterminacy and disagreement in judgments of right or wrong, even among conscientious and reasonable people.⁷⁷ The general problem is that “though laws must be meticulously observed, they cannot, after all, have regard to every little circumstance, and the latter may yield exceptions, which do not always find their exact resolution in the laws.”⁷⁸ A virtuous person must rely on her powers of judgment to interpret and apply her duties of right as well as her ethical duties.

Judgments of right and wrong sometimes require the application of thick moral concepts, such as equity and fairness, that Kant treats as concepts of right that cannot be fully specified by moral principles.⁷⁹ For example, how, as a matter of right, should the profits of a company be distributed when its founders originally agreed to share them equally, but one of the partners contributed significantly more to its success than the others?⁸⁰ Other cases involve contracts that are not explicit enough to easily determine what is right and wrong. If I promise a charity to donate a sum of money to them, but later regret my decision and refuse to send the funds, does the charity have the right to force me to pay up?⁸¹ And some cases of right or wrong involve apparent conflicts of rights. If I purchase a horse in a public market in accordance with public ordinances without knowing that it was stolen, it seems that both I and the original owner have a right to the horse.⁸²

When we encounter controversial cases of right and wrong, Kant claims that each of us must use our own reason, judgment, and conscience to ascertain the relevant facts and determine as best we can what is right or wrong “in itself.”⁸³ These deliberations, in some cases, must be guided by our best guesses about what the parties to a contract most likely intended to do in making it. Also our deliberations about right and wrong should avoid concerns about the feasibility of a system of property rights. For instance, our judgments about who owns stolen property that was purchased in good faith should not be influenced by the fact that it is often impractical for people to fully investigate titles before the time of purchase.⁸⁴

According to Kant, applying the Universal Principle of Right, especially in controversial cases, can be very difficult, if not impossible. He acknowledges that these difficulties can result in disagreements about right and wrong, even among conscientious people who are using their best judgment.⁸⁵ Yet, in Kant’s view, rights necessarily involve an authorization to coerce others. If everyone were allowed to unilaterally follow his or her own best judgment about “*what seems right and good*” without being “dependent upon another’s opinion about this,” then they could be authorized to coerce one another in ways that are inconsistent with the equal freedom of all.⁸⁶ This is one of Kant’s main arguments for why we must join together in a public legal order in which judges

are given the rightful authority to settle disputes about rights.⁸⁷ Our rights and duties, which are often in themselves indeterminate and subject to interpretation, are given an artificial specificity in a “rightful condition” that is necessary in order to determine and secure the equal freedom of all.⁸⁸

In order to serve this public role, Kant claims that judges should be guided by additional principles of right.⁸⁹ They should make judgments only on the basis of what is most certain and clear because otherwise their task would be too difficult or impossible.⁹⁰ Judges, according to Kant, may also take account of the conditions that must be satisfied in order for a feasible system of property transfer to exist by, for example, not requiring buyers to fully establish the titles of the goods they purchase.⁹¹ And because equity and fairness are indeterminate concepts of right, judges should not take them into account at all in settling disputes about rights.⁹²

In sum, moral principles and rules of various kinds play an essential role in the life of a virtuous person. She is committed to these standards as fully regulative in her life, but she must carefully exercise her powers of judgment to interpret and apply them to specific cases. She also recognizes the need for a minimally decent legal framework of enforced public laws, which she obeys except when legal orders “conflict with inner morality.”⁹³

VI. CONCLUSION

Human agents, according to Kant, owe it to ourselves to strive for perfect virtue by fully committing ourselves to morality and by developing the fortitude to maintain and execute this life-governing policy despite obstacles we may face. Although Kant thinks that we can never achieve perfect virtue because of the inherent “*frailty (fragilitas)* of human nature,” our journey of moral self-improvement nonetheless requires communities of good persons, a precise system of legally enforced rules as well as indeterminate moral principles that we must interpret and apply with care and good judgment. Exemplars and cultivated good feelings can also be useful aids along the way, but Kant warns us against attempting to derive our moral standards themselves from examples or feelings. The best any of us can hope for, in Kant’s view, is to make constant progress in our difficult struggle for moral perfection.

NOTES

1. MM 6:380; R 6:57; V 27:492. Kant’s texts are referenced by these symbols, followed by volume and page numbers in the standard Prussian Academy Edition:

G—*Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*

MM—*The Metaphysics of Morals*

R—*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*

CPR—*Critique of Pure Reason*

CPrR—*Critique of Practical Reason*

CJ—*Critique of the Power of Judgment*

A—*Anthropology, History, and Education*

PP—“*Toward Perpetual Peace*”

TP—“On the Common Saying: This May Be True in Theory, but It Does Not Hold in Practice”

IUH—“Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective”

CB—“Conjectural Beginnings of Human History”

E—“An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?”

CF—“The Conflict of the Faculties”

LP—“Lectures on Pedagogy”

C—“Moral Philosophy: Collins’s Lecture Notes”

V—“Kant on the Metaphysics of Morals: Vigilantius’s Lecture Notes”

2. MM 6:380; V 27:492.
3. MM 6:205–221, 380, 405–408, 477. See also Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 162–179; Paul Guyer, *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 303–323; and Allen W. Wood, *Kantian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 142–158.
4. R 6:29.
5. MM 6:380, 383, 390.
6. MM 6:219–221, 394.
7. G 4:413–421.
8. MM 6:213, 218, 226; G 4: 414, 439.
9. Kant held out hope that all human beings are *persons*, who are, as such, rationally disposed to comply with moral requirements. It is possible, however, that some human beings, such as those we now call psychopaths, lack this rational disposition, although he thinks it would be difficult to know for sure that someone altogether lacked any moral motivation.
10. MM 6:218, 379.
11. MM 6:379–380.
12. V 27:656–657.
13. LP 9:487–488; V 27:656–657. See also Thomas E. Hill, “Kantian Virtue and ‘Virtue Ethics,’” *Virtue, Rules, and Justice: Kantian Aspirations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012a), 129–159; and, for a competing view, see Adam Cureton, “Kant on Cultivating a Good and Stable Will,” in *Questions of Character*, edited by Iskra Fileva (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 63–77.
14. G 4: 394–402. A good will in this sense is a person’s resolution to do one’s duty from duty, which is distinct from the inevitable predisposition to morality that, in Kant’s view, all moral agents possess.
15. MM 6:380, 383–384, 387, 390, 394, 404–410, 479–480; R 6:29–39.
16. MM 6:213–215.
17. MM 6:409. See also MM 6:384, 405, 447.
18. R 6:4–7, 97–98; CPrR 5:110–132.
19. LP 9:445.
20. LP 9:453, 459; C 27:467; CJ 5: 431.
21. LP 9:482–484, 489.
22. CPrR 5:35, 154, 160–161; MM 480–484; R 6: 48; LP 9:490.
23. MM 6:385–388, 391–394.

24. MM 6:387, 397, 400, 441, 484.
25. MM 6:447.
26. Note, however, MM 6:228.
27. MM 6:446.
28. Kant implies that virtue, as a kind of “strength of soul,” can vary in degree from perfect virtue, which Kant represents as “a+,” to utter weakness, which he represents as “o,” but weakness is not the same as vice, which Kant represents as “-a.” A person with the vice of ingratitude, for example, rejects the Kantian principle that he ought to honor his benefactors, but a morally weak person (deficient in virtue) accepts the principle but to some degree neglects to act accordingly (MM 6:384, 390).
29. See Marcia Baron, *Kantian Ethics Almost without Apology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); Barbara Herman, “Making Room for Character,” in Herman, *Moral Literacy*, pp. 1–28. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007; Thomas E. Hill, “Kant’s Tugendlehre as Normative Ethics,” in Hill, *Virtue, Rules, and Justice: Kantian Aspirations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012c), 234–255.
30. G 4:393–399, R 6:36.
31. R 6:184–187; MM 6:401, 437–440; E 8:35–42. See also Thomas E. Hill, “Moral Responsibilities of Bystanders,” in Hill, *Virtue, Rules, and Justice: Kantian Aspirations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012b), 343–357.
32. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, edited by T. Irwin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1999).
33. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Bernard Mayo, *Ethics and the Moral Life* (London: Macmillan, 1958), 183–232; Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
34. MM 6:483–484, 407, 409, 479–480; R 46–47.
35. LP 9:440–445, 459, 481–492. See Adam Cureton and T. E. Hill, “Kant on Virtue and the Virtues,” in *Cultivating Virtue*, edited by Nancy Snow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 97–102.
36. G 4:413–418, 441–444.
37. R 6:21–26.
38. MM 6:446.
39. CPrR 5:155, 157; R 6:49.
40. G 4:407.
41. G 4:408–409.
42. G 4: 408–409.
43. Kant, for example, held that the French Revolution “finds in the hearts of all spectators (who are not engaged in this game themselves) a wishful *participation*” despite his belief that they acted wrongly in service of their worthy ideals (CF 7:85). He thought that examples of good people can focus our attention on the moral law, reveal our own capacity to comply with the requirements of morality, strike down our selfish tendencies and prompt the workings of our conscience (G 4:402; CPrR 5:76–77). And Kant claimed that scandalous behavior can serve as a warning to us, but such public expressions of immorality can also tempt us to follow suit (PP 8:346; MM 6:394, 445, 460, 464). See also Onora O’Neill, “The Power of Example,” *Philosophy* 61 (1986): 5–29.
44. An *idea* in Kant’s technical sense is “a necessary concept of reason . . . , one to which no congruent object can be given in the senses” (CPR A327).
45. G 4:395–403.
46. MM 6:446–447.

47. See, for example, MM 6:418. See also Richard Dean, "Humanity as an Idea, as an Ideal, and as an End in Itself," *Kantian Review* 18 (2013): 171–195. As Dean notes, 'Idea' properly means a rational concept, while an 'ideal' is the "presentation of an individual being as adequate to an idea" (CJ 5:232).
48. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*; Roger Crisp and M. A. Slote, *Virtue Ethics*, Oxford Readings in Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).
49. R 6:26–27; MM 6:401–402, 456–457, 471–472; LP 9:482, 484–485, 492, 498; A 7:278–279; IUH 8:21; CJ 5:296–297, 355.
50. MM 6:470; IUH 8:20–22; A 7:265–277; G 4:424; R 6:27, 93–94; CB 8:120; CJ 542–543; LP 9:492, 498.
51. CJ 5:276; A 7:270.
52. MM 6:386–387, 391–393, 444–447; LP 9:449; CB 8:116–118; CJ 5:431.
53. CJ 5:297.
54. CJ 5:433. See also CJ 5:297, 355–356; A 5:297–298.
55. IUH 8:18–23; LP 9:445.
56. MM 458–460, 465–466; R 6:93–94, 97; CJ 5:432–433; A 7:270–273; LP 9:492.
57. R 6:94; 97. See also R 6:93–98.
58. R 6:94. See also R 6:94–96, 97–98, 122–124.
59. R 6:97. See also R 6:95–98.
60. R 6:95, 101–108.
61. R 6:98–100, 102.
62. R 6:101–104, 151–152.
63. G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33 (1958): 1–19; Bernard Williams, "Morality, the Peculiar Institution," *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 174–197; Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*; McDowell, *Mind and World*; Michael A. Slote, *From Morality to Virtue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*.
64. MM 6:216–217.
65. MM 6:230, 395.
66. MM 6:218–220, 239, 381.
67. MM 6:389–391, 446.
68. MM 6:426, 437.
69. MM 6:409 (Kant's italics).
70. MM 6:239, 381, 464, 466.
71. CPR A133/B172.
72. MM 6:216, 441, 444–448; R 6:184–187.
73. MM 6:390.
74. MM 6:411.
75. MM 6:392–393, 422, 426, 428, 454, 467, 472; CB 8:121, PP 8: 363, 365–366; G 4:418.
76. MM 6:233. See also MM 6:411.
77. MM 6:238, 257.
78. V 27:574. See also CPR A133/B172.
79. MM 6:234–235; V 27:433, 532–533.

- 80. MM 6:234.
- 81. MM 6:297–298.
- 82. MM 6:300–303.
- 83. MM 6:297. See also MM 6:230, 235–236, 297, 301–302.
- 84. MM 6:301.
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- 87. MM 6:307, 311–313.
- 88. MM 6:312.
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CHAPTER 14

CHRISTIAN THEORIES OF VIRTUE

W. JAY WOOD

I. INTRODUCTION

THIS title prompts at least three questions: (1) What is a virtue? (2) What makes a virtue a Christian virtue? (3) What is a Christian theory of virtues? I will not say much about Christian “theories” of the virtues because on one way of understanding theories, very few Christian accounts of the virtues qualify as theories. Theories frequently attempt to derive and hierarchically order all concepts in a given domain from some key fundamental concept. In metaphysics, matter plays such a role for physicalists. In ethics, utility plays such a role for utilitarians. Concepts of rights, duties, obligations, and so forth are all explained by and reduced to matters of utility. Even Aquinas’s *eudaimonistic* account of virtues, which takes *caritas* to be the form of all virtues, does not qualify as a theory in this strict sense, as his accounts of natural law and dominical law are neither reducible to nor derivable from the concept of virtue. Two thousand years of Christian reflection on the virtues reveals a relative lack of interest in spelling out whether an ethics of virtue is independent of, compatible with, or ancillary to notions of duty, utility, and other concepts that have preoccupied modern moral ethicists. Still less are they at pains to show that all major moral concepts of rights, responsibility, blame, and so on all derive from the concept of virtue.

Virtues may be defined as acquired habits of excellent functioning in generic areas of human life that are challenging and important. Discovering and sharing knowledge, creating just societies, ordering our loves, regulating our appetites, and maintaining friendships are among the challenging and important pursuits deemed by many as essential to human flourishing. Many virtues are “perfections,” or mature completions of natural human faculties; but some are dispositions that correct for proneness to dysfunction and error in common situations. To form abiding dispositions that enable us to do these things well requires that we be formed by education in particular communities

that bring to full maturity a set of potentials that culminate in the virtues: intellectual, moral, civic, and for Christians, the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love.

As to what makes a virtue a “Christian virtue,” I propose that paradigmatically it is because the trait in question helps persons to achieve a distinctive *form of flourishing and telos*: growth in Christlikeness and eternal friendship with God. This spare definition prompts a host of questions. What specific traits do Christians regard as virtuous? Are some virtues more important than others in achieving our telos? How do Christian virtues differ, if at all, from pagan virtues called by the same name? Can pagans acquire virtues through the natural processes of habituation and social formation, or must true virtues be instilled in us by the supernatural activity of God alone? How do we cultivate Christian virtues? What role does the Holy Spirit play in the process of virtue acquisition? In what ways do the virtues help us to become more like Christ? What is the role of the Church in our becoming more like Christ? How do its practices, spiritual disciplines, and sacraments, for example, help to nurture and reinforce virtues? How do the virtues help us to conquer vices that oppose our becoming more like Christ? What objections have Christians themselves posed to thinking about the moral life in terms of the virtues? We will touch upon selected responses to many of these questions in our survey, drawn from two millennia of Christian thinking about the virtues.

What counts as human flourishing and what traits contribute to it are contestable. Metaphysics matters. Our conceptions of human flourishing and the traits productive of it depend on our conceptions of human nature and the world we inhabit. “Bear in mind,” says the Stoic Marcus Aurelius, “what is my nature, and how this is related to that, and what kind of part it is of the whole.”¹ Different conceptions of human nature come with different prescriptions for what traits produce the optimal life for that nature. The Stoic conception of human nature, with its corresponding virtue of tranquility (*apatheia*), viewed preoccupation about health, wealth, friends, and other changeable matters outside our control as vicious, as causes of inner perturbation, and therefore counterproductive to genuine flourishing. The Stoics sought to extirpate emotions arising from matters outside our control, and to direct reason to the Logos, universal reason, a pitiless and meticulous providence that governs the whole world. By contrast, the highest Christian virtue of love requires that we invest ourselves emotionally in our neighbor’s welfare, even so far as to “rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15, RSV).” Love, joy, hope, compassion, and other emotions are essential for the mature Christian character.

These deep differences regarding human nature, the conditions for human flourishing, and the master virtues that promote it influence the specific content and rank ordering of the virtues. How we think about traits such as courage, humility, and gratitude, for example, depends crucially on whether we view them from within or outside the Christian faith. Because Christians view themselves as created in God’s image, and their creation and preservation as a gift from a loving God, they stress our dependence on God and other persons differently from pagans such as Aristotle. Thus gratitude is a virtue for Christians, but not for Aristotle’s magnanimous man. Christian generosity

contrasts with Aristotelian liberality by focusing on the good of the beneficiary, not the magnificence of the giver. On Aristotle's view, key virtues for the excellent life such as magnanimity were unavailable to women, slaves, and the poor. Christianity's more egalitarian perspective sees its key virtues—faith, hope, and love—as available to all by God's grace. What we take to be a generically human situation varies among metaphysical outlooks, with consequent differences in the way we think about human flourishing, the virtues that promote it, and the vices that undermine it. These differences will become more apparent as we delve into various Christian accounts of the virtues, starting with those exemplified by Jesus.

II. GOSPEL VIRTUES

Jesus' life and teachings promote virtues in stark contrast to what the apostle Paul calls the prevailing "wisdom of the world."² In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared as blessed the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those persecuted for righteousness' sake. He further inverted worldly wisdom by teaching that those who would save their life must lose it, that the first shall be last and the last first, that we should love and forgive our enemies, and that it is harder for a rich man to enter heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. To this the writers of the New Testament teach that God's power is made manifest in weakness, and that this world is not our true home, that we are resident aliens awaiting citizenship in heaven. Prevailing worldly wisdom would instead counsel that we do unto others before they do unto us, that might makes right, and to the winner go the spoils. No wonder Paul and Silas were accused before the magistrates of Thessalonica of having "turned the world upside-down."³

The ethical teachings of the New Testament are indeed a dramatic inversion of the surrounding culture's prevailing wisdom. Power, privilege, influence, and honor give way to love, humility, gratitude, and service to others. The apostle Peter enjoins his readers to "make every effort to add to their faith virtue." But the virtues he bids us pursue are those that allow believers to become "partakers of the divine nature," "little Christs," if you will.⁴ To imitate Christ is to have in ourselves those virtues that were in Christ: love, mercy, compassion, kindness, generosity, humility, forgivingness, and others, whereby we can love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. The telos of the virtuous Christian life is not honor or tranquility, but eternal loving communion with God and all the blessed. The motivation to add virtue to faith is gratitude for redemption and the prospect of deep peace and joy in this life and in the life to come. Christians seek virtues not merely to fulfill our given nature, but to acquire a new nature conformed to Christ.⁵ Vice, too, is viewed differently. Yes, vices are bad habits counterproductive to happiness in this life, but they are also obstacles to friendship with Christ, our true and everlasting happiness.

III. EARLY CHRISTIAN BEGINNINGS

The first Christians were Jews living in a Hellenized world, and their early reflections on the virtues drew from both Jewish and Greco-Roman sources. St. Paul even quotes from Stoic philosopher Aratus in his Mars hill discourse with the philosophers.⁶ Wayne Meeks notes that “[i]t is curiously difficult to say exactly what was new about Christian morality, or to draw firm boundaries around it. The language of virtue that Christians spoke was adapted from older traditions of moral discourse, rather than being invented from scratch.”⁷ The Hebrew wisdom tradition in which the first Christians were steeped was rich in the language of virtue, including the same cardinal virtues found in Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero. The *Book of Wisdom* (second century BCE), for example, names the cardinal virtues, saying, “If anyone loves righteousness, her labors are virtues; for she teaches self-control and prudence, justice and courage; nothing in life is more profitable for men than these (Wisdom 8: 7–9).” The Psalmist and the writers of Proverbs likewise name the cardinal virtues as “superior to gold and jewels.” In addition to outward acts, the Hebrew prophetic tradition makes morality an interior matter, speaking of God’s writing his laws upon our hearts. Some of the great New Testament lists of virtues and vices⁸ name, in common with Greek thinking, such virtues as self-control, honesty, and prudence, along with vices such as wrath, envy, and conceit. Of course these New Testament passages also prize virtues alien to the Greeks: humility, lowliness, meekness, forgiveness, mercy, gratitude, kindness, and compassion, among others.

What made the early Christian thinking about virtues unique was less a matter of the traits they named in common with other virtue perspectives than the narrative and interpretive context in which these virtues were understood, cultivated, and practiced. Alasdair MacIntyre’s revival of the virtues pays special attention to the traditions and social practices in which the virtues are embedded, “as providing the arena in which the virtues are exhibited and in terms of which they are to receive their primary, if incomplete definition.”⁹ For Christians, all the virtues, not just the theological ones, take shape in the light of the grand Christian narrative that centers on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. According this narrative, life is a gift of God, meant to be lived in friendship with God. Human sin disrupted that friendship, but God’s redemption of the human race through Christ’s atoning work on the cross reconciles us to God and restores that friendship, making possible eternal life with God. United with Christ in friendship, and nurtured in the community of the Church, we are granted the power to live lives in imitation of Christ, and can hope for a resurrected life in a new heaven and a new earth.

How does this narrative shape the way early Christians understood the virtues? Consider Augustine’s reconceptualization of the four cardinal virtues in his *On the Morals of the Catholic Church*.¹⁰

I hold that virtue is nothing other than the perfect love of God. Now when it is said that virtue has a fourfold division, as I understand it, this is said in accordance with the various movements of love . . . We may, therefore, define these virtues as follows: temperance is love preserving itself entire and incorrupt for God; courage is

love readily bearing all things for the sake of God; justice is love serving only God, and therefore ruling well everything else that is subject to the human person; prudence is love discerning well between what helps it toward God and what hinders it.

Here the cardinal virtues are recast as manifestations of love, the highest of the Christian theological virtues, yielding the highest form of felicity in this life and in the life to come.

To identify true virtue closely with a particular confessional context prompted early Christians to question whether persons outside that context have genuine virtues. Though schooled in the texts of Greek and Roman poets and philosophers, Augustine and other early Christian writers raised doubts about whether pagans possessed true virtue, sparking a controversy that weaves its way throughout the history of Christian thinking about the virtues.

Why is this debate important? At the heart of Christianity is the death and resurrection of Christ, by which our sins are forgiven and we are restored to friendship with God. Christianity teaches that all humans require redemption since all suffer from the debilitating effects of original sin, which disposes all persons to go wrong in moral matters. If, however, pagans can achieve virtue apart from Christ, this suggests that persons can conquer vice and attain virtue without divine aid, making Christ's death unnecessary. The Pelagian heresy, against which Augustine battled fiercely, taught that persons could acquire virtue without grace, by sheer effort and willpower.

Augustine vacillates on the issue, at times commending and at other times condemning pagan virtue. Augustine is often said to have denounced pagan virtues as "splendid vices." "For what kind of mistress of the body and the vices can that mind be which is ignorant of the true God?" "Virtues," he says, "are rather vices so long as there is no reference to God. For although some suppose that virtues which have a reference only to themselves, and are desired only on their own account, are yet true and genuine virtues, the fact is that even then they are inflated with pride, and are therefore to be reckoned vices rather than virtues."¹¹ No virtue is a "true virtue" that does not direct us to friendship with God. Yet Augustine also admits that because ineliminable goodness remains in human nature, pagan virtues could successfully contribute to earthly and common goods, such as social order and concord. The Romans, he says, "have a certain uprightness of their own,"¹² and pagan virtues exhibit a kind of "human love" (*caritas humana*).¹³ Pagans could thus be viewed as having political virtues that, while promoting the common good, did not contribute to salvation.

IV. VIRTUES AND VICES AMONG PATRISTIC AND EARLY MEDIEVAL SOURCES

No account of Christian thinking about the virtues is complete without examining its vice counterparts. The Christian tradition is known for its list of so-called "seven deadly sins," or seven capital vices, made famous, among other places, in Dante's *Inferno*.

Though the New Testament makes individual mention of each of the seven deadly sins, arriving at the current canonical list of seven was centuries in the making. This list now includes pride (vainglory), envy, and anger among the emotions; greed, gluttony, and lust among the appetites; and sloth, or spiritual torpor, an indifference, even an aversion, to rise to the demands of the spiritual life.

Of all vices to which we are prone, why these seven? Lying and drunkenness are more common, torture and murder more heinous. In answer, note that the term “capital” refers to the head, as in headwater of a river with its many tributaries. These capital vices are the sources of many other sins that flow from them. Capital vices are not the necessarily the worst sins we commit. Their deadliness lies in their being the parents of “offspring vices,” as they are sometimes called. So, John Cassian says, “from covetousness [flows] lying, deceit, theft, perjury, the desire of filthy lucre, false witness, violence, inhumanity, and greed.”¹⁴

Though these capital vices are frequently referred to as the “deadly sins,” they are not equally grievous. Aquinas taught that “carnal sins” incur less guilt than the vices pertaining to the spirit because a sin such as gluttony involves an inordinate turning to something good, whereas pride involves a deliberate turning from away from God. Christian tradition defined mortal sins as those performed with full advertence of mind and will, and of sufficient moral seriousness.¹⁵ Such sins are thought to alienate us from friendship with God. Vices of appetite, such as lust and gluttony, seldom meet these conditions, often occurring out of momentary passion or impulsiveness and without “malice and aforethought,” as we say today. Actions that would be mortal sin are venial sins only, if arrested before brought to completion. So we mustn’t suppose that the “deadly sins” are always mortal sins. Note, too, that the traditional list of capital vices identified the besetting sins of the hermit or the monk dwelling in community, they being less inclined to murder and mayhem than to lust or envy of another monk’s superior sanctity.

The tradition of identifying and classifying the deadliest vices originates with the Desert Fathers, who followed St. Antony’s (251–356) lead by going into the deserts of Egypt to devote themselves to prayer and work. Word of Antony’s wisdom and spectacular triumphs over all manner of temptations drew followers who wished to be his disciples, a model that spread throughout Egypt, preparing the ground for later monasticism.¹⁶

Evagrius of Pontus, St. Anthony’s biographer, was perhaps the most famous member among a Greek-influenced type of monasticism developed around Nitria, near the Nile delta. In Evagrius’s *Praktikos* (The Practical Treatise) we find his famous Eight Evil Thoughts (*logismoi*), a list that includes gluttony (*gastrimargia*), fornication (*porneia*), love of money (*philarguria*), sadness (*lupē*), anger (*orgē*), listlessness (*acēdia*), vainglory (*kenodoxia*), and pride (*huperēphania*). Evagrius’s eight thoughts, or demons as he also refers to them, were chief among those that sabotage the monk’s spiritual endeavors. He did not reduce the struggle against vices to the interior struggle between the temptations of the flesh and the monk’s higher spiritual calling. He conceived of it literally

as involving spiritual warfare against demonic powers. A chief strategy for resisting temptations is to talk back to the demons by reciting scriptures, which the devils cannot abide. Evagrius's *Talking Back* (*Antirrhetikos*) was a compendium of scripture passages that monks were to recite in resisting the temptations of demons. So for the soul harassed day and night by thoughts of fornication, Evagrius counsels, "But if you should say in your thinking, 'This nation is greater than I: how will I be able to destroy them?' you shall not fear them. Remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and all the Egyptians."¹⁷

Most of these vices are now part of our contemporary moral vocabulary. *Acēdia* is less familiar, though Evagrius deemed it the most dangerous. It has been variously translated as listlessness, boredom, despondency of spirit, sloth, weariness of heart, and apathy. Evagrius describes *acēdia* as "hatred of industriousness, a battle against stillness, stormy weather for psalmody, laziness in prayer, a slackening of askesis, untimely drowsiness, revolving sleep, the oppressiveness of solitude, hatred of one's cell, and adversary of ascetic works, an opponent of perseverance, a muzzling of meditation, ignorance of the scriptures, a partaker in sorrow, a clock for hunger."¹⁸ He also called it "the noonday devil," as it struck often in the heat of the day, when the monks retreated to their cells, weary from the morning's work. Weariness often gave way to boredom, distraction from prayers, and thoughts that returned to the pleasures they renounced before answering the call of the desert. Evagrius gave wise and understanding counsel to monks despairing of the rigors of their vows, words of encouragement outnumbering those of rebuke.

John Cassian's (360–early 430s) *Institutes for Monasteries and the Eight Remedies against the Eight Capital Vices* and the twenty-four *Conferences of the Fathers* bridge the eastern Christian tradition of Evagrius, to whom he is highly indebted, and western Benedictine monasticism. From Evagrius, he inherits the eight deadly thoughts, which he thinks must be conquered in a regimented way beginning with the more easily conquered sins of appetite, gluttony, fornication, and avarice, and progressing to the interior sins of anger, sadness, *acēdia*, vainglory, and pride. Cassian and the tradition following him regard the sins of the mind and spirit as far more dangerous. The monk who lacks control over his eating cannot expect to conquer the more serious and subtle sins of vainglory and pride.

Gregory the Great's (540–604) famous "*Magna Moralia*"—lectures on the book of Job—establishes our current canonical list of deadly vices. Like Cassian, he was a consummate master of self-examination, and his writings show deep insight into the inner workings of the human mind. He, too, considered the vices of the interior life, particularly pride, to be the most serious. Like Augustine before him, Gregory denied that we could combat vice absent divine grace. "We really learn where our good qualities come from when, by apparently losing them, we are made to realize that they can never be preserved by our own efforts."¹⁹ Though we depend on grace, Gregory nevertheless urges us to good works, which can through grace produce salutary effects on our interior lives, just as good interior intentions issue forth in external good works.

V. SCHOLASTIC VIRTUE

Aquinas gives what is unquestionably the most thorough and influential account of the virtues in the middle ages, devoting one-third of the *Summa* to the subject. This is in addition to his *Commentary on Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics*, the *Disputed Questions on Virtue*, *De Malo*, his *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, as well as his commentary on sections of scripture that touch on the subject of virtue. The moral theology of the *Summa* was prompted in part by the Lateran Council of 1215, which mandated that all persons receive communion at least once a year. This required that every communicant go to confession before receiving communion, which, in turn, required priests suitably tutored in moral theology who could accurately diagnose and counsel those confessing.²⁰

Aquinas is often read as a mere continuer of Aristotle. His ethical orientation, like Aristotle's, is eudaimonistic, directed to happiness. He sometimes goes to considerable lengths to harmonize Aristotle with the biblical texts, as he does in his unsuccessful effort to reconcile the gospel Beatitudes with Aristotle's discussion of the three forms of life: that devoted to pleasure, the active life, and the contemplative.²¹ His account of the four cardinal virtues hews closely to Aristotle's, and his account of the intellectual virtues scarcely deviates from Aristotle's.

To be sure, Aquinas parts company with Aristotle at significant points, not least of which in his belief that the Aristotelian virtues and the sciences directed to sensible objects do not fit us for ultimate happiness, which consists in contemplation of God.²² For this reason, Thomas distinguishes between virtues acquired by habituation through imitation and repetition, and infused virtues, among them the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, "poured" into us by the Holy Spirit. Despite these Christian additions, Alasdair MacIntyre judges Aquinas an "unexpectedly marginal figure" to the Aristotelian tradition arising from the *Nichomachean Ethics*, its "canonical" text.²³ Jennifer Herdt judges that "the whole shape of Aquinas's mature moral theology was structured by his theological absorption of Aristotle's ethics, with grace perfecting nature."²⁴ Put this way, Aquinas's work on the virtues is but Christian icing on an Aristotelian cake.

Some recent scholars seek to upend the claim that Aquinas's account of the virtues is too beholden to Aristotle. They emphasize instead the distinctively Christian elements in his account of virtues by bringing to light what he says about infused virtues, and the gifts, beatitudes, and fruits of the Holy Spirit. Even his introductory definition of the concept of a virtue should signal that he is not captive to Aristotle's influence. "Virtue is a good quality of the mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us, without us."²⁵ Aquinas is clear that human perfection and happiness cannot be achieved without the gifts.²⁶

Thomas states clearly that only through the infused virtues of faith, hope, and love can the process of moral perfection fit us for the supernatural end for which God

created us. To these infused virtues there correspond the “seven gifts of the Holy Spirit,” by which humans are further perfected by the work of the Holy Spirit. The gifts include that of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and counsel, which correspond to the intellectual virtues. While these gifts concern matters to which natural virtues are also directed, we are not directed by our natural powers alone, but in a superior and non-coercive way by the Holy Spirit, who makes us amenable to the Spirit’s prompting.²⁷ The Holy Spirit inspires acute and penetrating judgment by creating within persons an internal and non-discursive “connaturality” with the moral demands in concrete situations. The gifts could therefore be described as second-person dispositions, by which a person is disposed to be moved freely by the second-person agent, in contrast to first-person dispositions, or virtues by which a person is moved by his own reason.²⁸ Taken in their entirety, Thomas’s account of the virtues “forms an organism whose head is constituted by the theological virtues. These animate and inspire the moral virtues from within, to such an extent that they transform the measure of the moral virtues.”²⁹

VI. VIRTUES AND THE REFORMERS

Martin Luther’s teachings on justification and predestination combine to dim virtue’s luster as portrayed by Aquinas. Luther famously taught that while God’s saving grace justifies us and makes us righteous before God, we nevertheless remain “*simul justus et peccator*,” simultaneously justified and sinner. If God imputes to us the gift of saving grace, then God views us as redeemed, though in reality we remain fallen beings desperately in need of healing. Luther allegedly likened our redeemed state to “dung covered with snow.” If we are not beneficiaries of redemptive grace “our good works are evil,” bearing only the appearance of true virtue, and meriting divine wrath. “So great is this wrath there is nothing profitable in those things which seem good as, for instance, arts, talents, prudence, courage, chastity, and whatever natural, moral, and impressive goods there are.”³⁰ “All good work is sin unless it is forgiven by mercy.”³¹ The verdict on our lives looked upon as a whole, and from the divine perspective, is that they lack any moral merit. Whatever semblance of virtue may appear in the pagan’s partial steps toward virtue count for nothing. Even successful acquisition of particular virtues cannot make for a wholly virtuous life as judged by God. There remains a moral gap that can only be bridged by grace.

Erasmus famously opposed Luther’s repudiation of pagan virtue. He allowed that God’s common grace works through natural processes of social formation, which culminate in acknowledgment that God’s grace must bring virtue to completion.³² Erasmus’s view more closely resembles that of Aquinas than Luther’s. While pagan virtue may fit us for excellence in this world, such virtue is incomplete, requiring God’s grace to complete us for a truly virtuous life now and in the eschaton. Pagan virtues needn’t be rejected so long as they are assigned their proper place as partial steps toward a character that is

assisted by and completed only in Christ. Luther's view makes no room for grace to work through pagan efforts to imitate virtuous exemplars, whereas for Erasmus, "[h]uman agency and divine agency do not compete for control, and human agency need not step aside in order of divine agency to enter in."³³

Gilbert Meilander argues that Luther leaves room for an ethics of virtue among the redeemed. As Luther writes, "Everything is forgiven through grace, but as yet not everything is healed through the gift."³⁴ Having been declared righteous in Christ, we must yet remedy those parts of ourselves that remain unconformed to God's perfect righteousness. Just here, says Luther, "Christians do not become righteous by doing righteous works; but once they have been justified by faith in Christ, they do righteous works."³⁵ In his commentary on the Catholic Epistles, he writes, "since such a great blessing has been given to you through faith, that you truly have everything that is God, he wants to say, to add this, be diligent, do not be lazy, supplement your faith with virtue; that is let your faith break forth before people, in order that it may be helpful, busy, powerful, and active, and may do many works and not remain sluggish and sterile."³⁶ Luther's theology, says Meilander, requires us to live in the tension of being committed to cultivating virtue, while simultaneously acknowledging that God alone is responsible for any growth in virtue that our efforts may produce.

John Calvin's doctrine of original sin, like Luther's, depicts fallen humans as utterly ruined, further eroding the claim that humans have any natural orientation to virtue. Calvin defines original sin as a "hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature, extending to all parts of the soul."³⁷ Even infants, who have not yet sinned of their own mind and will, are nevertheless viewed by Calvin as "seed beds of sin, and thus cannot but be odious and abominable to God."³⁸ "For our nature is not only utterly devoid of goodness, but so prolific in all kinds of evil that it can never be idle . . . Everything which is in man, from the intellect to the will, for the soul even to the flesh, is defiled and pervaded with this concupiscence . . . The whole of man is nothing else than concupiscence."³⁹

Calvin denies that fallen reason is able to guide the will to virtue. He likewise dismisses the view of Church Fathers such as Chrysostom, who taught that God has given us "full freedom of choice" regarding good and evil. In answer to the question "is it indeed true that all thought, intelligence, discernment, and industry are so defective that we cannot aim at anything that is right," Calvin answers that "everything which our mind conceives, meditates, plans, and resolves, is always evil . . . that our mind in what direction soever it turns, is miserably exposed to vanity."⁴⁰

The will fares no better than reason under Calvin's assessment. "The will is so utterly vitiated and corrupted in every part as to produce nothing but evil."⁴¹ Without grace, every thought and every imagination of man's heart seeks only evil. Calvin admits that some "residue of intelligence and judgment" remain in humans as regards "earthly things," but being weakened and corrupted, "a shapeless ruin is all that remains. In the perverted and degenerate nature of man there are still some sparks which show that he is a rational animal, and differs from the brutes, . . . yet, this light is so smothered by clouds of darkness, that it cannot shine forth to any good effect."⁴²

Despite this desperately grim assessment of our fallen nature, Calvin confesses to finding wisdom among ancient authors, especially Plato. His indictment of our fallen nature is tempered by his concession that our intelligence is sufficient to engage in the study of the liberal arts, and thereby to make just laws that conduce to civil order and honesty. This accomplishment, says Calvin, is “ample proof that some principle of civil order is impressed on all” and that “no man is devoid of the light of reason.”⁴³ “In reading profane authors,” says Calvin, “the admirable light of truth . . . displayed in them should remind us, that the human mind, however much fallen and perverted from its original integrity, is still adorned and invested with admirable gifts from its creator.” Indeed, says Calvin, “in despising these gifts we insult the Giver.” “Nay we cannot read the writings of the ancients on these subjects without the highest admiration, an admiration which their excellence will not allow us to withhold.”⁴⁴ The following remarkable passage shows Calvin, like Augustine, to be of two minds regarding pagan virtue.

In every age there have been persons who, guided by nature, have striven toward virtue throughout life. I have nothing to say against them even if many lapses can be noted in their moral conduct. For they have by the very zeal of their honesty given proof that there was some purity in their nature These examples, accordingly, seem to warn us against adjudging man's nature wholly corrupted, because some men have by its promptings not only excelled in remarkable deeds, but conducted themselves most honorably throughout life. But here it ought to occur to us that amid this corruption of nature there is some place for God's grace; not such as to cleanse it, but to restrain it inwardly In his elect the Lord cures these diseases in a way that we shall soon explain. Others he merely restrains by throwing a bridle over them only that they may not break loose, inasmuch as he foresees their control to be expedient to preserve all that is.⁴⁵

How shall we reconcile these seemingly incompatible assessments of human nature and the goodness left to it? Here Calvin's doctrine of “common grace” comes to the fore. Through common grace, God bestows gifts of intelligence and moral sense in unregenerate humans so as to restrain evil, preserve the human race, and establish civil order and equity. God also confers grace to empower humans to goodness, with the ability to “discern and act on the natural law.” The Spirit also endows particular individuals with special artistic abilities, such as those given to the architects of the Tabernacle. These gifts enhance the common good, and are adequate to the local, secular sphere its beneficiaries inhabit, but they are not sufficient to confer saving grace.

Many expositors of Calvin attribute any residual moral goodness in unregenerate humans entirely to God's common grace. Paul Helm argues convincingly, however, that Calvin acknowledges fallen humans to retain a universal moral sense, a natural faculty of reason to apprehend principles of natural law and equity, that remains in us as part of the *imago dei*. That by his common grace God restrains evil leaves open that he does so by “leaving gifts to human nature even after the Fall.”⁴⁶ Says Helm, “It is perfectly consistent with common grace that the vehicle of such restraint should be such things as the recognition by the conscience of various features of the ‘inward law’ or natural

law instigated at the creation, the recognition of the general sense of equity among men and women, and so on. Calvin draws attention to such mechanisms when he refers to what God has 'implanted' in human nature."⁴⁷ Helm summarizes the difference between Calvin and Aquinas: "The main point of difference is that Calvin has a dimmer view of the powers of fallen mankind to discern what is morally right from the natural law, and to be motivated to do it. So the difference between them is one of degree rather than one of principle."⁴⁸

Jonathan Edwards, one of America's most original and influential thinkers, best known for his theological writings, fiery sermons, and his role in America's Great Awakening, provides a formal and philosophical articulation and defense of a Reformed view of virtue. His work *The Nature of True Virtue* shows him to be a significant moral philosopher. While his ethical philosophy is congruent with his Calvinist theology, he also shows the influence of philosophers such as Shaftesbury and Hume. Edwards thinks moral judgments, our moral approvals and disapprovals, are grounded in sentiment, a sense whereby we immediately perceive pleasure in the presence of certain kinds of things, their loveliness and agreeableness, and displeasure in what is distasteful. Moral virtue is chiefly a matter of the heart, not argument, whereby the heart is oriented to "true beauty." "Virtue is the beauty of the qualities and exercises of the heart, or those actions which proceed from them."⁴⁹ And to what is the virtuous heart directed? "True virtue consists in benevolence to being in general,"⁵⁰ which is exercised in a general good will.

Edwards distinguishes between two types of beauty, and therefore two types of virtue, one grounded in "consent and good will to being in general," the other "a general and particular beauty," restricted to a particular sphere of thought and action. The heart of true virtue is love in the most comprehensive sense, directed to all persons, to all "intelligent being in general" in proportion to its degree of existence and dignity. To love in the general, as opposed to the particular, sense is to promote the happiness of others, and to rejoice in such happiness as the other may already possess. It follows that "true virtue must chiefly consist in love to God; the Being of beings, infinitely the greatest and best."⁵¹ God is the source of all being and all true beauty, thus our love of God will consist in glorifying him, and love of others will direct persons to knowledge of God, to love and joy in him. Where love of God is wanting, he says, there can be neither true virtue nor true religion.

Inferior virtues have their source in some disposition other than love of God, even when they are not discrepant in content, and may, when suitably enlightened, concur with the law of God. Some defective virtues arise from the "love of complacency," a delight in beauty as one finds in the symmetry and design of a building, the composition of a painting, and the aptness of a tool for a task. Such symmetry and proportionality are detected in the moral life as well, as when just and proportional punishment is meted out, or appropriate gratitude given to a benefactor. While those who love being in general will love the beauty of justice and proportionality, the reverse is not true. A just judge may not love God. Other virtues arise from self-love and the pursuit of private interest, as when we love those who love us, but this is not the universal love characteristic of

true virtue. Still another source of moral propriety springs from a natural disposition to dislike inconsistency in oneself. "To do that to another, which we should be angry with him doing to us, and to hate a person for doing that to us, which we should incline to and insist on doing to him, if we were exactly in the same case, is to disagree with ourselves, and contradict ourselves."⁵² This sense of being inconsistent with oneself reflects a "natural conscience," which can approve and disapprove the same virtues as true virtue. Natural conscience, while not identical to true virtue, may nevertheless display "negative moral goodness," because without it, a greater evil might have prevailed. Similar remarks apply to virtue arising from pity, gratitude, and parental affection; they are typically particular in their scope of application and susceptible to being undermined by sin. Edwards seems to acknowledge that the two levels of morality, natural and true virtue, may be blended, as when natural affections "have their operations mixed with the influence of virtuous benevolence, and are directed and determined thereby, they may be called virtuous."⁵³

Philosophical attention to the virtues wanes significantly with the rise of modernism. Kant's deontological ethics, Mill's Utilitarianism, and to a lesser extent Hume's ethics of sentiments become the central foci of ethical reflection. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) attempted to reconcile Enlightenment ethics, particularly Kantianism, with traditional Protestant Christianity. Concepts such as *telos*, life as a school of virtue, and the idea of paradigmatic moral exemplars against which we measure our own moral progress are all present in his *Monologen*.⁵⁴ The turn of the century Thomistic renewal championed by Pope Leo XIII sparked renewed interest in the virtues by Catholic moral theologians, but this was mainly directed to renewing the moral manuals used to instruct seminarians. Servais Pinckaers comments that this revival was not robust, as the concepts of obligation and legal prohibition continue to dominate Catholic moral teaching at this time.⁵⁵

Modernism's major moral theories continued to dominate ethical reflection in the twentieth century. Virtue ethics fared no better among Protestant theologians. Karl Barth, widely acknowledged to be Protestantism's premier theologian of the twentieth century, strongly criticized the moral life construed as the pursuit of virtue. Drawing heavily on Luther and other Reformed thinkers, Barth questioned how virtue could reside in persons who were, as Luther put it, simultaneously justified and sinner. His reading of the Reformers put his own views in stark opposition with Aquinas, for whom the doctrine of the *imago dei* meant that, though wounded by sin, humans nevertheless retained something of the divine image, and were thus capable of qualified virtue.⁵⁶

G. E. M. Anscomb's pivotal and prophetic essay, *Modern Moral Philosophy*, argued that the concept of moral duty, of being under moral obligation, is incoherent apart from a lawgiver. She recommended that ethics recover the riches of the Aristotelian tradition along with central concepts of philosophical psychology such as intention, pleasure, wanting, and flourishing.⁵⁷ A little over two decades later, Anscomb's prophetic call was powerfully answered by Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, which offered the Aristotelian tradition of virtue ethics as an alternative to the exhausted and irremediably broken theories of deontology and utilitarianism. This work arguably contributed

more than any other single volume to the re-emergence of virtue ethics in the twentieth century.

VII. A CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN ACCOUNT OF VIRTUE

Moral theologian Stanley Hauerwas offers a robust and distinctively Christian account of the virtues that deepens our understanding of issues addressed by earlier thinkers. He underscores the importance of the Church as a worshipping community whose liturgy and sacraments foster and reinforce distinctively Christian virtues. It further requires us to see how he weaves together the themes of narrative, character, agency, community, and virtue. Like MacIntyre, Hauerwas abandons the enlightenment quest for indisputable moral rules and principles gleaned from a neutral point of view “midair above history.” He opts instead for an account of virtues historically situated amidst particular communal practices in a particular tradition, to wit, the Christian narrative that tells of God’s dealing with creation.

Hauerwas views humans as inescapably historic beings. “To be historic means that I must be capable of making a succession of ‘events’ a narrative—not just any narrative, but a narrative that is sufficient to give me a sense of self, which looks not only to my past but points to the future, thereby giving my life a telos and direction.”⁵⁸ While all Christians have a personal narrative, these narratives are further situated within the grander Christian story that includes creation, fall, the story of God’s dealing with Israel, and especially our redemption, sanctification, and glorification through Jesus Christ. “[This] set of stories . . . constitutes a tradition, which in turn creates and forms a community.” The narrative character of our knowledge of God and self is a “reality-making claim,” by which we see our personal narratives within the context of the Christian narrative, and thereby see ourselves as contingent, historical beings, who are part of a community that is striving to “identify and navigate a path to the good.”⁵⁹

Hauerwas portrays our character as the deeply anchored dispositions of belief and intention that he calls our “perduring agency.” “We are our character,”⁶⁰ he says, and the agential powers our character affords us are the means whereby “I make my life my own.”⁶¹ Hauerwas would later amend his initial portrayal of character as “the qualification of our self agency,” as that suggests an independent self that stands behind our agency. He now prefers to say that character is not simply a qualification but “the form of our agency.”⁶² Christian character mustn’t be viewed solely as the sum of our choices, but instead should be viewed in the light of what has been done to us and for us in Christ. “While we are related to our choices, we are never entirely captured by them, since we know our character by discovery, as if a gift bestowed on us.”⁶³

“Christianity,” writes Hauerwas and co-author Charles Pinches, “is not a continuation of the Greek understanding of the virtues, but rather an inauguration of a new tradition

that sets the virtues within an entirely different telos in community.”⁶⁴ In the context of Christianity, virtues and vices become more than traits productive or counterproductive to some conception of human flourishing; they are traits that orient us toward or away from friendship with God. Unsurprisingly, his analysis of particular virtues ranges over many most germane to Christian living, including hope, hospitality, love, patience, justice, friendship, forgiveness, and peacemaking. Reminiscent of Augustine, he is often at pains to show how even those traits named in common by both Christians and non-Christians, such as prudence and justice, take on a distinctive form when situated within a Christian context.⁶⁵

As one might expect, Hauerwas argues that the distinctively Christian versions of these virtues are best nurtured within the community of the Church, its tradition, and overarching narrative. Participation in worship among Christian exemplars often proves a superior means to foster the virtues. “The formation of Christians through the liturgy makes clear that Christians are not simply called to do the ‘right thing,’ but rather we are expected to be holy. Such holiness is not an individual achievement but comes from being made part of a community in which we discover the truth of our lives. And ‘truth’ cannot be separated from how the community worships, since the truth is that we are creatures made for worship.”⁶⁶

Christians of all stripes agree that our time on earth should be directed to becoming more like Christ, though that “becoming” can be variously described in terms of imitation of Christ, obedience to Christ’s commands, ministering to the poor in Christ’s name, or some combination of concepts. Christians also widely agree that faith, hope, and love, and other virtues nurture growth in Christ, and that patience, gentleness, and kindness are among its fruits.

So how does liturgy contribute to growth in Christ? By saturation and assimilation. The very structure of Christian worship draws us to Christ. We imbibe the rhythms of the Church year as it annually retraces the life of Jesus from his advent into the world to his glorious resurrection and ascension. In our corporate worship, in the company of Christian *phronimoi*, we confess credal truths about Christ, pray to Christ, confess and receive forgiveness for our sins from Christ, are taught and exhorted from his holy word, sing hymns to extol his glory, and receive Christ in the sacraments. In this way, we “put on Christ,” such that the things of Christ become, as St. Paul said in another context, the way we live and move and have our very being. And so it shall be until Church militant becomes Church triumphant and God will be all in all.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Christians have not been the only champions of virtue for the last two millennia. The centrality of imitating and following Christ to achieve our true telos has, however, put a very distinctive stamp on Christian thinking about what qualities of character count as virtues. Moral virtues such as humility, compassion, kindness, gratitude,

and forgivingness, not to mention the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, are largely absent from cultural landscapes Christians have shared with other virtue traditions. Even traits named in common with other virtue traditions take on a distinctive Christian form when situated within the Christian narrative. Despite the differences that have arisen among Christians about how to think about particular virtues, or even whether the virtue tradition is the best way to think about the moral life, they agree that we all stand in need of divine aid if we are to have in ourselves those qualities that were also in Christ, now and in the age to come.

NOTES

1. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, II-9, translated by Martin Hammond (London: Penguin Books, 2006) p. 12.
2. I Cor. 1:20, RSV.
3. Acts 17:6, RSV. Callicles levels the same charge against Socrates: "For if you are serious and what you say is true, then surely the life of us mortals must be turned upside down and apparently we are everywhere doing the opposite of what we should." Plato, *Gorgias*, translated by Donald Zeyl (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987), 481c.
4. II Pet 1: 3. The "core and non-negotiable axiom" of Orthodox practice is *theosis*—the teaching that Christ became man, that man might become like God, that is, a partaker of the divine nature. See Perry T. Hamalis and Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Toward a Godly Mode of Being: Virtue as Embodied Deification," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 26 (2013): 274.
5. St. Paul gives powerful expression to the transformation available to those in Christ: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God" (Gal. 2: 20).
6. See Acts 17. Also Christopher Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 45 ff.
7. Wayne A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 2.
8. E.g. Col. 3; Eph. 4; Gal. 5; Rom. 12.
9. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd edition (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), 187.
10. Augustine, *On the Morals of the Catholic Church*, 15.25.
11. Augustine, *The City of God*, translated by Marcus Dods (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), 707.
12. Augustine, *Letters of St. Augustine*, edited by John Leinenweber (Baker Books, 1992), 138.3.17.
13. Cited in John Rist, *Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 172.
14. John Cassian, *The Conferences*. Ancient Christian Writers Series, No. 57 (Paulist Press, 1997), V. xvi. New Jersey.
15. See I John 5:16 ff.
16. See chapter 4 of William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford, 2004).
17. Deut. 7:17–18. Evagrius of Pontus, *Talking Back Antirrhētikos: A Monastic Handbook for Combating Demons*, translated with introduction by David Braake (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 70.

18. Evagrius of Pontus, "To Eulogius: On the Vices Opposed to the Virtues," in *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, translation, introduction, and commentary by Robert E. Sinkewicz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 64.
19. Gregory, quoted in G. R. Evans, *The Thought of Gregory the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 69.
20. Leonard E. Boyle, "The Setting of the Summa Theologiae," in *Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: Critical Essays*, edited by Brian Davies (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 1.
21. See Anthony Kenney, "Aquinas on Aristotelian Happiness," in *Aquinas's Moral Theory*, edited by Scott MacDonald (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 20.
22. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, translated by The Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1947), Ia-IIae 3, 7.
23. Quoted in Andrew Pinsent, *The Second Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 2.
24. Jennifer Herdt, "Varieties of Contemporary Christian Virtue Ethics," in *The Routledge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, edited by Lorraine Besser-Jones and Michael Slote (New York: Routledge, Taylor, and Francis, 2015), 224.
25. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-IIae 55.4.
26. Romanus Cessario, O.P., argues for the centrality of the infused virtues describing them as "indispensable for authentic development in the life of faith." See Romanus Cessario, *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics*, 2nd edition (Notre Dame: UND Press, 2009), especially chapter 5. See also Eleonore Stump, "The Non-Aristotelian Character of Aquinas's Ethics: Aquinas on the Passions," *Faith and Philosophy* 28(1) (2011): 29–43.
27. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-IIae 68, art. 2.
28. See Andrew Pinsent, "Aquinas: Infused Virtues," in the *Routledge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, edited by Lorraine Besser-Jones and Michael Slote (New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2015), 149.
29. Servais-Théodore Pinckaers, O.P., "The Sources of Ethics in St. Thomas Aquinas," in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, edited by Stephen J. Pope (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 39.
30. Martin Luther, *Against Latomus*, in *Luther's Works*, volume 32 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 225.
31. Luther, *Against Latomus*, 209.
32. Jennifer Herdt, "Virtue's Semblance: Erasmus and Luther on Pagan Virtue and the Christian Life," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 25(2) (2005): 137–162.
33. Herdt, "Virtue's Semblance: Erasmus and Luther on Pagan Virtue and the Christian Life," 163.
34. Luther, *Against Latomus*, 229.
35. Luther, *Against Latomus*, 256.
36. Luther, *The Catholic Epistles*, vol. 30.
37. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), Bk II, Chapter 1.8.
38. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.
39. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.
40. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bk II, 2. 25.
41. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bk II, 2. 26.
42. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bk II, 2, 12.
43. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II, 2, 13.

44. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bk II, 2, 15.
45. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bk II.3.3.
46. Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 386. My thanks to Nathan Carson for directing me to Paul Helm's excellent book. See also Arvin Vos, *Aquinas, Calvin, and Contemporary Protestant Thought: A Critique of Protestant Views on the Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1985).
47. Vos, *Aquinas, Calvin, and Contemporary Protestant Thought*.
48. Vos, *Aquinas, Calvin, and Contemporary Protestant Thought*, 384.
49. Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), 2.
50. Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, 3.
51. Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, 14.
52. Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, 62.
53. Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, 98.
54. See Brent Sockness, "Was Schleiermacher a Virtue Ethicist?" in the *Journal for the History of Modern Theology/Zeitschrift für Theologischesgeschichte*, edited by Chapman, Vial, Graf, 8(1) (2001): 1–33.
55. Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, translated by Sr. Mary Thomas Noble, O.P. (Washington, DC: The Catholic University Press, 1995), 299.
56. A complete comparison of Aquinas's and Barth's views would require an in-depth study of their contrasting views on theological justification, the nature of sin, grace, and the process and fruits of sanctification: a daunting task given their voluminous writings.
57. G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy" *Philosophy* 33(124) (1958): 1–16.
58. Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 36.
59. Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 29.
60. Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 39.
61. Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*.
62. Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1985), xx.
63. Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, "On Developing Hopeful Virtues," in Hauerwas, *Christians among the Virtues* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 124.
64. Hauerwas and Pinches, "The Renewal of Virtue and the Peace of Christ," in *Christians Among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 63.
65. For example, see Hauerwas and Pinches' analyses of prudence, friendship, and courage in Hauerwas and Pinches, "On Developing Hopeful Virtues."
66. Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics*, 155.

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PART III

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CONTEMPORARY
VIRTUE ETHICS AND
THEORIES OF VIRTUE

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CHAPTER 15

EARLY VIRTUE ETHICS

WILLIAM DAVID SOLOMON

VIRTUE ethics emerged in the last half of the twentieth century as a significant alternative to the deontological and consequentialist approaches to ethics that had dominated normative ethical thinking in Anglophone academic ethics earlier in the century. This chapter examines certain features of the early days of this return to virtue (a period roughly from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s). After some general remarks about this development within academic ethics in the first section of the chapter, the second section turns to a brief description of other significant developments in academic ethics that were related to the turn to virtue. The third section explores some central texts that constitute the “canon of early virtue ethics.” The concluding section discusses briefly some developments in virtue ethics after its early days.

I. THE CONCEPT OF VIRTUE AND THE PROJECT OF VIRTUE ETHICS

It is sometimes thought that twentieth-century Anglophone ethics prior to the emergence of virtue ethics in the mid-twentieth century ignores both the concept of virtue as well as the project of virtue ethics. Yet discussions of the concept of virtue, or of the particular virtues, are at home in any attempt to do moral philosophy or ethical theory—for example, in the work of Kant and Mill. Since the virtue concepts—such notions as justice, courage, temperance, and amiability—are central to practical thought, any philosophical account of ethics must attend to them, as well as to the concept of virtue itself, even if what it says merely marginalizes them. Discussions of an ethics of virtue (as opposed to the particular virtues or the concept of virtue itself), however, involve quite different considerations. An ethics of virtue is an ethical theory that gives a central place to the virtues or to the concept of a virtue.

Since neither Kant nor Mill makes the concept of virtue the central notion in his ethical theory, they are not typically regarded as virtue ethicists. It is common to characterize

Kantian-style normative theories as taking rules or principles as fundamental (in some sense of “fundamental” to be specified within the theory) and utilitarian normative theories as taking the notions of a good (or choice-worthy) end as similarly fundamental. For both Kant and Mill (and for most modern ethical theorists), the concept of a virtue is a secondary notion within the structure of an ethical theory, to be explained in terms of the other more fundamental ethical concepts in the theory. A Kantian-style deontological theory might define a virtue as a disposition to act in accord with certain principles, thus subordinating the notion of a virtue to the notion of a principle. Similarly, a classical utilitarian ethical theory like Mill’s might define virtues as dispositions to act so as to maximize good outcomes open to one in a situation, thus subordinating the notion of a virtue to the notion of a “good outcome.”

This distinction makes clear what was neglected in moral philosophy during the first half of the twentieth century and what was not. There was certainly discussion of the concept of a virtue—and of the particular virtues—during this period. Early twentieth-century moral philosophers, such as Prichard and Moore, wrote much about virtue but, since they never gave the virtues a central or fundamental place in their theories, they are not virtue ethicists.

In the 1950s and 1960s, however, moral philosophers began to give virtue a more central place. It is difficult to reconstruct the slow emergence of virtue ethics as an alternative within academic moral philosophy, however, since its early development engaged numerous problem areas within contemporary academic ethics. The next section examines briefly two such areas with the goal of clarifying how “early virtue ethics” developed in the period roughly from 1955 to 1985. Although there is no consensus on the beginning and end of “early virtue ethics,” this discussion dates its beginning in the late 1950s with the appearance of Elizabeth Anscombe’s “Modern Moral Philosophy” (1958), G. H. von Wright’s Gifford lectures (1959) on which his *Varieties of Goodness* is based, and the influential articles by Philippa Foot, “Moral Arguments” (1958) and “Moral Beliefs” (1958–1959), which anticipated many of the themes that developed later.

Early virtue ethics gave way to a more mature virtue ethics in the early to mid-1980s. In 1981 Alasdair MacIntyre’s magisterial *After Virtue* was published, the first contemporary, full-length, systematically developed piece of moral philosophy that placed virtue at the center of the discussion.¹ In 1985, Bernard Williams’s tour de force, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, appeared.² Though not a straightforward defense of virtue ethics, it provided, in the eyes of many, a devastating critique of the ambitions of those modern moral theories seen as the main alternatives to an ethics of virtue. Following it, the *Midwest Studies* volume on virtue ethics (1986) contained significant articles by central figures in the virtue revival, including Martha Nussbaum, Alasdair MacIntyre, Rosalind Hursthouse, and Julia Annas.³ It seems reasonable, then, to regard early virtue ethics as persisting from roughly the mid-1950s until the mid-1980s. By 1985, with the mature work of MacIntyre and Williams in play and the *Midwest Studies* collection reflecting diverse and refined explorations of virtue, virtue ethics surely reached the end of its beginning and was firmly launched.

II. THE EMERGENCE OF VIRTUE ETHICS IN TWENTIETH CENTURY MORAL PHILOSOPHY

The decades after World War II, during which early work in virtue ethics commenced, were a complicated and dynamic period within Anglophone academic ethics. Moral philosophy as a discipline was changing in multiple ways, and it was in the midst of these changes that virtue ethics emerged. Early proponents of the virtues were engaged in two simultaneous disputes. Within classical meta-ethics, which dominated academic ethics when moral philosophers first turned their attention to the virtues, they argued for a revived naturalism against entrenched non-cognitivist and intuitionist meta-ethical views. But with the revival of interest by moral philosophers in large-scale normative theories in the 1960s and 1970s, they encountered different issues and different opponents. Proponents of the revival of the virtues then joined the debate about the structure of normative theories as well as the debate among the emerging normative theories, especially Kantian rationalism and utilitarianism, which were at odds with Aristotelian virtue ethics.

At the moment in the late 1950s when moral philosophers such as Philippa Foot, Iris Murdoch, Elizabeth Anscombe, and Peter Geach were turning their attention to the virtues, moral philosophy at the leading philosophy departments in the United Kingdom and the United States had been dominated for a half century by a set of technical issues focusing largely on the semantics of ethical language, along with closely related epistemological and metaphysical questions about ethics. These meta-ethical issues, as they were called, were second-order questions about the meaning and justification of ethical claims, and had their proximate origin in G. E. Moore's 1903 classic work, *Principia Ethica*.⁴ Moore argued that the most fundamental questions in ethics are semantic ones (i.e., questions about the definitions of the most general ethical terms). He also argued that "good" is the most basic ethical term, and, somewhat surprisingly, concluded that it was indefinable (in its non-instrumental uses) and functioned solely to name the simple, non-natural property of intrinsic goodness. Moore's argument in support of his indefinability thesis, the "open question argument," purported to establish that not only was "good" indefinable, but any attempt to give a reductive definition of any ethical term committed a logical fallacy—"the naturalistic fallacy"—and must be rejected.⁵

Though Moore's arguments on these matters were controversial in 1903, and continue to be controversial today, his approach to fundamental questions in ethics had shaped academic moral philosophy in crucial ways by the mid-twentieth century. The semantic questions that Moore took as primary (and the related epistemological and metaphysical questions) defined a sphere of ethics that was sharply distinguished from the normative ethics that had traditionally been at the heart of ethical theory. Normative ethics, unlike meta-ethics, focused on substantive questions about what things are good and

which actions are morally permissible or morally required. By the time questions about the virtues were becoming seriously addressed in the 1950s, meta-ethical discussions had come to dominate academic moral philosophy, and normative ethics was largely neglected.

By the 1950s, the options in meta-ethics had been reduced to three relatively well-defined positions: intuitionism, non-cognitivism, and naturalism. Intuitionists held, with Moore, that ethical claims are objective, but that ethical properties are non-natural and not reducible by definition to natural properties. Ethical claims when true are self-evident. Naturalists agreed with intuitionists on the objectivity of ethical claims, but held that ethical properties are empirical and that empirical claims can serve as evidence for ethical claims. Non-cognitivists disagreed with both intuitionists and naturalists on the objectivity of ethical claims, arguing instead that such claims do not express propositions and are not, therefore, truth-apt (i.e., capable of being true or false). For non-cognitivists, the primary role of ethical talk was not to express truths, but rather to express the attitudes of the speaker and influence causally the attitudes of the audience.

By the mid-1950s, intuitionism had fallen out of favor within academic ethics and non-cognitivism had emerged as the dominant view, especially in the sophisticated version defended by R. M. Hare in his widely read and influential early books, *The Language of Morals* (1951) and *Freedom and Reason* (1963). Hare's version of non-cognitivism held that there were a number of sharp distinctions in ethics—distinctions between facts and values, between descriptive language and prescriptive language, between evaluative meaning and descriptive meaning, and between meta-ethics and normative ethics. He was strongly committed to the view that there was an unbridgeable gap between descriptive (or factual) discourse and evaluative (including ethical) discourse. On his view, no logical bridge from purely factual premises to ethical conclusions was possible. There was always a gap. And, following Moore, he held that the open question argument guaranteed that no naturalistic definition of ethical terms could close that gap.

The third competing meta-ethical view, ethical naturalism, rejected this so-called fact-value gap and argued that there were logical limits to what could count as evidence for (or against) ethical judgments—and that these limits were tied to the meaning of ethical terms. This view was anathema to Hare and the other non-cognitivists who dominated moral philosophy at the time. Indeed, before the 1950s, it was difficult to find any moral philosophers who espoused meta-ethical naturalism, since the power of the open question argument seemed to render such views untenable on their face. Philippa Foot recognized these difficulties in articulating and defending a naturalist meta-ethical view when she opened her defense of ethical naturalism in her influential 1958 article, "Moral Beliefs," by saying, "To many people it seems that the most notable advance in moral philosophy during the past fifty years or so has been the refutation of naturalism . . . given certain apparently unquestionable assumptions, it would be about as sensible to try to reintroduce naturalism as to try to square the circle."⁶

While acknowledging these difficulties, Foot went on to attack in a series of influential articles⁷ the "apparently unquestionable assumptions" that supported the widespread rejection of naturalism. She emerged as the most prominent defender of naturalism in

meta-ethics at this time, but was joined in her effort to resuscitate naturalism by almost all of the moral philosophers who were also beginning to bring discussions of the virtues back into the heart of moral philosophy, including Elizabeth Anscombe, Peter Geach, Iris Murdoch, Julius Kovesi, Alasdair MacIntyre, and other prominent participants in the virtue revival.⁸

These figures, and others, were simultaneously defending a naturalist view in meta-ethics, while trying to put the virtues back at the center of academic ethics. Since they all focused their attacks on Hare's formulation of non-cognitivism—and its rejection of ethical naturalism—the early years of virtue ethics were marked by sharp exchanges between Hare and many of the main early advocates of virtue ethics.⁹ And Hare spent much of the remainder of his career fighting a rear-guard action against the kind of revived naturalism so persistently defended by early figures in virtue ethics.

Since most of the early figures in virtue ethics took a broadly Aristotelian approach to ethics, according to which natural facts about human capacities, inclinations, and other psychological properties are deeply relevant to ethical questions, it is not surprising that they pursued a naturalistic meta-ethical view. But the constraints of meta-ethical discussions did not allow them to pursue within the framework of the naturalism debate the normative issues that were also at the heart of Aristotelian virtue theory. Fortunately, as the style of discussion typical of classical meta-ethics was being transformed under the assault of such virtue-oriented thinkers as Anscombe, Foot, and Geach, another quite different undertaking was gaining prominence in Anglophone academic moral philosophy. This new problematic rejected altogether the earlier reluctance on the part of academic moral philosophers to engage normative issues. After a half-century, from the death of Sidgwick¹⁰ until the 1950s, in which the project of constructing and defending large-scale normative theories—a project that had dominated nineteenth-century work in moral philosophy—had almost disappeared, it experienced a sudden and dramatic revival in the 1960s and 1970s.

Although there already had been tentative steps toward a return to constructing broad normative theories,¹¹ the impetus that turned this tentative movement to a stampede was the publication of John Rawls's influential *A Theory of Justice* in 1971.¹² Rawls did not just argue in favor of reviving normative theory; he actually revived it—and did so on a scale that had not been attempted since Sidgwick, and with a clear, judicious voice that gained the attention of the entire philosophical world. Rawls almost completely ignored the debates of the meta-ethicists that dominated Anglophone academic moral philosophy from Moore to the 1960s, and he returned to the kind of large-scale normative project that had engaged nineteenth-century moral philosophers like Sidgwick, Bradley, and Spencer.¹³

In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls explored and defended a form of Kantian rationalism that saw as its main opponent the utilitarianism that he felt had dominated ethical and political thinking in late modernity. Rawls's breakthrough was followed by other important works in normative ethics in a similar deontological vein. But having opened the door to the construction of normative theories, he could not prevent a number of other styles of normative theories following him through. In particular, there was a rebirth of interest

in developing utilitarian theories on the same scale as Rawls's deontological account.¹⁴ For a while it looked as if the great normative debates in academic ethics would be confined to debates between these two late modern positions in ethics—Kantian rationalism and utilitarianism. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, however, there was a steady stream of articles and books suggesting a third alternative, Aristotelian virtue ethics, to compete with the Kantian and utilitarian positions.

The high point of this Aristotelian revival in normative theory in early virtue ethics was the publication of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* in 1981.¹⁵ *After Virtue*, which will be discussed in some detail in the next section, was the first large-scale defense of an Aristotelian virtue approach to ethics that could match Rawls's Kantian effort in comprehensiveness, subtlety of argument, and historical awareness. Written in a lively style and accessible even to non-specialists, it had a large readership outside the narrow circle of professional philosophers. It also powerfully attacked many fundamental features of late modern culture in ways that reflective persons outside the academy could appreciate.

MacIntyre's entry into the normative discussion made it clear that there were three alternatives competing within normative ethical theory, not two. But more than that, the entry of virtue ethics into the normative arena substantially enriched the philosophical agenda of early virtue ethics. It now would challenge its Kantian and utilitarian rivals on substantive normative issues, as well as on questions about the methodology of normative ethics and the appropriate goals and aims for a normative ethical theory. The next section will examine a number of particular contributions to early virtue ethics that take on these tasks.

III. MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS IN VIRTUE ETHICS

The revival of virtue ethics in the midst of these changes in academic moral philosophy took the form of a canon of articles and books focusing on virtue. Although at first diverse in aims and methodology, common themes slowly emerged. Nevertheless, even a half-century after the emergence of virtue ethics, there remains deep disagreement about the center (if there is a center) of a virtue approach to ethics.¹⁶ This section selectively comments on some important texts from early virtue ethics to sample the different approaches and to discern common themes.

The very earliest work calling attention to virtue in a new way was not put forward as a comprehensive normative theory with virtue at its heart. It rather emerged in the midst of the changes in academic ethics at mid-century discussed earlier, with the intention of reintroducing the topic of the virtues to the discussion and contributing to the reconstruction of ethics in the midst of these changes. Two examples of the earliest discussions of virtue in this period are William Frankena's influential 1963 textbook,

Ethics, and G. H. von Wright's 1959 Gifford Lectures, later published as *The Varieties of Goodness*. A discussion of their very early views will be followed by an examination of more substantive invocations of virtue, focusing especially on the work of Elizabeth Anscombe and Alasdair MacIntyre.

Frankena was a highly respected and influential moral philosopher, much of whose early work had been done in technical areas of meta-ethics. His influence on the emergence of virtue ethics was primarily exerted through his widely read textbook, *Ethics*, published in 1963 and revised substantially in 1973. Even before the virtue revolution, Frankena spent the bulk of this text, five out of six chapters, on normative ethics. Only in the last chapter, after providing a taxonomy of normative theories in the first five chapters, did he explore the meta-ethical issues that still dominated academic ethics in 1963.

At the heart of Frankena's text was his influential taxonomy of normative ethical theories derived from his division of ethical judgments into three classes: (1) deontic judgments or judgments of obligation, (2) aretaic judgments or judgments of moral goodness, and (3) judgments of non-moral goodness. Theories of obligation, on his view, were either teleological (where obligation was a function of the non-moral good produced in an action) or deontological, which, as Frankena put it, "deny what teleological theories affirm."¹⁷ Having distinguished deontological and teleological theories, he turned to questions about the relation of rule theories to the virtues in chapter 5, where he notes that "throughout its history morality has been concerned about the cultivation of certain dispositions or traits, among which are character and such virtues . . . as honesty kindness, and conscientiousness."¹⁸ He goes on to acknowledge that for some philosophers, Plato and Aristotle specifically, "morality is or should be conceived as primarily concerned, not with rules or principles, but with the cultivation of such dispositions or targets of character."¹⁹

He also concludes that a complete normative theory of morality would seem to require both principles (deontological or teleological), in order to discern the actions one is morally required to do, and virtues, to provide the appropriate motivation for performing the action. He thus concludes that one need not have to choose between an ethics of rules and an ethics of virtue:

I propose therefore that we regard the morality of principles and the morality of traits of character . . . not as rival kinds of morality between which we must choose, but as two complementary aspects of the same morality. Then, for every principle there will be a morally good trait, often going by the same name, consisting of a disposition or tendency to act according to it; and for every morally good trait there will be a principle defining the kind of action in which it is to express itself. To parody a famous dictum of Kant's, "principles without traits are impotent, traits without principles are blind."²⁰

It is difficult to overestimate how much influence Frankena's brief account of the nature of "an ethics of virtue" and its relation to a rule-based normative theory had on subsequent discussions of the role of the virtues in ethical reflection. Frankena treated as non-controversial certain theses about the virtues (and their relation to obligations and

moral rules or principles) that became matters of bitter dispute among moral philosophers for the next forty years. Among the views that he put forward straightforwardly are these:

- (1) The role of the virtues in the ethical life is exclusively motivational. Virtues are unable to discern what should be done without the aid of principles, since “without principles they are blind.” Frankena denies the virtues any cognitive role in the ethical life.
- (2) The role of principles or rules in guiding action is exclusively cognitive. Principles can tell us what to do, but cannot move us to do it, since “without virtues they are impotent.” He denies principles or rules any motivational role in the ethical life.
- (3) The alleged deep disagreement between the virtue-centered accounts of ethics in ancient philosophy and the characteristically principle-based accounts in modern moral philosophy is illusory. The ancients and the moderns are not deeply disagreeing, but merely talking about different parts of the ethical life—the cognitive and the motivational, “two complementary aspects of the same morality.”
- (4) “The moral” equally frames the ancient virtue approaches to the ethical life and the modern principle-based approaches. Morality is a timeless notion, framing in a similar fashion the projects of ancient philosophers (e.g., Plato and Aristotle) and modern thinkers (e.g., Butler, Kant and Rawls).

All these commitments that Frankena accepted straightforwardly became matters of sharp contention within the growing body of work by early virtue ethicists and their opponents. Philosophers as different as Iris Murdoch and John McDowell sharply defended the cognitive character of the virtues. For McDowell, virtues are “sensitivities” to norms that could guide us;²¹ for Murdoch, they embodied a certain vision that made them far from blind.²² Additionally, many deontologists denied the claim that principles must be impotent.

However, the two final commitments of Frankena’s became the most controversial. Many moral philosophers committed to the centrality of the virtues claimed that the great divide in ethical theory was precisely between the ancient and the modern. They insisted that the notion of “morality” itself was a characteristically “modern” notion (largely absent from ancient ethics) and that the focus on it in modern ethics distorted ethical reflection in important ways. Using different approaches, Elizabeth Anscombe (with her attack on the modern “moral ought”),²³ Alasdair MacIntyre (with his attack on the fragmentation of the moral vocabulary in modernity and the inevitable failure of the “enlightenment project”),²⁴ and Bernard Williams (with his attack on morality as “the peculiar institution” and his insistence that moral philosophers return to “Socrates’ Question”)²⁵ all highlighted the radically different approaches to ethics found in modern and ancient moral philosophy.

Let us turn now to von Wright. Like Frankena, von Wright didn't straightforwardly defend an ethics of virtue, but his 1963 book *The Varieties of Goodness* played an important role in shaping the discussion of virtue in the 1960s and 1970s, especially among Oxford moral philosophers. He denied that the book was a "treatise on ethics," but admitted that it contained "the germ of an ethics" and "that a moral philosophy may become extracted from it."²⁶ Because much of the book was critical of the approaches to ethics in vogue at the time he was writing, it might be more appropriately described as "ground-clearing" or as a preliminary to writing a proper treatise on ethics. Like many others with an early interest in the virtues, he rejected any sharp distinction between facts and values, between the descriptive and the evaluative, or between meta-ethics and normative ethics. He was also highly critical of what he called the "conceptual autonomy of morals," the particularly Kantian view that there was a "peculiar moral sense of 'good' and 'duty' which is the proper object of ethical study."²⁷ He rejected the narrow Kantian conceptual autonomy of morals in favor of a broad approach that would place moral ideas in a comprehensive network of ideas drawn from value concepts like "good," normative concepts like "obligation," "permission," "prohibition," and "rights," and psychological concepts like "choice," "deliberation," "intention," and "motive."

The Varieties of Goodness thus examined how moral notions fit into the "broader setting of value-concepts and normative ideas."²⁸ And among those moral notions was the concept of virtue. Von Wright noted, as others had, that virtue was neglected in modern ethics and was regarded as obsolete, but he urged philosophers to see virtue as a "subject awaiting fresh developments,"²⁹ as a concept related to a complex set of evaluative notions. His careful exploration in chapter 7 of virtue's place in this complex set of evaluative notions is much more sophisticated than Frankena's relatively crude treatment of the "ethics of virtue." Indeed, von Wright's expanded conception of what ethics could be, when rescued from the burden of sharp dichotomies between facts and values, meta-ethics and normative ethics, and the moral and the non-moral, contributed significantly to the later explosion of creative work on the role of virtue in ethics.

Both Frankena and von Wright are heralds for the revival of the virtues in moral philosophy. Both moved beyond the non-cognitivism that dominated ethical theory at this time. They rejected a sharp distinction between meta-ethics and normative ethics and regarded normative thinking as an integral part of academic moral philosophy. Although neither of them proposed a normative virtue ethics, each was eager (in different ways) to place the topic of virtue on the agenda of contemporary moral philosophy. Frankena held that virtue was required to do the motivational work of the ethical, but also that a principle-based ethics was required to do the work of discerning what the virtues were required to motivate. Von Wright introduced a broader conception of ethics, one not so in thrall to the deontic concepts that had dominated much of ethical discussion earlier in the century. He rejected any sharp distinction between the moral and the non-moral and invited a fresh exploration of all forms of the good—including, of course, the good of virtue.

IV. VIRTUE ETHICS AND THE PROJECT OF MODERN MORAL PHILOSOPHY

Although Frankena and von Wright bring virtue back into the conversation of academic ethics, it is Elizabeth Anscombe's "Modern Moral Philosophy," the 1958 article almost universally considered the most significant early expression of a serious return to virtue, that engages central meta-ethical and normative issues in stating a powerful case for the superiority of virtue ethics to its contemporary alternatives. This celebrated article is about much more than virtue, although virtue looms large in it. Its philosophical density is staggering, containing more ideas per page than almost any philosophical article written in the twentieth century. It is strikingly original, both in the content of its ideas and in their mode of presentation. In addition to laying the groundwork for the later revival of virtue ethics, it, along with Anscombe's short monograph *Intention*,³⁰ published at approximately the same time, inaugurated a new discussion of practical reason and invented the philosophical specialty of action theory; introduced the term "consequentialism" into contemporary ethics; took seriously the history of moral philosophy and the historical and cultural influence on ethical ideas in a new manner; argued that the most important differences in moral philosophy were those between the modern and the classical, not between modern traditions like Kantian rationalism and Benthamite utilitarianism, which were mere variants on modern themes; raised serious questions about the coherence of the modern notion of "morality" as a distinctive, autonomous sphere of human life and evaluation; and allowed the voice of the moral philosopher to speak with moral authority, even when it spoke from the perspective of the philosophical. Anscombe's forthright espousal of substantive normative positions in "Modern Moral Philosophy" reflected a clear break with the earlier, more normatively timid style of academic ethics. Clearly her ambition was to make a frontal assault on moral philosophy as practiced in the Anglophone academic world throughout the early twentieth century.

Anscombe's "Modern Moral Philosophy" is one of the bookends of early virtue ethics, with Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, published twenty-three years later, as the other. They bear many similarities, and MacIntyre has always acknowledged Anscombe's influence on him. Their views are deeply Aristotelian, and both develop a version of "radical virtue ethics." They are radical in that their goal in making virtue central to ethics is not merely to make a move within the contemporary problematic of ethical theory (say, to replace the notion of a rule as central to ethics with the notion of virtue as central), but rather to undermine the contemporary problematic itself.³¹ Both Anscombe and MacIntyre argued that there was something seriously amiss with contemporary ethical theory, both in its substantive normative conclusions, and in the framework within which those conclusions are established. Anscombe even suggested that the practice of moral philosophy should cease until certain issues in philosophical psychology that stand in the way of progress in the field are resolved. MacIntyre, similarly, was skeptical of the ability of analytic ethics or of recent continental ethics to resolve the ethical

difficulties that confront late modernity. Both also agreed that to understand fully the ambitions of modern moral philosophy, and its failure to realize them, one must turn to the history of ethics to discover when and how ethics went wrong. They agreed, finally, that reintroducing virtue to the heart of ethics was essential to fixing its problems.

Anscombe located the central difficulty in modern ethics as the emergence of the “modern moral ‘ought’” as the dominating notion in modern moral thought. She argued that this categorical and foundational moral “ought” is only intelligible in communities, like traditional Jewish and Christian ones, that accept a law conception of ethics anchored in a Divine legislator. With modern secularizing currents bringing about the widespread rejection of such a legislator, no law conception of ethics is available to render this distinctively modern moral “ought” intelligible. What we have instead, she argues, is an instance of a concept persisting in thought past the time when the background necessary to make its use intelligible has disappeared.

Among Anscombe’s main theses in this paper was the claim that, given its tainted state, the “modern moral ‘ought’” should be abandoned. Agents should conduct their ordinary deliberations without using this compromised concept; philosophers should eschew it as well. She further suggested that it was possible to avoid using the moral “ought” in practical thinking because recourse to the language of virtue is possible. As she argued, Aristotle did not have access to the modern moral “ought” and did ethics relying only on virtue discourse.³² There is a difficulty with the proposal to adopt a virtue framework straightaway, however, in that she also argued that there is not yet an adequate concept of a virtue—or of the particular virtues—to permit replacement of the deliberative framework centered on the moral “ought” with a framework largely constituted by thought and talk of the virtues. She develops this point at length in the following important passage in “Modern Moral Philosophy”:

In present-day philosophy an explanation is required how an unjust man is a bad man, or an unjust action a bad one; to give such an explanation belongs to ethics; but it cannot even be begun until we are equipped with a sound philosophy of psychology. For the proof that an unjust man is a bad man would require a positive account of justice as a ‘virtue.’ This part of the subject matter of ethics is, however, completely closed to us until we have an account of what type of characteristic a virtue is—a problem, not of ethics, but of conceptual analysis—and how it relates to the actions in which it is instanced: a matter which I think Aristotle did not succeed in really making clear.³³

In this influential passage, Anscombe gave contemporary virtue ethics its marching orders. Its task is to develop a framework of concepts from which philosophy could reoccupy a classical perspective on ethics that puts virtue at its center and relates it properly to naturalistic notions of human flourishing and harm and to substantive views of the particular virtues, especially justice.

Much of the work in early virtue ethics was done in the spirit of carrying out this Anscombian mandate. Her two Oxford colleagues, Iris Murdoch and Philippa Foot, though differing significantly from Anscombe and from each other, shared her antipathy

to the modern moral “ought” and the Kantian ethical views it carried in its wake—and agreed that more attention to the virtues was needed to break the hold of this distorted picture on our practical lives.³⁴ Murdoch’s 1960s essays, drawing on resources more Platonic than Aristotelian, explored the kind of “self” that might be an alternative to the lonely Kantian “self” so foreign to a classical view of the virtues.

Foot was Anscombe’s student, colleague, and collaborator at Oxford’s Somerville College. In her influential articles (including “Moral Beliefs” and “Moral Arguments,” discussed in the previous section) she defended a naturalistic view of ethics with Aristotelian virtues at its heart.³⁵ She focused on demonstrating that giving primacy to the virtues allowed one to avoid the sharp distinction between facts and values, the descriptive and the evaluative, the meta-ethical and the normative, and other similar dichotomies that bedeviled ethical thinking at the time and fueled the enthusiasm for non-cognitivism.

Other important Aristotelian efforts to revive virtue ethics appeared after “Modern Moral Philosophy,” but it is MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* that carried the Anscombian project forward most powerfully. MacIntyre, like Anscombe, believed the key to understanding the plight of modern ethics was to be found in certain episodes in its history. He argued that modern moral philosophy was in thrall to the “Enlightenment Project,” a conception of modern moral philosophy that emerged after the loss of the teleological conception of nature in the late medieval and early modern eras.

According to MacIntyre, classical ethics was shaped in a world in which moral rules and virtues were understood as guiding agents from their natural states to the perfected states, realized when they had achieved their natural ends (or “in moving from man-as-he-happens-to-be to man-as-he-would-be-if-he-realizes-his-essential-nature”).³⁶ With the loss of a teleological conception of nature (brought about by modern science) and the loss of the theologically grounded teleology in Christianity and Judaism (brought about by the Reformation and secularizing forces in early modernity), this conception of moral rules and virtues as transformative and end-directed was no longer tenable. The Enlightenment Project was the attempt by moral philosophers to construct arguments for received moral rules and virtues based simply on the features of “man as he happens to be.” Rules and virtues, intended in classical ethics to transform human agents, were reconceived after the loss of teleology as being derived from features of human agents as they are—and, thus, as losing their transformative power. What was supposed to be remedial became, in the hands of modern moral philosophers, merely descriptive. In light of those developments, MacIntyre concluded that the Enlightenment Project failed, and had to fail, given its deep incoherence. The incoherence, put most simply, arose from the Enlightenment attempt to justify moral rules and virtues whose goal was to transform human sensibilities by appealing to the very features of human agency most in need of transformation. Or, as MacIntyre summed it up,

... the eighteenth-century moral philosophers engaged in what was an inevitably unsuccessful project; for they did indeed attempt to find a rational basis for their moral beliefs in a particular understanding of human nature, while inheriting a set of moral injunctions on the one hand and a conception of human nature on the other which had been expressly designed to be discrepant with each other.³⁷

Like Anscombe, MacIntyre turned to virtue as a rescue strategy for modern moral philosophy. For Anscombe, recourse to the language of virtue was necessary to rescue ethical thinking from domination by the “modern moral ‘ought’” and the consequently distorted picture of deliberation and practical reason that accompanied it. For MacIntyre, it was the incoherent project of Enlightenment ethical theory (which of course also embodied the “modern moral ‘ought’”) that was the villain. Their critiques of modern moral philosophy were similar in many respects, but MacIntyre’s embodied a more sophisticated account of the historical details of the development of enlightenment ethics than Anscombe’s.

MacIntyre also expanded Anscombe’s project in two important ways. First, he coupled with his attack on the Enlightenment Project a subtle and far-reaching discussion of the impact Enlightenment ethics had on modern social life. His depiction in the first half of *After Virtue* of contemporary culture as “emotivist culture,” with its dominating characters of the manager, the therapist, and the aesthete, brought the project of virtue ethics into contact with post-1960s concerns among contemporary social critics.³⁸ It gave virtue in academic moral philosophy a cultural salience that it had previously lacked. In this way, MacIntyre contributed to the return of moral philosophy to a substantive engagement with culture that Rawls had pioneered in *A Theory of Justice*.

Second, MacIntyre developed a sophisticated and detailed positive account of the virtues unlike anything attempted in contemporary ethics previously. His location of the virtues in the tripartite framework of practices, the narrative unity of a life, and tradition drew on work in other areas of philosophy and in other disciplines (especially sociology and literary studies) to give a substantive and comprehensive account of how virtues might serve as the central notions in ethical theory.³⁹ In *After Virtue*, virtue ethics moves finally from being merely a nagging critic of mainstream academic moral philosophy to being a significant alternative to broadly Kantian and consequentialist views.

The rich development of broadly Aristotelian virtue ethics in this period from Anscombe’s “Modern Moral Philosophy” to MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* is surely the heart of early virtue ethics, but there are other accounts of the virtues that contribute to the virtue revival. These views depart from Aristotelianism in various ways, but still place virtue at the center of their accounts. G. J. Warnock, Edmund Pincoffs, and James Wallace developed three of these influential non-Aristotelian views.⁴⁰ Warnock’s 1971 book, *The Object of Morality*, defended a form of virtue-consequentialism and located moral virtues as important contributors to the “amelioration of the human condition,” which, he argued, was the object of morality. Pincoffs’s 1971 article, “Quandary Ethics,” argued that ethics went wrong in narrowly focusing on its role in solving practical puzzles or quandaries. He insisted that the neglect of virtue was responsible for this narrowing of the focus and that turning to virtue would distance agents from the quandary paradigm. Wallace’s 1978 book, *Virtues and Vices*, took a broadly Deweyan perspective on ethics and deployed a biological functionalist argument for the centrality of the virtues in ethics.

The variety of philosophical work that made a serious contribution to the revival of virtue in this period is great. Moreover, there are many other philosophers in this period who would not be described as committed to virtue ethics, but who nevertheless made significant contributions to putting virtue back at the center of discussions in academic

ethics. Bernard Williams and Charles Taylor would surely be among this group.⁴¹ They both approached issues in ethical theory from a rich historical perspective and with a deep suspicion of the ambitions of modern Kantian and consequentialist theories. In this way, their work lent support to the revival of interest in the virtues, even if they are not usually counted as virtue ethicists.

Given the variety of the views that contributed to early virtue ethics, it is impossible to give a single or simple characterization of the distinguishing marks of virtue ethics in this period. However, a list of themes that repeatedly emerged in the work of philosophers who turned to the virtues would certainly include the following:⁴²

- (1) A suspicion of rules and principles as adequate to guiding human action in the complex, variegated situations in which human agents find themselves.
- (2) A rejection of conscientiousness as the uniquely appropriate motivational state in the best human action.
- (3) A turn for an understanding of the ethical life to the virtue terms (e.g., “justice,” “courage,” and “chastity”) in preference to more abstract ethical terms like “good,” “right,” and “ought.”
- (4) A critique of modernity and of the models of practical rationality that underlie such enlightenment theories as Kantian deontology and Benthamite consequentialism—with the critique extending to the impersonal bureaucratic features of many central modern social practices.
- (5) An emphasis on the importance of community in introducing and sustaining the ethical life, in contrast with the individualism that permeated Kantian and consequentialist approaches to ethics.
- (6) A focus on the importance of the whole life as the primary object of ethical evaluation, in contrast with the modern focus on the evaluation of individual actions or more fragmented features of human lives.
- (7) An emphasis on the narrative structure of human life, as opposed to the more episodic picture of human life found in Kantian and consequentialist alternatives.
- (8) An emphasis on the centrality of contingently based special relationships, especially with friends and family, for the ethical life, in contrast to the Kantian and consequentialist tendency to downplay such relationships.
- (9) A suspicion of the institution of morality as an autonomous and alienating grid of obligations and rights, cut off from the more concrete features of human practical life.
- (10) A special emphasis on thick moral education involving training in the virtues, as opposed to Kantian and consequentialist models of moral education that tend to emphasize growth in autonomy or in detached instrumental rationality.

Some of these themes, of course, are also found in work not specifically committed to a virtue approach to ethics, but many of them came to the center of contemporary discussions of ethics from out of the rich mix of views in early virtue ethics.

V. AFTER “EARLY VIRTUE ETHICS”

Other chapters in this *Handbook* will discuss more recent work in virtue ethics, but it may be useful to conclude by calling attention to some of these significant later developments. First, as virtue ethics develops beyond the mid-1980s, the diversity of forms of virtue ethics increases. While there is still important work being done in Aristotelian virtue ethics, broadly Aristotelian approaches to virtue do not dominate the field in the way they did in early virtue ethics. Humean, Nietzschean, and consequentialist models of virtue ethics are common, and there seems no limit to the variety of ethical approaches that might place virtue at their center. Second, contemporary virtue ethics seems overall less radical than it had been in its earlier days. Many proponents of virtue in the early days of virtue ethics turned to virtue because they found something seriously wrong with the direction or the structure of academic ethics as standardly practiced. Recent virtue ethics seems more concerned to find a place for virtue within the received structure of academic ethics.

A third exciting development in more recent virtue ethics stems from the attempt to respond to a serious objection to virtue ethics from outside the field of philosophy altogether. In the 1990s, the situationist critique of virtue ethics emerged from empirical work done in social psychology.⁴³ This empirical work convinced many that virtues themselves did not play the powerful motivational role in ethical situations they were traditionally claimed to play. The objection charged that experimental work demonstrated that it was rather contingent and seemingly ethically trivial features of situations that dominated motivation. Some early versions of this objection went so far as to claim that this work demonstrated in fact that virtues as traditionally conceived did not exist.⁴⁴ This objection has led to a lively debate in virtue ethics that, while far from settled, has already influenced the field in important ways. In order to respond to this objection, philosophical advocates of virtue ethics had to engage complicated empirical work in the social sciences, which, in turn, fueled an expanding interest on the part of moral philosophers to investigate empirical resources further. As a result, empirical work on motivation, on the nature of happiness and satisfaction, and on the acquisition of virtues has had an increasing impact on virtue ethics.⁴⁵ It is unclear where this new interest in empirical work will lead the field, but it is no doubt changing it in important ways.

NOTES

1. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).
2. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).
3. Peter French, Theodore Uehling, and Howard Wettstein. *Ethical Theory: Character and Virtue*, Midwest Studies in Philosophy, XIII (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986).

4. G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1903).
5. See William Frankena, "The Naturalistic Fallacy," *Mind* 102 (1939): 464–477, for a classic discussion of both the naturalistic fallacy and the open question argument.
6. Philippa Foot, "Moral Beliefs," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 59 (1958): 83.
7. Philippa Foot, "Moral Beliefs"; Philippa Foot, "Moral Arguments," *Mind* 67 (1958): 502–513.
8. Elizabeth Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33 (1958): 1–16; Peter Geach, "Good and Evil," *Analysis* 17 (1956): 33–42; Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); Julius Kovesi, *Moral Notions* (New York: Humanities Press, 1967). Alasdair MacIntyre, "Ought," in *Against the Self-Images of the Age* (London: Schocken Press, 1971), 136–156.
9. A useful collection of articles on these disputes is found in Anthony Flew, *The Is-Ought Problem* (London: Macmillan St. Martin's Press, 1969).
10. Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th edition (London: MacMillan, 1907).
11. See, for example, Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View: A Rational Basis for Ethics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1958); and Marcus Singer, *The Generalization Principle in Ethics* (New York: Knopf, 1961).
12. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).
13. Sidgwick, *Methods*; F. H. Bradley, *Ethical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1876); Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Ethics* (London: Williams and Northgate, 1892).
14. See especially Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).
15. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).
16. See Martha Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics: A Misleading Category," *The Journal of Ethics* 3(3) (1999): 163–201.
17. William Frankena, *Ethics* (Englewood-Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 46.
18. Frankena, *Ethics*, 51.
19. Frankena, *Ethics*, 52.
20. Frankena, *Ethics*, 53.
21. John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62(3) (1979): 331–350.
22. Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts*.
23. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," 46. Her particular problems with the "moral ought" are described in detail later.
24. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1981), 39. MacIntyre characterizes the particularly modern 'ought' as at home in "that particular sphere in which rules of conduct which are neither theological nor legal nor aesthetic are allowed a cultural space of their own." It is the breakdown of the project of an independent rational justification of morality in this sense that provides the key, according to MacIntyre, to the failure of the Enlightenment Project at the heart of modern moral philosophy.
25. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), chap. 10. Williams's attack here on the modern notion of morality is complex and sustained, and certainly impossible to summarize briefly here. He concludes his attack on morality by claiming that "[i]ts philosophical errors are only the most abstract expressions of a deeply rooted and still powerful misconception of life" (196).
26. Georg von Wright, *The Varieties of Goodness* (London: Routledge, 1963), vi.
27. Von Wright, *Varieties*, 1.
28. Von Wright, *Varieties*, 8.
29. Von Wright, *Varieties*, 136.
30. Elizabeth Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957).

31. For more about "radical virtue ethics," see David Solomon, "Virtue Ethics: Radical or Routine?" in *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*, edited by Linda Zagzebski and Michael DePaul (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 57–80.
32. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," 5.
33. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," 7.
34. Foot's distaste for the "moral ought" is particularly on display in her much discussed 1972 article, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," *The Philosophical Review* 81 (July 1972): 305–316.
35. Philippa Foot, "Moral Beliefs," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 59 (1958): 83–104; Philippa Foot, "Moral Arguments," *Mind* 67 (1958): 502–513.
36. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 52.
37. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 55.
38. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chap. 3–4.
39. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chap. 14–15.
40. G. J. Warnock, *The Object of Morality* (London: Methuen, 1971); Edmund Pincoffs, "Quandary Ethics," *Mind* 80 (October 1971), 552–571; James Wallace, *Virtues and Vices*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978).
41. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); and Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).
42. MacIntyre, Williams, and Taylor pursue all of these themes. Others take some seriously and distance themselves from others.
43. A nice summary of this objection is in John Doris, "Persons, Situations and Virtue Ethics," *Noûs* 32 (4) (1998): 504–530.
44. Perhaps the most influential proponent of this view is Gilbert Harmon. See, for example, Gilbert Harmon, "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 99 (1999): 315–331.
45. Two important instances of this new empirical work is found in Nancy Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory* (London: Routledge, 2010); and Christian Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

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CHAPTER 16

NEO-ARISTOTELIAN VIRTUE ETHICS

NANCY E. SNOW

I. INTRODUCTION

To understand neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics (hereafter NAVE), one must first grasp the distinction between virtue *theory* and virtue *ethics*. Virtue *theories* offer accounts of what virtues are, and can be parts of larger ethical theories, such as Kantianism and utilitarianism.¹ By contrast, virtue *ethics* is a type of ethical theory that prizes virtue as its central concept.² As such, it is an alternative to deontology, which takes such notions as duties, principles, and rules as central, and utilitarianism, which regards happiness, welfare, or pleasure as primary.

NAVE, as the name suggests, takes its inspiration from Aristotle's ethical theory. Aristotle's ethical theory relies on the idea that virtues, that is, enduring dispositions of character and intellect, are central to our lives.³ Virtues, along with external goods, enable us to live flourishing or *eudaimon* lives, in accordance with our nature as rational beings. Aristotle's theory is teleological, for the virtues direct us toward the end or *telos* of flourishing and enable us to attain it, and it is naturalistic, in the sense that to live a virtuous life is to live a life of natural goodness. These ideas are explained at greater length later in this chapter, but two points should be noted here. First, though *eudaimonia results from* having virtues and external goods, it is also *constituted by* those virtues and goods. *Eudaimonia* is had in the living of a life,⁴ and, as Aristotle famously notes, we cannot call someone *eudaimon* until after he is dead—until after we can gain a complete picture of his life as a whole and how well he lived it. Second, ethical naturalism grounds and justifies virtue ethics. On this view, goodness does not derive from some non-natural source, such as Plato's Form of the Good or divine commands. Goodness consists in being good of one's kind, and human goodness is part of a comprehensive scheme of natural goodness that includes the goodness of plants and animals.

NAVE's contemporary origins are typically traced to Elizabeth Anscombe's seminal article, "Modern Moral Philosophy," first published in 1958, in which Anscombe lamented the state of ethics in her day, especially the hegemony of deontology and consequentialism, and urged a return to Aristotle's thought to develop an adequate philosophical psychology.⁵ Philippa Foot, writing in Oxford as early in the 1950s, was a major contributor to thinking about virtue who drew on Aquinas as well as Aristotle for inspiration. John McDowell's work, some of which was written in the 1970s, yielded important interpretations of Aristotelian virtue. Alasdair MacIntyre contributed *After Virtue* in the 1980s.⁶ Special mention should be made of Linda Zagzebski's book *Virtues of the Mind*, which unified a virtue-based approach to ethics and epistemology.⁷

The seminal event in the development of NAVE as a full-fledged theoretical alternative to deontology and consequentialism was the publication of Rosalind Hursthouse's book *On Virtue Ethics*, which inspired a flurry of activity. Some philosophers have criticized various aspects of NAVE as developed by Hursthouse.⁸ Others have offered virtue ethical alternatives to NAVE.⁹ Still others, such as Russell, Foot, and Hursthouse herself, carried it beyond the bounds of Hursthouse's initial work.¹⁰

In this chapter, I review central aspects of Hursthouse's view that virtue ethics is a viable alternative to deontology and consequentialism, followed by a discussion of two major themes of Russell's account of the role of practical reason in virtue ethics.¹¹ Finally, I turn to ethical naturalism, as articulated mainly by Hursthouse, Foot, and Thompson, with mention of McDowell's approach.¹²

II. HURSTHOUSE: VIRTUE ETHICS AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO DEONTOLOGY AND CONSEQUENTIALISM

To make the case that virtue ethics is a bona fide theoretical alternative to deontology and consequentialism, Hursthouse elucidates structural similarities among the three views.¹³ In doing so, she addresses a criticism long thought to be a bane of Aristotelian ethics, namely, its alleged inability to provide action guidance.¹⁴ In this regard, two structural similarities are important. The first is that all three theory types rely on a central principle. The second is that all three principles require supplementation in order to provide usable action guidance.

Ethicists have long acknowledged that deontology and consequentialism provide principles that, when applied to specific situations, give guidance about how to act. By contrast, virtue-based approaches, it has been claimed, are unable to give clear prescriptions for action, offering vague truisms such as "be honest," "act courageously," and so on. Hursthouse addresses this complaint by noting that consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics can all be seen as starting with a central principle, which, in itself, gives no guidance as to right action.¹⁵ Consequentialism, for example, begins with the

principle, “An action is right if and only if it promotes the best consequences”; deontology, with the principle (for example), “A correct moral rule is one that is universalizable”; and virtue ethics, with the principle, “An action is right iff [if and only if] it is what a virtuous agent would characteristically (i.e., acting in character) do in the circumstances.”¹⁶ The last principle—Hursthouse’s virtue ethical criterion of right action—has come in for criticism, discussed later in the chapter. Here we should note her central point: none of these principles, taken by itself, is informative as to how agents should act. Each requires supplementation if it is to guide action.

Consequentialists need to explain what the best consequences are, namely, those that maximize happiness. They also need to explain what happiness amounts to. Various accounts are on offer: pleasure, the absence of pain, maximizing the satisfaction of preferences, and conceptions of well-being that combine objective and subjective elements, to name a few. Deontologists need to explain what universalizability is, how that principle is applied to specific situations, and why we should think the impartial perspective it yields is in fact a moral point of view. Similarly, virtue ethicists need to explain who the virtuous agent is; that is, they need to give content to that notion. A virtuous agent, Hursthouse writes,¹⁷ is one who has and exercises certain character traits, namely, the virtues, and the virtues can be listed and explained. For neo-Aristotelians, the virtues are character traits partly constitutive of a flourishing life. Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, Hursthouse maintains, is as capable as the other theories of supplementing its central principle and thus giving usable guidance.

What form does this supplementation take? Again, Hursthouse identifies a structural similarity. Just as deontology offers “rules of thumb” that guide action, such as “Do not lie,” “Do not break promises,” and so on, virtue ethics provides what she calls “v-rules”—rules that state how virtuous agents, acting in character, would act or not act in certain situations. The v-rules, in other words, generate lists of prescriptions or prohibitions to guide right action.¹⁸ Should one lie when doing so would be to one’s advantage? Would the virtuous agent do so? Clearly not. Should one be generous to a friend in need? Again, would the virtuous person be generous or stingy? The shape that honesty, generosity, and the other virtues would take in specific circumstances is often not clearly specified, but neither is it always clear to agents how to maximize happiness in any given situation, or what doing one’s duty would in fact involve.

For virtue ethics, this is the issue of uncodifiability, namely, the notion that the complexity of situations in which virtue is called for outstrips the list of rules and specific prescriptions for action guidance that can be given. Hursthouse addresses this issue and notes that it pinpoints a condition of adequacy for any normative ethics: any normatively adequate ethics must not only offer action guidance for rational adults who are capable of thinking through for themselves what specific actions are called for in any given situation, but also give some account of moral education, that is, of how people come to possess the discernment and skills needed for ethical action.¹⁹ She points out that virtue ethical admonitions, such as “Don’t be cruel,” “Be patient,” “Be tolerant,” and so on, often provide more action guidance than is typically recognized and are used to teach children.²⁰ An advantage of NAVE is that it explicitly incorporates the

requirement that *phronēsis*, or practical reason, inform the virtues, regulate emotional responses, and guide right action.²¹ Thus, the successful development of virtue requires the cultivation of *phronēsis*. Traits such as courage, loyalty, and so on cannot be considered developed Aristotelian virtues unless they are informed by *phronēsis*, though they can be natural virtues—traits not informed by *phronēsis*, which are possessed by children and some animals.²²

In addition to a discussion of action guidance and virtue ethical right action in chapter 1, Hursthouse's other early chapters (2 and 3) examine resolvable and irresolvable and tragic dilemmas.²³ Irresolvable dilemmas, which may be pleasant or distressing, are those in which a virtuous agent is confronted with two possible actions, but virtue ethics appropriately gives no grounds for choosing one instead of the other.²⁴ Resolvable dilemmas are of two types: those that occur in circumstances in which a virtuous agent would find herself, and those that occur in circumstances in which she would not find herself. In the former, the decision as well as the action will be assessed as morally right; in the latter, the decision, though not the action, will be assessed as morally right.²⁵ In the latter types of situation, the virtuous agent has an "emotional remainder": she deeply regrets the circumstances that made the action necessary.²⁶ Some resolvable dilemmas deserve to be called "tragic," Hursthouse thinks, because the virtuous agent cannot resolve them correctly without marring her life.²⁷ This forces a revision of the virtue ethical criterion of right action mentioned earlier to state,

An action is right iff it is what a virtuous agent would, characteristically, do in the circumstances, except for tragic dilemmas, in which a decision is right iff it is what such an agent would decide, but the action decided upon may be too terrible to be called 'right' or 'good.' (And a tragic dilemma is one from which a virtuous agent cannot emerge with her life unmarred.).²⁸

As noted earlier, Hursthouse's virtue ethical criterion of right action has come under fire.²⁹ One of the most interesting critiques is from Johnson,³⁰ who argues that, in mature but imperfect agents who seek to improve in virtue, right action is not always that which the virtuous agent would characteristically do. Suppose that someone has a tendency to lie in difficult situations. To break herself of this habit, she begins keeping a journal in which she notes occasions on which she has lied or not, in order to keep track of how well she is doing to overcome this flaw. This is not something a virtuous agent would characteristically do, yet arguably, it is right action in her circumstances, since it is a strategy to help her improve in virtue—obviously a worthy end. In her discussions of virtue, the emotions, and moral motivation, Hursthouse acknowledges the need for appropriate education of the emotions for the development and possession of virtue and the importance of upbringing and socialization for one's capacities for virtue.³¹ Yet Johnson's challenge revealed virtue development as an area in which further articulation of NAVE was needed.³²

In the central chapters of her book, Hursthouse develops other Aristotelian themes.³³ She insists that being virtuous is not only a matter of having the correct perceptions and thoughts, but also of having appropriate emotions, of being able to feel in the right way at the right time for the right reasons.³⁴ The central thesis of chapters 6 and 7, on the virtuous person's reasons for action and moral motivation, respectively, is that occurrent thoughts, such as "This is right, virtuous, noble, my duty," are neither necessary nor sufficient for moral motivation.³⁵ Instead, moral motivation is about character—about the possession of the virtues, and this is a matter of degree. The virtuous person acts from virtue, and virtue is informed by practical wisdom. She acts for the right reasons, and these reasons are responsive to facts in the world. The virtuous person is not always articulate about why she acts virtuously; nevertheless, her reasons for acting reveal the facts she sees as salient in the circumstances.³⁶ The perfectly virtuous agent sets the standard for moral motivation, against which the imperfectly virtuous can be assessed.³⁷ "What is both necessary and sufficient for a virtuous act to be 'morally motivated,'" Hursthouse argues, "is that it be done from a state of character that adequately resembles the state of character from which the perfectly virtuous agent acts."³⁸

In the course of this argument she makes several important points about the variability of virtue as instantiated in actual lives. One is the possibility of "blind spots" of varying degrees of moral deficiency—gaps in one's moral vision resulting from one's upbringing and socialization.³⁹ She contends that some blind spots, such as being allegedly "blind" to the slaughter of Jews during World War II, are enough to disqualify their possessors from being considered to have any virtue at all.⁴⁰ Possession of other blind spots might call for less harsh judgment, as we might think only exceptional people could overcome them, given the societies in which their possessors live.⁴¹ Another point is that people can be strong in one virtue, yet weak in another.⁴² She continues, "... the virtues do not thereby become completely discrete, isolable character traits, for not only do the ranges overlap but the same sorts of judgments about goods and evils, benefits and harms, what is worthwhile and what is unimportant crop up all over the place."⁴³ These observations lead her to endorse a thesis of the "limited" or "weak" unity of the virtues.⁴⁴ A strong unity of virtues thesis is found in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle claims that possession of the single virtue of practical wisdom carries with it the possession of all of the virtues.⁴⁵ A weak or limited thesis charts a middle ground between the strong view and the unpalatable option that the virtues are discrete and unconnected. The "weak" or "limited" thesis thus allows for "... the fact that practical wisdom cannot occur in discrete packages, limited in its area of competence to just this virtue or that, and also the fact that it is not an all-or-nothing matter. According to this thesis, anyone who possesses one virtue will have all the others to some degree, albeit, in some cases, a pretty limited one."⁴⁶

Hursthouse's exploration of NAVE did not end in 1999. She has extended her work to other areas of theoretical interest as well as to applied virtue ethics.⁴⁷ We will revisit Hursthouse's work in our discussion of ethical naturalism.

III. RUSSELL: PRACTICAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE VIRTUES

Daniel C. Russell has further developed NAVE in an important book, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*. This is a complex book that deals with a number of central virtue ethical issues, such as right action, the enumeration problem, the unity of the virtues, and the situationist challenge to virtue ethics. The discussion of themes other than virtue ethical right action and the enumeration problem must here be left aside.⁴⁸ Russell's overarching aim is to defend what he calls "hard virtue ethics" against "soft virtue ethics." According to the former, *phronēsis* is a part of all of the virtues; according to the latter, it is not. Russell argues that only hard virtue ethics is viable.⁴⁹

Integral to this account is the notion that *phronēsis* is required for virtue ethical right action. The topic of virtue ethical right action is taken up in Part I of the book. Should virtue ethicists fail to provide an adequate virtue ethical account of right action, Russell contends,⁵⁰ virtue ethics will not be a convincing alternative to deontology and consequentialism. In Part II, another plank of the case for hard ethics is put in place. Russell there takes up a topic that has been neglected by virtue ethicists: the "enumeration problem." If we cannot enumerate or list the virtues, we confront the possibility that there are infinitely many. But if there are infinitely many virtues, Russell contends,⁵¹ virtue ethics would be undermined. He proposes a model whereby virtue ethicists identify a finite list of cardinal or primary virtues in terms of which other, subordinate virtues can be specified.

Russell begins his treatment of virtue ethical right action by stepping back from the contours of the present debate to ask how the issue of virtue ethical right action has been framed. He contends that the lack of a theoretically neutral concept of right action has hindered philosophical discussions of this issue, not least by smuggling hidden assumptions—often of a consequentialist nature—into the debate.⁵² He proposes to develop a framework for assessing virtue ethical approaches to right action in a non-question-begging way.

Russell begins his complex discussion—simplified here—by noting two constraints:

The 'account constraint': "An account of right action is adequate only if that account takes sufficiently into consideration all of our serious practical concerns," and

The 'act constraint': "An account of right action is adequate only if that account holds that an action is right only if that action sufficiently meets all of our serious practical concerns."⁵³

The account constraint raises questions, for example: Must a virtue ethical account of right action judge only those actions to be right that take into account all of our serious practical concerns, among which would be outcomes, consequences, states of affairs, and so on—the standard fare of consequentialism? If a virtue ethical account does not,

does it fail to take these concerns seriously enough? If it does, has it covertly become reliant upon a consequentialist theory of right action, and thereby lost its virtue ethical character?

As for the act constraint, Russell asks: *Must* a virtue ethical account satisfy the act constraint, and *can* a virtue ethical account satisfy it? He notes that Michael Slote's agent-based virtue ethics accepts the account constraint but not the stronger act constraint, and that neo-Aristotelians Philippa Foot, Rosalind Hursthouse, and an advocate of non-eudaimonist pluralism, Christine Swanton, are committed to the act constraint, according to which acting virtuously is necessary but not sufficient for right action.⁵⁴

In an extensive discussion that incorporates the distinction between action guidance and action assessment, he argues that the real disagreement among virtue ethicists concerns action assessment, not action guidance, and notes that virtue ethicists generally agree that the task of virtue ethics is not to solve ethical problems, but to provide a way of modeling how to think about them.⁵⁵ So the central problem of providing a virtue ethical account of right action can be understood as the problem of finding a framework for the assessment of virtue ethical action that satisfies both the account and act constraints. Russell finds this framework by adopting from Watson a requirement that Russell calls the "virtue ethical constraint" or "VE constraint."⁵⁶ Loosely stated, this is the idea that the concept of a virtue is prior to that of right action, in the sense that a virtue can be understood apart from a formula of right action, but right action cannot be fully understood apart from an account of the virtues. It is clear, Russell thinks, that the VE constraint is a necessary condition on virtue ethical right action,⁵⁷ accepted by Hursthouse, Foot, and Swanton, but is it also sufficient? And does it smuggle in consequentialist concerns?

He argues that the VE constraint is necessary and sufficient, and does not smuggle in consequentialist concerns, provided that it is modified as follows: ". . . the notion of virtue's priority to an account of right action must be understood as also including virtue's priority, not necessarily to the notion of good outcomes, but *to the notion that outcomes can bear on the rightness of action.*"⁵⁸ To oversimplify a complex discussion, we can note that amending the VE constraint in this way allows for cases in which virtue is frustrated by circumstances in the world, and because of these virtuous efforts fail to produce virtuous outcomes. Russell considers a variety of kinds of cases in which virtue ethical action assessments can differ—for example, dilemmas in which a virtuous person must act but recognizes that there is no benevolent thing to do, or cases in which she acts the wrong way but for the right reasons, that is, cases in which reasons of virtue result in bad outcomes. In such cases, virtue ethical action fails, but not because of a failure to produce the desired outcomes. Virtue ethical action fails because virtue itself is impeded.

Having set a framework for virtue ethical theories of right action, Russell goes on to argue that the account constraint, which requires virtue ethical theories of right action to take sufficiently into consideration all of our practical concerns, entails that virtuous deliberation take seriously all of our serious practical concerns, as well as provide good

specifications of virtuous ends.⁵⁹ But only *phronēsis* enables us to do this reliably and intelligently. *Phronēsis*, then, is required to link virtue and right action.

An important feature of this account should be highlighted. Virtue ethical right action is virtuous *overall*, that is, all things considered. The only reliable way of regularly achieving virtue ethical right action is by using *phronēsis*. Russell identifies two roles for *phronēsis*: that of deliberating wisely about where the mean for particular virtues lies, and that of integrating the concerns of various virtues.⁶⁰ The latter role allows us to perform acts that are virtuous overall, and thus, right. For we cannot perform acts that are virtuous overall without being able to balance the possibly conflicting demands of various virtues—justice and mercy—for example. Balancing these demands requires proficiency in a range of virtues, which leads us in the direction of the unity of virtues thesis. Later in the book, after tackling the enumeration problem, Russell defends a strong version of this thesis, according to which the virtues are unified through *phronēsis*.⁶¹

The upshot of the discussion just reviewed is that only hard virtue ethics, according to which *phronēsis* is part of all of the virtues, is viable, for only hard virtue ethics can reliably link virtue and right action. Soft virtue ethics, which does not require that *phronēsis* be a part of all of the virtues, cannot do this, and, thus, is not a contender as an adequate ethical theory.

Consider now Russell's treatment of the enumeration problem. The problem is this: "If right action is action in accordance with the virtues, and a virtuous person a person who has the virtues, but virtue ethics tells us that the virtues are infinitely many, then virtue ethics cannot say what right action is action in accordance with, or what it would be to be a virtuous person."⁶² In addition, the notion that there are infinitely many virtues is inconsistent with ethical naturalism, Russell argues, because human psychology is finite: our character cannot have infinitely many traits.⁶³

He contends that the best way out of this problem is to follow the lead of historical virtue theorists other than Aristotle, such as Plato, the Stoics, and Aquinas, who followed the Stoics.⁶⁴ That is to offer a theory of the virtues that specifies a finite number that are cardinal or primary, such as justice, temperance, wisdom, and courage, and relating other, subordinate virtues to the primary ones. Russell argues that subordinate virtues are best related to primary ones not by the contexts in which they are exercised, but by shared general reasons. The model that he proposes is one in which virtues are connected to each other in two ways.

First, "... the virtue reasons of a cardinal virtue and the virtue reasons of its subordinate virtues are related as genus to species."⁶⁵ He gives the example of generosity and magnificence: "... reasons of magnificence are generically the same as reasons of generosity,⁶⁶ for both aim to benefit others with one's resources. Yet magnificence is a specialization of generosity (one way of understanding the subordination relation), since magnificence requires both specialized deliberative skills as well as a specialized form of *phronēsis* to specify the content of reasons for magnificence, or the ends at which magnificence aims.⁶⁷ This form of connectivity, which Russell calls "generic connectivity,"⁶⁸ obtains between cardinal virtues as genera and subordinate virtues as species.

The second form of connectivity, or “cross-generic connectivity” is between the genera of virtues, such that “. . . each virtue involves responsiveness to reasons that rationalize every virtue, just as such, as part of a whole life of a creature that acts for reasons.”⁶⁹

Both types of connectivity require *phronēsis*. As for the first, *phronēsis* is required to realize that a commitment to responsiveness to one generic type of reason, to reasons of generosity, for example, requires a commitment to responsiveness to another type of reason, such as those of magnificence.⁷⁰ *Phronēsis* is also required to recognize that virtue reasons are themselves context-independent; that is, they are applicable across different types of situations that call for the same virtue. *Phronēsis* enables the virtuous person to see this, and to calibrate her virtue reasons as specific situations require. Reasons of generosity, for example, apply when giving gifts to family and friends, when donating to charity, when giving of one’s time to help another, and so on, yet they are generically the same, based in a recognition of the value of sharing one’s resources, including one’s time and energy, with others. Even though we, as imperfect beings, might compartmentalize the virtues to various areas of our lives or to specific types of situations, *phronēsis* and the virtues are global across contexts.

Moreover, if cardinal virtues exhibit the second form of connectivity, cross-generic connectivity, then, Russell contends, “[h]olism about the content of reasons implies that the content of any chain of virtue reasons, such as that comprised of generosity and magnificence, must be understood in light of (at least some of) the other chains.”⁷¹ *Phronēsis*, one might say, enables us to discern connections among the virtues, not only vertically, up and down the chains of virtue reasons of specific cardinal virtues and their subordinate virtues, but also horizontally, that is, between the cardinal virtues themselves, as well as between the subordinate virtues comprising respective chains. To be virtuous overall, then, and to perform overall virtuous actions, requires sensitivity to the claims of all of the virtues, both cardinal and subordinate, which comprise chains of virtue reasons, as well as acknowledgment of the fact that virtues themselves are not compartmentalized, though we commonly experience compartmentalization in our imperfect lives.⁷² All of this fleshes out the integrative role that Russell had earlier claimed for *phronēsis*.⁷³

The two forms of connectivity link with Russell’s arguments against the situationist critique, as well as with the conception of virtue he endorses in his defense of the unity of virtues thesis. In connection with situationism, he argues that virtues are indeed global traits with an adequate empirical psychology. As for the unity thesis, he views this as a model for how the virtues should be united in the character of a person, and not as an attributive thesis about how virtues actually are instantiated in the lives of imperfect, developing individuals. On this model, “. . . phronesis entails all the virtues.”⁷⁴ He takes the virtues to be excellences, “. . . traits in virtue of which one fulfills one’s nature as a rational and emotional creature that chooses and acts.”⁷⁵

The foregoing discussion barely scratches the surface of a profound and important contribution to the ongoing development of NAVE. In addition to his monograph on happiness, Russell has continued publishing on Aristotle and advancing NAVE in a series of articles.⁷⁶

IV. ETHICAL NATURALISM

John McDowell, Rosalind Hursthouse, Philippa Foot, and Michael Thompson have developed versions of ethical naturalism specifically meant to ground Aristotelian virtue ethics.⁷⁷ The Hursthouse-Foot-Thompson conception constitutes a more or less unified approach, featuring points of influence, overlap, and coherence. McDowell's view stands apart. Let us consider the former, then turn to an all-too-brief comment on the latter.

The central idea of this conception of naturalism is that evaluations of the moral goodness and badness of humans have the same conceptual structure as evaluations of the goodness and badness of plants and animals. Early adumbrations of this approach can be found in work by Elizabeth Anscombe and Peter Geach, and were developed in papers by Foot in which she argues against moral subjectivism, especially R. M. Hare's version of prescriptivism.⁷⁸ In "Does Moral Subjectivism Rest on a Mistake," Foot invokes Anscombe's notion of an "Aristotelian necessity": "that which is necessary because and insofar as good hangs on it."⁷⁹ We use this idea, Foot contends, "... when we say that it is necessary for plants to have water, for birds to build nests, for wolves to hunt in packs, and for lionesses to teach their cubs to kill."⁸⁰ These judgments about what is necessary for the good of plants and animals provide standards by means of which we can identify individuals that are good of their kind and those that are defective. Since it is the nature of wolves to hunt together in packs and the nature of dancing bees to lead other bees to sources of nectar, we can say that a free-riding wolf, one that does not participate in the hunt but partakes of the spoils and a dancing bee that finds nectar but does not alert other bees to its whereabouts are defective. They are just as defective in these social aspects as are members of species who suffer from individual defects, for example, who lack sight, hearing, or the power of movement.⁸¹

Foot claims: "I am therefore, quite seriously, likening the basis of moral evaluation to that of the evaluation of behaviour in animals."⁸² She goes on to stress the extent to which human communication and reason complicate these evaluations, not least by creating a diversity of goods exceeding those available to plants and other animals in extent and complexity. Yet the passage just quoted expresses the central thesis of the Hursthouse-Foot-Thompson approach to ethical naturalism. Foot expands on this, as does Hursthouse.⁸³ Both draw on an important paper by Michael Thompson, "The Representation of Life," which develops a conceptual structure for naturalistic evaluations of plants, animals, and humans.⁸⁴ Ideas in this paper have been amplified in Thompson.⁸⁵ Let's proceed by reviewing central features of Hursthouse, then turn to Foot and Thompson.⁸⁶

Hursthouse discusses ethical naturalism in Part III of *On Virtue Ethics*, and revisits it in a later paper, "On the Grounding of the Virtues in Human Nature." The later paper is in essential respects a condensed restatement of her earlier view. A succinct way to begin is with her contention that she is taking over from Aristotle two connected claims, yet moving beyond him to deal with distinctively modern concerns. The claims are

- (1) that the virtues are those character traits that human beings, given their nature, need for *eudaimonia*, to flourish or live well as human beings, whereby
- (2) considerations of human nature provide, in some sense, a rational foundation for ethics.⁸⁷

Consider (2). Hursthouse adopts the general framework of ethical naturalism introduced in Foot's early papers, and thus agrees that we should look to species-dependent evaluations of plants and animals to find the kinds of structures that ground ethical evaluations in humans. "Species-dependent" means that the kinds of evaluations in question are those that indicate whether a member of a species is good of its kind, given the nature and ends of the species itself, and not given some other set of ends or purposes. My sick old cat might not be very good of its kind, all things considered, but it is an excellent friend and companion to me. A detailed discussion in Hursthouse⁸⁸ generates a set of evaluative criteria, parts of which apply to plants and non-social animals, but all of which applies to social animals, including humans:

So, summing up, a good social animal (of one of the more sophisticated species) is one that is well fitted or endowed with respect to (i) its parts, (ii) its operations, (iii) its actions, and (iv) its desires and emotions; whether it is thus well fitted or endowed is determined by whether these four aspects well serve (1) its individual survival, (2) the continuance of its species, (3) its characteristic freedom from pain and characteristic enjoyment, and (4) the good functioning of its social group—in ways characteristic of the species.⁸⁹

This scheme allows for considerable complexity. Complexity emerges in the evaluations of specimens themselves. Hursthouse contends that the overall evaluation, "... that this individual is a good *x*, a good specimen of its kind—supervenes on the evaluations of its relevant aspects."⁹⁰ Cases will emerge in which the overall evaluation involves a judgment, since an individual might be good in some ways, and defective or fair in others, good given its age, or poor, given its environment, and so on.⁹¹

Complexity emerges in a more profound way insofar as humans are rational animals. Our rationality genuinely transforms the basic evaluative structure.⁹² It does so by enabling us to see and do otherwise than we have always done. Unlike other animals, "... we have room for the idea that we might be able to be and to live *better*."⁹³ Our characteristic way of going on is rational: "A 'rational way' is any way we can rightly see as good, as something we have reason to do."⁹⁴ Our characteristic enjoyments are those we rightly see as good, as having reason to endorse. The connection made here between rightly seeing something as good and having reason to endorse or act in accordance with that perception is a theme that is salient in Foot's reprinted papers and taken up again in her later work.⁹⁵

Other aspects of Hursthouse's account are significant, but only two can briefly be mentioned here. The first is that ethical naturalism is a form of justification of a particular kind: coherentist rather than foundationalist.⁹⁶ Ethical naturalism does not

purport to provide a purely biological or scientific account that is independent of an ethical outlook from which ethical evaluations can be derived.⁹⁷ Instead, following McDowell, Hursthouse insists that the validation of ethical naturalism and the evaluations of individuals as good or defective of their kind, and of traits as virtues or vices, proceed from within an ethical outlook.⁹⁸ Justification is a “Neurathian” enterprise—a coherentist account according to which we can validate aspects of the ethical naturalistic conceptual scheme plank by plank, examining and revising within the structure itself. Our evaluations are thus internal to an ethical outlook, yet capable of being radically revised through careful premise-by-premise scrutiny. Because of the possibility of this sort of revision, ethical naturalism does not simply reiterate ethical judgments that we already endorse, but can lead us to form new evaluations and judgments.

A second important feature takes us back to (1), quoted earlier. In addition to evaluating individuals as good or defective of their species, the account is concerned directly with the evaluation of character traits, and only indirectly with the evaluation of practices.⁹⁹ The evaluation of character traits enables us to identify which traits actually conduce to human flourishing, and thus are virtues, and which, such as greed and unbridled selfishness, do not. The evaluation of practices must proceed via an evaluation of traits and the circumstances of the practice in question. Ethical naturalism is indirectly applicable to practices, such as vegetarianism—an example that Hursthouse discusses.¹⁰⁰ This is because ethical naturalism justifies temperance, and insofar as temperance comes into play in evaluating the practice of vegetarianism, it bears on the ethics of that practice. Evaluations of vegetarianism must also consider circumstances, for example, nutritional facts about vegetarianism as opposed to meat-eating. Careful consideration of such facts, Hursthouse contends, could lead to changes in people’s views about vegetarianism.¹⁰¹ This is an example of how Neurathian holism can lead to changes in ethical beliefs from within a larger ethical outlook.

As mentioned, Hursthouse and Foot draw on Thompson,¹⁰² ideas that have been expanded in his subsequent work. One way of casting Thompson’s project is to say that he is interested in characterizing representations and knowledge of things as alive, and specifically, the human life form.¹⁰³ Though he contends that his work in this area began as a way of contributing to NAVE, he believes that “[a]ny sound practical philosophy must get clear on the concepts in question.”¹⁰⁴ Thompson claims that he is undertaking “... what amounts to a logical treatment of the idea of life, and its near relatives, and their expression in language.”¹⁰⁵ This project is needed to make good Foot’s contention that there is a conceptual connection between “life” and “good” in the case of human beings, as in the cases of animals and plants.¹⁰⁶

The benefits of this undertaking are considerable. For one thing, elaborating a logic of the representation of life provides a conceptual framework for neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism that would allow it to rebuff charges of reliance on purely empirical or scientific conceptions of life and related concepts. For another, ethical naturalism so construed enables the articulation of a distinctively neo-Aristotelian form of practical rationality. This avoids the Humean conception of practical rationality as instrumental

and desire-driven, as well as the Kantian notion that practical rationality is not specific to humans, but predicable of any rational creatures—be they angels, Martians, and so on.

A starting point for understanding in barest outline Thompson's project is his development of the abstract concept of a "natural kind" into the notion of a life-form. A life-form is the idea of a living kind or species.¹⁰⁷ This abstract representation—which in the case of a particular species is built up partly from empirical observations of the lives of members of that species, but goes beyond them—is necessary if one is to understand both the individual members as well as the species itself.¹⁰⁸ Knowledge of life-forms enables us to make life-form attributions, the general form of which is "*X is a bearer of life form S, or X is a member of species S . . .*," and natural historical judgments.¹⁰⁹ Natural historical judgments describe life-forms, and, though they tend to be formed in the present tense, are actually atemporal. They take the form: "The S is (or has, or does) F," as in "The domestic cat has four legs, two eyes, two ears, and guts in its belly."¹¹⁰ Thompson calls such sentences "Aristotelian categoricals."¹¹¹ Natural historical judgments provide the basis for "judgments of natural standard," that is, species-relative judgments of natural goodness and natural defect.¹¹² Natural-historical judgments are normative in allowing for inferences of the following type: "the S is F," "this S is not F," therefore, "this S is defective in not being an F."¹¹³

This scheme applies to Foot's work insofar as operations of the will or practical reason in humans are species-dependent and thus can be judged as good or bad according to a natural standard. Our species is the kind of life-form whose natural history shows it capable of acting well, for reasons that we see as good.¹¹⁴ Thus, when we fail to see reasons as good and do not act upon them, or see them as good yet fail to act, we are displaying defects. If someone chronically fails to see that she has good reasons for acting, or chronically fails to act upon that for which she sees she has good reason to act, she can be judged a defective member of her kind. These judgments have the same conceptual structure and follow the same logic as attributions of goodness and defect to other species.

Foot expands ideas in her earlier papers and draws on Thompson.¹¹⁵ Like Thompson, she finds normativity in nature: "... natural goodness and defect in the domain of plants and animals depends [*sic*] essentially on the form of life of the species to which an individual belongs."¹¹⁶ She adopts Thompson's conceptual structure of judgments of natural goodness and badness, contending that the meanings of the terms "good" and "bad" are the same when used in judgments of natural goodness and defect of plants and animals as when applied to humans, and that this is true despite the diversity of human goods.¹¹⁷ Thus, *contra* prescriptivism, the goodness of humans is not a matter of commendation, but, instead, a matter of seeing the good, seeing reasons for acting in accordance with the good, and choosing to act in accordance with the good.¹¹⁸ Her aim is to show that there is an intrinsic link between moral goodness and reasons for action.¹¹⁹ Moreover, she argues that the happiness of humanity consists in the enjoyment of good things, by which she means pursuing and attaining right ends. This, she thinks, rules out a priori a life of wickedness.¹²⁰

This brief recap of central ideas from Foot must be followed by a similarly abbreviated commentary on McDowell's conception of ethical naturalism, which stands apart from the Hursthouse-Foot-Thompson view.¹²¹ Beginning with a critique of Thompson, McDowell introduces the concept of "mere" nature.¹²² Mere nature is nature as grasped through knowledge of the natural patterns of life of a species. Mere nature is transformed with the acquisition of reason. McDowell makes this point by inviting us to consider the case of a rational wolf.¹²³ Facts about "wolf nature"—for example, traveling in packs, cooperating in the hunt, and sharing the spoils—would be transformed by the acquisition of reason by a wolf. Similarly, facts about human nature, in particular, the human virtues, are transformed by the acquisition of reason. The critique, in essence, is this: "... even if we grant that human beings have a naturally based need for the virtues, in a sense parallel to the sense in which wolves have a naturally based need for co-operativeness in their hunting, that need not cut any ice with someone who questions whether virtuous behaviour is genuinely required by reason."¹²⁴ McDowell addresses this concern with the concept of "second nature," which he draws from his reading of Aristotle's account of the virtues of character.¹²⁵ Virtues of character incorporate *phronēsis*, or practical reason. In the course of acquiring virtues of character through moral education, we develop *phronēsis*, and this transforms mere nature into second nature. According to McDowell, "One's formed practical intellect—which is operative in one's character-revealing behaviour—just is an aspect of one's nature as it has become."¹²⁶ Moral education, McDowell contends, does not merely channel one's natural impulses, but enables us to stand back from our motivations and question their rationality.¹²⁷

More could be said about McDowell's conception of ethical naturalism. We should note that Thompson criticizes McDowell, and that ethical naturalism in general has sparked lively debates among a wide range of scholars.¹²⁸

V. CONCLUSION

This chapter offers an introduction to the central themes of NAVE as developed by its primary proponents. It cannot do justice to other themes in the writings of the philosophers discussed here, nor to work by other advocates of NAVE, nor to critiques by deontologists, consequentialists, philosophical situationists, or critics of ethical naturalism. Luckily, this vigorous activity shows no sign of abating.

NOTES

1. See Hill and Cureton, Chapter 13, and Bradley, Chapter 20, this volume.
2. See Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1ff.
3. See Curzer, Chapter 5, this volume.

4. A point beautifully made by Russell, *Happiness for Humans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
5. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33(124) (1958): 1–16.
6. For more on Anscombe, Foot, and MacIntyre, see Solomon, Chapter 15, this volume; for more on McDowell, see Clarke, Chapter 2, this volume.
7. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); see Wright, Chapter 37, this volume.
8. See, for example, Johansson and Svensson, Chapter 25, this volume.
9. See Pettigrove, Chapter 18, this volume.
10. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues, Happiness for Humans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), "Phronesis and the Virtues [NE vi 12–13]," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, edited by Ronald Polansky (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 203–220, and Chapter 22, this volume; Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001); Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, "Practical Wisdom: A Mundane Account," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 106 (2006a): 285–309, "The Central Doctrine of the Mean," in *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, edited by Richard Kraut (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006b), 96–115, "Are Virtues the Proper Starting Point for Morality?" in *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory*, edited by James Dreier (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006c), 99–112, "Virtue Ethics and the Treatment of Animals," in *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics*, edited by Tom L. Beauchamp and R. G. Frey (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 119–143.
11. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*; Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*; Unfortunately, Russell's *Happiness for Humans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), an extended argument about Aristotelian and Stoic conceptions of *eudaimonia*, relating each to different conceptions of the self, must here be left aside. For more on eudaimonism, see LeBar, Chapter 24, this volume.
12. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, "On the Grounding of the Virtues in Human Nature;" In *Was ist das für den Menschen Gute? What Is Good for a Human Being?* edited by Jan Szaif and Matthias Lutz-Bachmann (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2004), 263–275; Foot, *Natural Goodness*; Thompson, "The Representation of Life," in *Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory*, edited by R. Hursthouse, G. Lawrence, and W. Quinn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 247–296, "Three Degrees of Natural Goodness," *Iride* (2003), <http://www.pitt.edu/~mthompso/>: 1–7, "Apprehending Human Form," in *Modern Moral Philosophy*, edited by Anthony O'Hear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 47–74, *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," in McDowell, *Mind, Value and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 167–197.
13. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*.
14. See, for example, Robert B. Louden, "On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21(3) (1984): 227–236.
15. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*.
16. *Ibid.*, 28.
17. *Ibid.*, 29.
18. *Ibid.*, 36.
19. *Ibid.*, 38.

20. Ibid., 38–39.
21. See, e.g., Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, “The Central Doctrine of the Mean,” “The Central Doctrine of the Mean,” “Are Virtues the Proper Starting Point for Morality?”; Foot, *Natural Goodness*; and Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*.
22. See Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 104–107.
23. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*; see Hursthouse, “Practical Wisdom: A Mundane Account,” 106–112, for a later discussion of virtue ethical right action.
24. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 68ff.
25. Ibid., 51.
26. Ibid., 76.
27. Ibid., 74, 77.
28. Ibid., 79.
29. See Johansson and Svensson, Chapter 25, this volume.
30. Robert N. Johnson, “Virtue and Right,” *Ethics* 113(4) (2003): 810–834.
31. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 113–120, 141ff; see also “Practical Wisdom: A Mundane Account,” 109ff.
32. See Annas’s *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), a developmental account of virtue, which is consistent with central features of NAVE. For more on Annas’s *Intelligent Virtue*, see Athanassoulis, Chapter 21, this volume.
33. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*.
34. See Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, chapter 5.
35. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 123.
36. Ibid., 127, 129.
37. Ibid., 143.
38. Ibid., 159–160.
39. Ibid., 146ff.
40. Ibid., 148–149.
41. Ibid., 149.
42. Ibid., 130–131.
43. Ibid., 131.
44. Neera Badhwar, “The Limited Unity of Virtue,” *Noûs* 30 (1996): 449–471, and Watson, “On the Primacy of Character,” in *Identity, Character and Morality*, edited by Owen Flanagan and Amelie O. Rorty, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 449–483, hold the “limited” or “weak” unity thesis. See also Hursthouse, “Are Virtues the Proper Starting Point for Morality?” 105; Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 156.
45. Ibid., 153.
46. Ibid., 156.
47. See Hursthouse, “On the Grounding of the Virtues in Human Nature,” “Practical Wisdom: A Mundane Account,” “The Central Doctrine of the Mean,” and “Are Virtues the Proper Starting Point for Morality?”
48. But see Bates and Kleingeld (Chapter 27, this volume) on situationism.
49. Russell, Chapter 22, this volume.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.

54. Michael Slote, *Morals from Motives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Foot, *Natural Goodness*; Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*; Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, 45.
55. *Ibid.*, 60.
56. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, 66–67; Watson, “On the Primacy of Character.”
57. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, 67.
58. *Ibid.*, 69–70; emphasis his.
59. *Ibid.*, 71.
60. *Ibid.*, 141.
61. *Ibid.*
62. *Ibid.*, 145.
63. *Ibid.*, 172.
64. *Ibid.*, 148–150.
65. *Ibid.*, 204–205.
66. *Ibid.*, 205.
67. *Ibid.*, 211; see also 154.
68. *Ibid.*, 205.
69. *Ibid.*
70. *Ibid.*, 205.
71. *Ibid.*, 206.
72. *Ibid.*, 205.
73. *Ibid.*, 141.
74. *Ibid.*, 338.
75. *Ibid.*, 339.
76. Russell, *Happiness for Humans*; see, for example, Russell, “Virtue Ethics, Happiness, and the Good Life,” “Phronesis and the Virtues [*NE* vi 12–13],” “Aristotle on Cultivating Virtue,” and Chapter 22, this volume.
77. My understanding of ethical naturalism has been greatly enhanced by an important paper by Jennifer Frey, “How to Be an Ethical Naturalist,” unpublished manuscript, https://www.academia.edu/7042655/How_To_Be_An_Ethical_Naturalist, cited here by kind permission of the author.
78. See Foot, “Rationality and Virtue,” 159–174; and “Does Moral Subjectivism Rest on a Mistake?,” 189–208, reprinted in Foot, *Moral Dilemmas and Other Topics in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002). References to Geach and Anscombe can be found in both papers; see Geach, “Good and Evil,” 33–42, cited at Foot, “Does Moral Subjectivism Rest on a Mistake?,” 162, and Anscombe *Collected Philosophical Papers*, vol. 3:18, cited at Foot “Does Moral Subjectivism Rest on a Mistake?,” 168, and Anscombe, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, vol. 3, 15, 18–19, 100–101, 139, quoted and cited at Foot “Does Moral Subjectivism Rest on a Mistake?,” 198–199. See also Geach, *The Virtues*, 17, quoted in Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 35, and cited at p. 44. For more on the prescriptivism/descriptivism debate, see Solomon (Chapter 15, this volume).
79. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 199.
80. Foot, “Does Moral Subjectivism Rest on a Mistake?,” 199.
81. *Ibid.*, 200.

82. Foot, "Does Moral Subjectivism Rest on a Mistake?," 200; the word "animal" in this discussion of ethical naturalism refers to non-human animals.
83. Foot, *Natural Goodness*; Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, "On the Grounding of the Virtues in Human Nature."
84. See, for example, Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 203; Foot, "Does Moral Subjectivism Rest on a Mistake?," 199, and *Natural Goodness*, chapters 2 and 3.
85. Thompson, "Three Degrees of Natural Goodness," "Apprehending Human Form," *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought*, "Forms of Nature," in *Freiheit*, edited by G. Hindrichs and H. Axel (Stuttgarter Hegel-Kongress, Frankfurt/Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2013), 701–735.
86. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, "On the Grounding of the Virtues in Human Nature"; Foot, *Natural Goodness*.
87. Hursthouse, "On the Grounding of the Virtues in Human Nature," 263.
88. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*.
89. Ibid., 202; see also "On the Grounding of the Virtues in Human Nature," 268.
90. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 203.
91. Ibid., 204.
92. Ibid., 218.
93. Ibid., 221–222; emphasis hers.
94. Ibid., 222.
95. Foot, "Rationality and Virtue," *Natural Goodness*.
96. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 236–237, contends that ethical naturalism primarily supplies us with justificatory reasons for virtues, though it can be used to provide people with motivating reasons to acquire the virtues and to act virtuously. These motivating reasons are connected with the thesis, defended by Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, chapter 8, that the virtues benefit their possessor.
97. Hursthouse, "On the Grounding of the Virtues in Human Nature," 265ff.
98. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," Macdonald, Graham, "The Two Natures: Another Dogma?" in *McDowell and His Critics*, edited by Cynthia Macdonald and Graham Macdonald (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 222–235; Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 165ff; 193, 237, "On the Grounding of the Virtues in Human Nature," 266–267.
99. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 226ff, "On the Grounding of the Virtues in Human Nature," 267.
100. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 227–228.
101. Ibid., 227–228.
102. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*; Foot, *Natural Goodness*; Thompson, "The Representation of Life."
103. Thompson, "Apprehending Human Form," 47.
104. See Thompson, "The Representation of Life," 6–7, *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought*, 9, emphasis his.
105. "The Representation of Life," 249.
106. See Foot, "Virtues and Vices," 42–43, quoted at Thompson, "The Representation of Life," 249.
107. Thompson, "The Representation of Life," 266.
108. Thompson, "Apprehending Human Form," 47ff.
109. Ibid., 48, emphasis his; see Thompson, "Apprehending Human Form," 49, "The Representation of Life," 280ff.

110. Thompson, "The Representation of Life," 281.
111. *Ibid.*, 281.
112. See Thompson, "Apprehending Human Form," 55ff, "The Representation of Life," 295–296.
113. See Thompson, "The Representation of Life," 295.
114. See Thompson, "Apprehending Human Form," 59ff, "The Representation of Life," 250–251.
115. Foot, *Natural Goodness*; Thompson, "The Representation of Life"; see especially Foot, *Natural Goodness*, chapter 2. See also Thompson's "Three Degrees of Goodness" important commentary on Foot, *Natural Goodness*.
116. Thompson, "The Representation of Life"; Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 35.
117. Thompson, "The Representation of Life"; Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 39, 44, 47.
118. *Ibid.*, chapter 4, especially 56.
119. *Ibid.*, 64.
120. *Ibid.*, 96–97.
121. Foot, *Natural Goodness*; McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism."
122. Thompson, "The Representation of Life"; McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," 173.
123. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," 167–173.
124. *Ibid.*, 173.
125. *Ibid.*, 184ff.
126. *Ibid.*, 185.
127. *Ibid.*, 188.
128. See Thompson, "Forms of Nature." Defenders of ethical naturalism include Lott, "Have Elephant Seals Refuted Aristotle? Nature, Function, and Moral Goodness," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 9 (2012a): 353–375, "Moral Virtue as Knowledge of Human Form," *Social Theory and Practice* 38(3) (2012b): 407–431, "Does Human Nature Conflict with Itself?: Human Form and the Harmony of the Virtues," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 87(4) (2013): 657–683, "Why Be a good Human Being? Natural Goodness, Reason, and the Authority of Human Nature," *Philosophia* 42 (2014): 761–777; and Hacker-Wright, "What Is Natural about Foot's Ethical Naturalism?" *Ratio (new series)* XXII(3) (2009): 308–321, "Human Nature, Virtue, and Rationality," in *Aristotelian Ethics in Contemporary Perspective*, edited by Julia Peters (New York: Routledge Press, 2013), 83–96. Critics include FitzPatrick, *Teleology and the Norms of Nature* (New York: Garland, 2000); Millum, "Natural Goodness and Natural Evil," *Ratio (new series)* XIX(2) (2006): 199–213; Woodcock, "Philippa Foot's Virtue Ethics Has an Achilles' Heel," *Dialogue* 45(3) (2006): 445–468; Andreou, "Getting on in a Varied World," Millgram, *Ethics Done Right: Practical Reasoning as a Foundation for Moral Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and "Critical Notice of *Life and Action*," *Analysis* 69(3) (2009): 557–564; and Brüllmann, "Good (as) Human Beings," in *Aristotelian Ethics in Contemporary Perspective*, edited by Julia Peters (New York: Routledge Press, 2013), 97–113. For a critique of McDowell, see Macdonald, "The Two Natures: Another Dogma?"; for a response, see McDowell, "Response to Graham Macdonald," in *McDowell and His Critics*, edited by Cynthia Macdonald and Graham Macdonald (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 235–239. See also MacIntyre, "Critical Study: Virtues in Foot and Geach," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 52(209) (2002): 621–631; Copp and Sobel, "Morality and Virtue: An Assessment of Some Recent Work in Virtue Ethics," *Ethics* 114 (2004): 514–554; Finlay, "Four Faces of Moral Realism," *Philosophy Compass* 2(6) (2007): 820–849; and essays in Hoffman

and Reuter, *Natürlich Gut: Aufsätze zur Philosophie von Philippa Foot* (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2010); and Szaif and Lutz-Bachmann, *Was ist das für den Menschen Gute? What Is Good for a Human Being?*

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CHAPTER 17

SENTIMENTALIST VIRTUE ETHICS

MICHAEL SLOTE

VIRTUE ethics dominated the philosophical landscape of classical Western antiquity and in recent decades has revived in a very strong way. The original impetus to that revival came from Elizabeth Anscombe, who, after roundly criticizing the Kantian and utilitarian traditions in ethics, called for more attention to Aristotelian moral psychology and a more Aristotelian approach to ethics itself.¹ But although the recent revival of virtue ethics originally centered pretty much entirely around the ideas and influence of Aristotle, it was eventually realized that virtue ethics could also be revived in a Humean or (neo-) sentimentalist form.² It has also been noticed that Nietzsche and the Stoics have their own versions of virtue ethics, but these approaches haven't seen all that much of a *contemporary* revival. Then, more recently, it has also been noted that various ethical traditions of the East bear resemblance to certain forms of Western virtue ethics and may well count as virtue ethical in their own right. So virtue ethics, far from being merely derivative from the Greeks, has a much wider significance for any form of contemporary philosophizing that looks to the history of modern Western thought and/or that looks beyond Western philosophy to other traditions of philosophical thought.

And this holds true not only for virtue ethics as a whole, but for the sentimentalist variety that I am going to be focusing on here. We shall see that Asian thought contains presumptive examples of virtue-ethical sentimentalism, and, in addition, as the idea of doing contemporary virtue ethics along Humean/sentimentalist lines has come to the fore, historical studies of Hume and Hutcheson *as* sentimentalist virtue ethicists (or as coming close to such virtue ethics) have also increasingly been undertaken.³ But Hume and Hutcheson were interested in not only normative theory, but also in meta-ethics, in questions about the meaning of moral judgments and/or the nature of moral attitudes. And they were both sentimentalists about the latter sorts of issues. However, virtue ethics as commonly understood means a kind of normative theory, and the meta-ethical and normative sides of sentimentalism sometimes, indeed often, exist in separation. Adam Smith, for example, is arguably a meta-ethical sentimentalist, but his normative

virtue ethics is more Aristotelian/Stoic than sentimentalist, and so I don't count him as a sentimentalist virtue ethicist. The same holds for Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, who is thought of as the founder of the moral sense or moral sentimentalist school, and the same distinction is quite relevant to contemporary theory as well. There are lots of meta-ethical sentimentalists who remain entirely neutral on whether normative ethics should be undertaken along virtue-ethical, much less sentimentalist virtue-ethical, lines;⁴ so I won't be entering into their views any further here.

Now the virtue-ethical sentimentalist holds, very roughly, that normative moral distinctions and motivations derive from emotion or sentiment rather than (practical) reason; and in the present chapter, I want to consider some of the most important historical forms of sentimentalist virtue ethics (or of forms of sentimentalism that contain major elements of virtue-ethical thinking) and then go on to discuss the problems and prospects of such virtue ethics in and for contemporary moral and political philosophy, which includes normative approaches that are far from virtue ethics and some forms of virtue ethics (e.g., the neo-Aristotelian) that are very different from any kind of sentimentalism. Many people today see contemporary sentimentalism and virtue ethics in a sentimentalist vein as emerging from the writings and influence of David Hume. But Hume himself was influenced by earlier sentimentalist thinking and tendencies, not least by those of his mentor Francis Hutcheson, and Hutcheson, in turn, shouldn't be viewed in a vacuum: his sentimentalism reflects and promotes sentimentalist tendencies to be found earlier within the Judeo-Christian tradition.⁵

Unlike the ancient Greeks and Romans, ancient Judaism and Christianity (to some extent, influenced by Judaism) placed a great deal of moral emphasis on kindness and compassion.⁶ But above or at least beyond Judeo-Christianity and its influence, there are forms of what is arguably virtue-ethical sentimentalism in various ancient—and subsequent—Asian philosophies. These didn't influence Hutcheson or Hume as far as anyone can be sure, but in this increasingly cosmopolitan world, they can have and already are having some influence on how sentimentalism and sentimentalism-influenced virtue ethics are pursued in the contemporary West, so let me discuss them at least briefly here, before I go on to consider the influences and ideas that shaped Hume's thought and that are having a major influence on present-day (virtue-ethical) sentimentalism.

I. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CONTEMPORARY VIRTUE-ETHICAL SENTIMENTALISM

When I speak of sentimentalist trends or tendencies in Asian ethical thought or philosophy, I have Buddhism and Confucianism particularly in mind. The long-standing Buddhist emphasis on kindness and compassion is arguably virtue-ethical in character

or inspiration, but the virtue ethics is pretty clearly of a sentimentalist, rather than an Aristotelian/rationalist, kind.⁷

However, sentimentalist virtue ethics is also arguably to be found within Confucianism: not in the writings of (or in the name of) Confucius himself, but in the work of Mencius (Mengzi) and his followers. Confucius (Kongzi) treated *ren* as central to his account of ethics or morality, but in the Confucian *Analects*, the term is usually thought to be best translated in very general terms as “virtue” or “humanity.” By contrast, Mencius (in the *Mencius*) uses *ren* to refer to something like kindness or compassion, and because he seems to regard *ren* as the most important of the virtues and as the most important basis for the moral life generally, a case can be and has often been made for regarding Mencius as a kind of virtue-ethical sentimentalist.⁸ And a similar and even stronger case can be made for treating certain later, neo-Confucian thinkers as virtue-ethical sentimentalists.⁹ However, the Asian forms of sentimentalism are only now beginning to be felt within academic Western virtue ethics;¹⁰ so I think it makes sense, in the present context, for me to spend more time speaking of the ways in which historical Western thought influenced the virtue-ethical sentimentalism that emerged during the modern period of Western philosophy and that has re-emerged, with some force, in Western academic thought very recently.

The Christian ethic(s) of love (*agape*) broadened out or universalized the ideals of compassion and kindness that were prevalent in ancient Judaism, and as has often been noted, Hutcheson’s emphasis on universal(ly directed and impartial) benevolence seems a kind a secular reflection of the original Christian ethic. But before we focus on Hutcheson, we should say something about agapic ethics in its religious form. Does Augustine’s defense of an ethic of love in *Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of Saint John* (1955) count, for example, as a form of virtue-ethical sentimentalism? The emphasis on love (even of an impartial kind) is certainly very much in keeping with such sentimentalism, but a good deal depends on how the/an imperative of love is grounded, and Augustine and a number of subsequent Christian thinkers are just too vague or unfocused regarding this issue to allow us to give a definitive answer to whether what they were doing or recommending was sentimentalist virtue ethics.¹¹ These thinkers see our obligation to love everyone as grounded in God’s own universal love—but grounded how?

Augustine sometimes seems to suggest that our obligation to love is based in God’s command that we should love our fellow creatures and our obligation to obey God’s commandments. But then what is the basis for the latter obligation? If it is thought that there is a general moral duty to obey one’s Creator, then we seem to be relying on a form of deontology and to have arrived at something different from virtue ethics. But even this is not entirely clear. If the duty to obey is regarded as based in gratitude, we may well be within the ambit of sentimentalist virtue ethics, since gratitude is not only a moral feeling, but a feeling that Hume considered to be one of our *natural sentiments*. And Augustine and others also sometimes say that in loving our fellow creatures, we would be following God’s ideal moral example, and this suggests the very virtue-ethical and sentimentalist idea that we should act lovingly because (we can appreciate that) loving

actions are morally or ethically ideal, considered just in themselves (and without bringing in gratitude). So Augustine's ethical views may possibly count as an early example of virtue-ethical sentimentalism.

Now Hutcheson, who was certainly influenced by the Christian ethic of love, was very clearly a sentimentalist. But it is far from clear that we should call him a virtue ethicist. To be sure, there are *parts* of Hutcheson's theory of ethics that seem paradigmatically virtue-ethical: for example, his idea that universal benevolence is a morally good motive in itself and without reference to its consequences. And Hutcheson also uses his account of good motivation to ground what he says about right and wrong human actions: right actions are those that achieve the goals sought by universal benevolence. This leads immediately, however, to a consequentialist criterion of right action, and Hutcheson is usually credited with having stated and advocated the first English-language version of the Principle of Utility. For Hutcheson, therefore, what makes an action right is its consequences, not anything to do with its underlying motive or intention or, more generally, with the moral character of the person who performs it, and such a criterion of rightness is clearly consequentialistic, rather than virtue-ethical. There is therefore a kind of hybrid quality to Hutcheson's moral sentimentalism that makes it difficult or more than difficult to regard him (simply) as a virtue-ethical sentimentalist.

But now we come to Hume, who is arguably the most important thinker among those with any claim to being virtue-ethical sentimentalists. Hume emphasized natural developing motivation to a greater extent than Hutcheson did, and he was skeptical about Hutcheson's universal benevolence because he didn't think such motivation lay naturally or even artificially within our human capabilities. But he certainly emphasized ordinary benevolence more than any other form of natural moral motivation, and he saw what no one prior to Hume (at least in the West) had ever recognized: that natural benevolence works through mechanisms of what we today would call empathy, but Hume called sympathy (the word "empathy" itself didn't exist until the twentieth century). For Hume, empathy and the virtue of benevolence rest on the same associative mechanisms of similarity, causality, and space-time contiguity that (according to Hume) operate in the fields of metaphysics and epistemology, so unlike Hutcheson, Hume sees positive virtue in a preference for one's own near and dear over mere strangers.

Moreover, Hume treats the rightness of an action as grounded in its having a good underlying motive, and this is much more virtue-ethical than what Hutcheson says about right and wrong action. However, Hume's account of what makes a motive a morally good one is not at all virtue-ethical in the manner of Hutcheson's approach. Hutcheson thinks motives can be evaluated independently of their consequences, but Hume ties the goodness of motives to a large extent to their consequences for human happiness. He gives, in effect, a (largely) utilitarian grounding for the morality of human motives, so even if he regards the rightness of actions as depending on the goodness of the motive that underlies them, the very fact that such goodness depends mainly on good consequences makes the overall account of right and wrong seem a kind of mixture of virtue-ethical and consequentialist elements.

And both Hume's sentimentalism and the virtue-ethical character of his views are attenuated or brought into question by what he has to say about the so-called artificial virtues. Hume doesn't think that natural motives like gratitude and benevolence can motivate conscientious action in cases having to do with promises or property—cases, as he imagines, where morality requires us to see ourselves as strictly bound by certain obligations (e.g., to do what we promised) and where natural motives would lead us to take a more relaxed and less conscientious approach. Benevolence won't tell us to return money we have borrowed from a "seditious bigot," but Hume thinks that we have an obligation to do just that and that our sense of such an obligation forces us to think in terms of strict ethical norms that it is difficult to account for in terms of the natural virtues.

Hume's understanding of the morality of promising and property (and certain other matters) moves him in the direction of deontological/rationalistic views of morality and, arguably, away from virtue ethics understood in a purely sentimental fashion. So there are not only utilitarian/consequentialist elements in Hume's normative philosophy, but deontological elements too, and these facts make it difficult to think of Hume as (just) a sentimentalist virtue ethicist. But the tie-in, for Hume, between actions and their underlying motives makes him seem to me to be more of a *virtue ethicist* than Hutcheson was, though all the emphasis on strict obligation makes him at the same time seem less of a *sentimentalist* than Hutcheson. In any event, it is difficult to pigeonhole either one of them in terms of contemporary moral-theoretic categories, but any contemporary virtue-ethical sentimentalist is going to regard both Hutcheson and Hume as among her intellectual ancestors (and should probably think this way about Augustine as well).

However, there is another virtue-ethical moral sentimentalist who figures or at least should figure in the historical background of contemporary virtue-ethical sentimentalism, namely, James Martineau. Many contemporary philosophers, perhaps even some contemporary ethicists, have never heard of Martineau, much less read his work. But Martineau was a very prominent thinker during the late nineteenth century, and Henry Sidgwick, for example, devoted more space to critiquing Martineau than to any of his other contemporaries except Herbert Spencer. Martineau held a very pure form of virtue ethics according to which the rightness of actions depended solely on their underlying motives, and the value or validity of underlying motives was based on their intrinsic character as motives, rather than on any relation to good consequences. Martineau ranked all relevant motives in a rigid ethical hierarchy, and on his view, right action consists in acting from the highest of the motives operating in any given situation of moral choice. And Martineau can also be characterized as a sentimentalist because he regarded compassion as the highest of human motives (his theological assumptions complicate this picture only very slightly). There are grave problems with Martineau's form of virtue-ethical sentimentalism (some of these were pointed out by Sidgwick), but if I may be allowed to inject a personal note into this discussion, my own interest in virtue-ethical sentimentalism owes at least as much to Martineau as it does to Hume. Hume is a much more important philosopher, but Martineau gives us a clearer idea of what a strictly sentimentalist and (at the same time) strictly virtue-ethical approach to

moral issues might look like, and the picture that emerges is in many ways quite attractive, even if it suffers from a number of significant philosophical flaws.

II. PRESENT-DAY SENTIMENTALIST VIRTUE ETHICS

Having described various historical instances or near-instances of sentimentalist virtue ethics (or virtue-ethical sentimentalism), we need to consider now how promising or interesting any such approach can be in present philosophical circumstances. And since I am myself committed to sentimentalist virtue ethics more than any other recent philosopher, it may make sense for me to say something now about how I think such an approach can best make its way among the philosophical views of ethics that are currently most prominent. As I do so, I will of necessity make references to and critical comparisons with other present-day ethical theories and the sentimentalist historical views discussed in the previous section.

In order to “do better” than previous sentimentalist virtue ethics has done, a contemporary version needs to be able to say something more convincing, and more clearly sentimentalist and virtue-ethical, about deontology than Hutcheson and Hume were able or willing to do. And given the prominence and many strengths of contemporary political liberalism, any promising current version of sentimentalist virtue ethics needs to address large-scale political and legal issues more convincingly, for example, than traditional Aristotelian virtue ethics or even Hume’s politically very conservative hybrid approach was able to do. In fact, as I shall argue, it needs to be able to pinpoint inadequacies or blind spots in liberal views of justice in something like the way in which recent feminist philosophy has sought to do. Finally, it will be helpful—though reasons of space will make it impossible to say much about this—if a present-day version of virtue-ethical sentimentalism can offer a more convincing view of the possibilities of objective (or valid) moral judgment than previous forms of sentimentalism have allowed for. And let us talk first about deontology.

The idea of dealing with deontology in sentimentalist terms might seem an entirely hopeless task, and not just because Hume’s theory of the artificial virtues of honesty/justice and fidelity to promises seems so convoluted and/or unclear. After all, most of us think of deontology as giving us reasons not to go with feeling and emotion: deontology tells us not to kill one person to save two others, but surely, one might say, the “sum of feeling” would dictate killing the one to save the two others; and viewed in this light, deontology seems a way of saying “no” to feeling, rather than something that does or could grow out of normal human sentiment. But I think that this would be a mistake (surprisingly enough—and it came as a surprise to me, too). There are sources and resources for deontology within feeling/sentiment itself, but in order to see this, we have to make more extensive and considered use of the notion of empathy than even Hume

did. And this requires us first to say some things about the *concept* of empathy and to point out some *presumptive empirical facts* about empathy that Hume to some degree anticipated, but that recent psychological studies of empathy have brought out more explicitly.

It is fairly easy to confuse empathy and sympathy, but ordinary usage of the terms “empathy” and “sympathy” has now settled down to a fairly regular distinction (at least among most Americans). Consider the difference between (Bill Clinton’s) feeling someone’s pain and feeling *for* someone who is in pain. Most adult speakers of English will recognize or acknowledge the former as an instance of empathy and the latter as an instance of sympathy. Thus in very typical cases empathy involves having the feelings of another (involuntarily) aroused in ourselves, as when we see another person in pain; and Hume speaks of a contagion of feeling from one person to another and of one person’s feelings being infused into another, in this connection. If, however, we simply feel sorry for a person and wish them well, that is sympathy rather than empathy, but that doesn’t mean that there aren’t important empirical and/or conceptual connections between these phenomena.

The recent literature of the psychology of moral development contains much discussion of the hypothesis that sympathy and active altruism toward others depends on the development of empathy within any given individual. There is a good deal of debate about the validity of this hypothesis, but a good many psychologists and philosophers hold it to be true, and we shall implicitly assume it in what follows. Virtue ethics needs and wants to assume “the possibility of altruism,” and a sentimental virtue ethics does best, I think, to understand our altruistic tendencies or capacities for caring, compassion, love, and benevolence as rooted in developing/developed human empathy—rather than in practical rationality or reason(ing).

More specifically, it is often said that individual empathy develops through several stages and that its connection with altruistic or moral motivations is more inchoate or ambiguous in the earlier stages of that development.¹² A baby can feel distress and start crying at the distress and crying of another child within hearing distance, and this operates via a kind of mimicry and seems like a very pure form of “contagion.” But as the child develops conceptual/linguistic skills, a richer history of personal experiences, and a fuller sense of the reality of others, a more “mediated” form of empathy can be involuntarily aroused in response to situations or experiences that are not immediately present and are merely heard of, remembered, or read about. It also becomes possible for the normal child to deliberately adopt the point of view of other people and to see and feel things from their perspective. Both this latter, *projective* form of empathy and involuntarily aroused *associative* empathy involve identification with the other, but Hoffman and others insist that the identification isn’t a total merging with or melting into the other: genuine and mature empathy doesn’t deprive the empathic individual of her sense of being a different person from the person she empathizes with.

Hoffman notes that as children become adolescents, they become aware of the existence of groups or classes of people whom they are not personally acquainted with, and this makes empathy with, say, the homeless or with the oppressed people of some distant

country possible and real for adolescents in a way that would not have been possible during their early years. And Hoffman also suggests a technique of moral education, which he calls “inductive discipline,” for making children (or even adults) more empathically sensitive and altruistic. Rather than threaten the child with punishment and carry out the threat if the child is disobedient, inductive discipline depends on a child’s capacity for empathy and typically involves a parent’s noticing when a child has hurt another person and then (in a non-threatening but firm manner) making the child vividly aware of the harm or pain she has caused. This leads a normal child who is capable of empathy to feel bad, a kind of rudimentary guilt, about what she has done, and repetition of the process can build up a certain resistance in the child to harming others. In addition, a child can empathically take in the benign attitudes and motives of those around her, and such “modeling” on others can also help the child become a more caring, moral person. But although empathic identification with distant groups of people, inductive discipline, and most modeling depend on the child’s acquisition of various kinds of empirical and conceptual/linguistic knowledge, none of these processes involves an appeal to the kind of “practical reason” that Kantians and Aristotelian virtue ethicists appeal to as the basis for moral motivation and moral justification; and we now need to see, as fully as our present space limitations allow, how sentimentalist virtue ethics can deal with central issues in normative moral theory without invoking the kinds of considerations that are basic and determinative for different forms of ethical rationalism. In the first instance, I think this means saying something about how a sentimentalist virtue ethics can deal with the central normative issue of deontology.

Consider how empathy shapes our (beliefs about) ordinary duties of beneficence.¹³ It is well-known, for example, that people have a stronger empathic reaction to danger or harm that they see than to danger or harm that they merely know about, and this empathic tendency corresponds to our ordinary *moral judgments*: other things being equal, we think it is morally worse not to help someone whose danger or distress we see right in front of us than not to do so for people whose danger or distress we only know about secondhand. Similarly, when miners are trapped underground, we feel more empathy for them than for the (somewhat) greater number of future miners we might save by installing safety devices, and we also think it is morally better, more imperative, to save the presently trapped miners than to (use the same money to) invest in safety devices. So both perceptual and temporal immediacy seem to affect both the strength of our empathic reactions and our judgments of what is morally better or worse, and I think these ideas can be transposed to the main issue or issues of deontology. Deontology, on one standard understanding, tells us that it is morally worse to hurt or harm people than (merely) to allow them to be hurt or harmed, and this corresponds pretty well with our differential empathic reactions to harming versus allowing harm. We empathically *flinch* from harming a lot more than we do from allowing someone to be harmed by a third party—the harm we might bring about is (causally) more immediate for us than harm we would simply not prevent.

But how does the correlation between empathic reactions and moral judgments and its instantiation in the area or issue of deontology help support or justify deontology?

Well, in the first instance, it is implausible to imagine that the fact that our judgments of what is morally worse correlate with what goes more against the grain of empathy is some sort of accident. And the correlation is much, much wider than I have mentioned: for example, we have more empathy for family and friends and greater moral obligations to them as well. What this wide correlation suggests, in fact, is that the notion or phenomenon of empathy is built into our moral concepts: that would certainly help explain why our differential moral judgments seem so broadly to follow our differential empathic responses. And I don't think we even have to be very specific about *how* empathy plays a role in our moral concepts to see that the correlation I have briefly described and defended gives us some reason to think that facts about empathic reactions help to justify our common moral judgments. At the end of this chapter, I shall say some more specific things about how I think empathy enters into our moral judgments.¹⁴ But for the moment I think it is enough to claim that we have given some reason for thinking that deontology can have a sentimental, as opposed to a rationalist, basis. I also believe that the Kantian/rationalist defenses of deontology I have seen aren't particularly convincing (Aristotelians don't even try to do this sort of thing), so I think we need to take the possibilities of sentimental deontology very seriously at this point.¹⁵

But having spoken of the sentimental possibilities for understanding and justifying deontology, I think I should mention some other moral ideas that ethical rationalism focuses on and that may seem to lie beyond the compass or comprehension of any purely sentimental approach. For example, a sentimental normative morality that sees us as obligated to act caringly or benevolently toward others may seem so focused on human or sentient well-being as to rule out any emphasis on or accommodation to the idea or ideal of respect for people's autonomy. Kantians treat respect for others as even more important than concern for their welfare, but how does the seemingly rationalist idea of respect get modeled or justified within a sentimental framework?

Well, to be sure, the Kantian thinks of respect as directed toward our rational capacities and rational dignity or status, but there is another, possibly more natural and down-to-earth way, of understanding respect for other people's autonomy, and this other way makes use of strictly sentimental concepts. Some people who love or claim to love others try to impose their idea of what is good on those others without paying any serious attention to how the others see things. Some parents are like this with their children, telling a child, for example, that they need to practice the violin many hours a day in order to become the great concert artist that they must surely want to become—and not listening to their child when the child says they are more interested in other things. Parents have to be paternalistic to some extent, of course; but the kind of “substitute success syndrome” parent I have just described takes paternalism to an extreme, and to that extent they show no empathy for how their child sees things, for the child's own aspirations and desires, for their child's individuality. And this, according to sentimental thinking, constitutes a lack of respect for the child's (nascent) autonomy. I believe we can say everything we need to say about respect by reference to considerations having to do with empathy, and one way to start showing this is by relating what has just been said about respect to issues of social justice.

Kantian/liberal rationalists believe that the right to freedom of worship can be justified in purely rational terms and independently of human sentiments and emotions. In fact, it is sometimes argued that our benevolent sentiments are precisely incapable of justifying freedom of religious worship because someone (e.g.) who believes in the Christian doctrine of immortality will in all benevolence try to deny freedom of worship to those they consider heretics, as a means to saving them from eternal damnation. But let's be realistic. John Locke in his *Second Treatise of Government* (1960) pointed out that the supposedly benevolent Spanish Inquisitors shouldn't have had dry eyes when they tortured people for the good of their souls; and far from having empathy for the points of view of those who religiously disagree with them, those who torture the unorthodox and deny them freedom of worship characteristically hate or condemn those who disagree with them. Allowing people to worship freely and differently requires respect for those people, but such respect doesn't have to be cashed out in terms of the acknowledgment of a rationally perceived sentiment-independent right for people to worship as they please. The sentimentalist can say, instead, that the rights we need to respect are a matter of what is or would be given by an empathically sensitive response to others, and this gives the virtue-ethical sentimentalist an ability to justify the right to worship freely in its own distinctive—and intuitively appealing—terms.

The same kind of sentimentalist considerations can also justify other important and intuitive ideas about justice. We think—and it is not just liberals who think—that we have stronger obligations of justice to those who are worse off in society (or the world) than we have to those who are better off. But the sentimentalist's emphasis on compassion and empathy can help establish the same point. We are empathically more sensitive to the absolute badness of someone's situation than we are to the fact that someone's mediocre lot in life could easily be improved, and compassion is precisely an expression of that kind of sentimental distinction-making. So it is not difficult for sentimentalism to defend a special concern for those who are badly off within a larger conception of social (and legal and international) justice. There is no space here to say more about such a larger conception.¹⁶ But I do think I should mention an important way in which the sentimentalist approach to respect (for autonomy), rights, and justice leads to normative disagreement with what the Kantian liberal has to say about particular (ranges of) cases.

Kantian liberalism and Kant himself emphasize our (rational) autonomy and our rights of autonomy vis-à-vis others, and as Carol Gilligan has pointed out in *In a Different Voice* (1982), this means placing moral importance on our separateness from others, rather than on our moral connection to or with others. Both the care ethics that developed out of Gilligan's work and any virtue ethics that is based in empathy emphasize such connection with others, and it is no wonder, therefore, that they can end up disagreeing with Kantian liberalism about various kinds of cases. For example, the Kantian/liberal emphasis on autonomy causes them to argue that neo-Nazis should have been allowed to march and make public speeches in Skokie, Illinois, in the early 1970s because the autonomy-based right to give vent to any form of speech, even hate

speech, trumps the considerations of human welfare that played a role in or were relevant to such a large-scale demonstration.¹⁷

But the sentimentalist virtue ethicist and the care ethicist (and I consider myself to be both) will disagree because of the moral importance they give to our concerned empathic connections with others. The neo-Nazis decided to march in Skokie (though in the end they didn't actually do so) because of the presence there of a fairly large population of Jewish Holocaust survivors, and there is good reason to think that if the march had occurred, that would have likely retraumatized and further damaged many of the survivors. This, in other words, would have been hate speech that was more than offensive and angering, and if one has to balance the frustration and anger of the neo-Nazis at not being allowed to march and make speeches against the psychological *damage* that was likely to occur if they had been allowed to do so, an empathic concern for human welfare would favor the interests of the Holocaust survivors: their welfare interests were much more seriously at stake, and an empathic concern for others would be sensitive to that distinction. In effect, then, the sentimentalist virtue ethicist can see rights of and respect for autonomy as anchored in empathic concern for others (as in the case of religious freedom), rather than as having the kind of independent existence and ability to trump just about any consideration of human welfare that the Kantian approach to autonomy rights assumes. Here I think the sentimentalist has the more humane and intuitive view of the matter, and I think there are other normative/legal/political issues where the sentimentalist is also at a normative advantage.

The legal emphasis on rights of autonomy has traditionally led the law (in English-speaking nations) to favor spouses or boyfriends who abuse or threaten to abuse their spouses or girlfriends over their wives or girlfriends. Courts have been hesitant to issue restraining orders against the potential or actual abusers out of regard for the rights of the accused to liberty of movement, and they have put more legal and practical weight on this kind of autonomy than on the welfare of the spouses or girlfriends who (say they) are in danger of being abused or harmed. Some of this is now changing, and changing in the light of women's protests and their increasingly influential say in political/legal matters. But the point is that the reluctance to issue restraining orders on the basis of a woman's complaint and in the absence of a legal hearing or trial reflects an emphasis on the (autonomy) right of movement over empathy-based considerations of human welfare and potential damage. And morally speaking, such an emphasis is increasingly seen as unpersuasive and unattractive. A woman's assured safety is morally more important than a man's complete freedom of movement, and empathic caringness is sensitive to that distinction in a way that the liberal emphasis on autonomy rights as dominating or lexically prior to welfare considerations is not. So the sentimentalist approach to human rights, while it is untraditional and goes against many of the political/legal views one hears expressed (especially) in the United States, turns out—over a range of cases—to be morally more appealing in human terms than traditional rationalist/liberal/Kantian views.¹⁸ Far from being unable to compete with Kantianism/liberalism on the latter's preferred terrain of political questions, the virtue-ethical sentimentalist can redirect our political thought in morally/normatively compelling and useful ways.

And let me just also say that sentimentalism's emphasis on empathy likewise gives it an advantage over Aristotelian virtue ethics. Because the latter has had no place for empathy, it doesn't explain why a virtuous individual should listen, really listen, to the opinions of others, rather than dismiss them as obviously mistaken. Such closed-mindedness in someone otherwise virtuous seems eerily and unfortunately similar to the arrant closed-mindedness of those who persecute others for their errant religious beliefs and practices. So Aristotelianism, at least presently, lacks the intellectual tools to understand the ideas of tolerance and respect that are so necessary in a modern world in which a variety of religious and ethnic groupings have to learn to live with one another. And that is a major reason to prefer a sentimentalist virtue-ethical approach to a rationalist neo-Aristotelian one.

Now as I indicated in the preceding, care ethics is a form of contemporary thought that also places great emphasis on the sentiments—especially love, commitment to others, and caring about others. And I ought to say something about how such an approach compares in general with the sentimentalist virtue ethics I am advocating. I say “in general” because, as I said, I consider what I do to be a form both of sentimentalist virtue ethics and of care ethics. But the version of care ethics that comes about in this way is far from typical of care ethics. Both Nel Noddings and Virginia Held have argued, for example, that care ethics differs from virtue ethics by treating the value in or of relationships as primary and the value of traits of character, or virtues, as secondary or derivative. On this view, if caring is to be seen as a virtue, it is because it is an important ingredient in good caring relationships; and it is also held that if we emphasize caring as a virtue, we leave room for supposedly virtuous paternalistic attitudes and actions toward others that violate the deepest values of (having) good relationships.¹⁹

But the sentimentalist virtue ethicist may want to reply that if we base our sense of what is valuable as a character trait or virtue in what is essential to certain exemplary caring relationships, we leave ourselves no way to distinguish the moral valence and value of caring from that of being cared for: for both are involved in the mother-child relationship that care ethicists have put so much emphasis on as a moral paradigm.²⁰ In addition, if the sentimentalist virtue ethicist speaks of empathic caringness and not just of caringness, then it will not allow for the kind of paternalism that care ethics wants to object to. If the caring person is empathic with those he wishes to help, he won't just heap what he thinks is good on the heads of those people, but will try to see things from their point of view and take their point of view into account in the process of helping them. Of course, there are some times when paternalism may be called for, and not just with regard to children. If one's adult son wishes to ride his motorcycle without a helmet because he loves the feeling of wind in his hair, one may nonetheless take steps to make it impossible for him to ride his motorcycle that way—steps that one's son very strenuously and even perhaps bitterly objects to—but care ethicists seem content with that result, and that result coincides with what the virtue-ethical sentimentalist will say about such cases.²¹ In the end, there are differences between the care ethicist who treats relationship values as fundamental and the sentimentalist who emphasizes personal qualities or virtues, but care ethics is now a broad enough tent to include such major disagreements.

For example, some care ethicists think political justice needs to be conceived in basically liberal and non-care-ethical terms, but others try to incorporate political thought and practice fully into the care-ethical point of view.²² And so despite my disagreement with Held and Noddings over the priority of relationship values, I don't think it is inappropriate for a virtue-ethical sentimentalist like myself, someone who makes the virtue of caring central to the moral life, to call himself a care ethicist as well.

Finally, let me very briefly say something about moral concepts. I earlier mentioned that one can be a meta-ethical sentimentalist without doing normative virtue ethics, and it is also true that one can do normative virtue ethics without having a distinctive take on issues of moral semantics.²³ But it is also true that meta-ethical sentimentalism can be used to bolster or undergird one or another kind of sentimentalist (normative) virtue ethics, and I would like to explain briefly how, in contemporary terms and in relation to my own views as a virtue-ethical sentimentalist, this may be possible. But let me begin by saying something about Hume.

Hume was both a normative and a meta-ethical sentimentalist, and the latter side of his work lends some support to the former. If, like Hume, one thinks that moral concepts are based in empathic mechanisms, then that fits in well with the normative idea that the virtuous person is benevolent (or sympathetic) toward others and apportions his or her benevolence (or sympathy) in differential ways that reflect the operation of sympathy/empathy in our minds: for example, we are more moved by and inclined to help those we know or who are near us than those we don't know or who are far away, and virtue demands or consists in having such differential concerns. So Hume's views on meta-ethics fit in, at least to some extent, with what he says about normative morality, and the same holds true—though on a very different basis—of my own recent approach to moral sentimentalism.

I have argued that empathy plays a role not only in normatively understood virtue but in our moral concepts as well.²⁴ The morally virtuous person cares in an empathic fashion about others, and according to my general criterion of moral action, an action is morally acceptable or all right if and only if it doesn't manifest or reflect a lack of empathic caringness on the part of its agent. But the empathy at issue here in being virtuous and acting virtuously is first-order, and on my view moral concepts involve second-order empathy. I hold that when we are empathically warmed by the empathic warmth some person displays in his caring/benevolent actions toward some third party, we are feeling approval of those actions, and, similarly, I think if we are chilled by the cold-hearted attitude someone displays in her uncaring or malicious actions toward third parties, then that counts as a kind of moral disapproval. *Moral Sentimentalism* (2010) argues that our concept of rightness or moral goodness can be applied in a semi-Kripkean way to what typically causes second-order empathic reactions of warm approval. Analogously with what Kripke (1980) says about terms like "red" and "water," the approval reactions fix the reference of the term "right" without being the subject matter referred to or described by judgments using that term, and this (for reasons discussed in my book) allows judgments of rightness and wrongness to be more objective than the meta-ethical views associated with traditional sentimentalism—subjectivism,

emotivism, projectivism, and ideal observer theory—can allow and indeed every bit as objective as any rationalist could want.²⁵ And if such a meta-ethical approach is at all promising, then it supports normative virtue-ethical sentimentalism because (and this is true on a priori grounds) second-order empathic reactions of warm approval can only be caused by warm attitudes in the agent one is reacting to, and empathic caringness (again on a priori grounds) is the warm agential attitude par excellence. So sentimentalist meta-ethics can be used to support sentimentalist virtue ethics, and that is all the more reason to take the latter very seriously as a contemporary approach both to virtue ethics and to normative ethics more generally.

NOTES

1. G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33 (1958): 1–19.
2. Michael Slote, *Morals from Motives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
3. See, e.g., Christine Swanton, *Hume and Nietzsche as Virtue Ethicists* (New York: Blackwell, 2015).
4. E.g., Jesse Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
5. I am not the first person to have made this point.
6. Obviously, there was also a great deal of legalism in ancient Judaism that Christianity, at least in its earliest period and earliest writings, threw off and discarded.
7. The present Dalai Lama was once asked to summarize his Buddhism as briefly as possible, and he replied with a single word: "kindness."
8. Most contemporary translations of the *Analects* or the *Mencius* allow one to see things this way.
9. E.g., Wang Yangming.
10. I am not treating Schopenhauer or popularizations of Asian thought as relevant here.
11. E.g., Malebranche.
12. E.g., by the psychologist Martin Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
13. Independently of deontology.
14. Hume also believed that it enters into such judgments.
15. By the way, Hume's account of promising and justice never focuses on the main deontological issue of doing vs. allowing, and Hutcheson takes the counterintuitive utilitarian path of rejecting deontology altogether.
16. I discuss some of its elements in my book, Michael Slote, *Moral Sentimentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
17. For discussion of the issues involved in defending or denying hate speech in Skokie-like cases and citation references to the liberal political thinkers who want to defend free speech even in such cases, see Susan Brison, "The Autonomy Defense of Free Speech," *Ethics* 108 (1998): 312–339.
18. See John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), esp. 295f. Rawls regards civil liberties as trumping considerations of welfare, and if what I have said is correct, this implies wrong answers to the normative questions of rights and justice that have been raised regarding hate speech and regarding threatened or actual spousal abuse.

19. Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
20. Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*.
21. Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*.
22. Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*.
23. Martineau is a good example.
24. Slote, *Moral Sentimentalism*.
25. Such a reference-fixing account of moral terms/concepts is actually a form of meta-ethical naturalism, but because this naturalism involves the concept and phenomenon of empathy, it allows moral judgments to have an intrinsically motivating character and to be practical in the fullest sense. Empathy not only takes in *facts* about others—e.g., that they are in distress—but, because it involves identifying with the mental states of others, also entails altruistic *motivation vis-à-vis* those mental facts or realities, e.g., a desire to relieve such distress. Slote, *A Sentimentalist Theory of the Mind*, 226. Moreover, if empathy can take in the emotions and concerns of others, it can also take in their reasons for action. Someone who empathically identifies with a person who wants and has reason to alleviate her own pain can want and have reason to alleviate that other person's pain; and so—surprisingly, but on an altogether different and arguably more nuanced basis—the sentimentalist can accept the rationalist idea that moral beliefs and concerns automatically involve the having of reasons for action. Slote, "A Sentimentalist Theory of Practical Reasons."

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CHAPTER 18

ALTERNATIVES TO NEO-ARISTOTELIAN VIRTUE ETHICS

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THE revival of virtue ethics that began in the 1970s and 1980s was led by a band of Aristotelians and Thomists. So it is not surprising that most variants of virtue ethics advanced in recent years have had a neo-Aristotelian timbre. However, standing alongside these neo-Aristotelians have been others playing similar tunes on different instruments. This chapter will highlight the four most important virtue ethical alternatives to the dominant neo-Aristotelian refrain. These are Michael Slote's agent-based approach, Linda Zagzebski's exemplarism, Christine Swanton's target-centered theory, and Robert Merrihew Adams's neo-Platonic account. What these four approaches highlight is the range of possible theoretical structures available to virtue ethicists.

I. SLOTE'S AGENT-BASED VIRTUE ETHICS

All virtue ethical theories are agent-focused: their central interest is in agents and their qualities. This is not to say that they cannot be interested in other things, too, such as actions, objects, events, or consequences. But a distinguishing mark of virtue ethics is the centrality it gives to agents and their qualities.¹ In particular, it focuses on agents' character traits, which are taken to be dispositions to act, think, or feel in certain ways. For example, an agent with the trait of benevolence is disposed to notice that another person is in need, to feel concern for that person's welfare, and when possible to take steps to address his need. An agent with the trait of ambition will have a yearning desire to improve herself or her station, will notice opportunities for making such improvements, and will take steps to turn those opportunities into achievements.² The traits that are excellent or admirable will be the virtues from which the theory derives its name. But

not all traits will satisfy this condition. Some, like being quick to anger, will be vices or qualities of which we disapprove. Others, like the disposition to notice bookshops and take an interest in their contents, will be morally indifferent, neither virtues nor vices.

While all virtue ethical theories are agent-focused, some agent-focused theories may include the value of objects or states of affairs, for instance, alongside the qualities of agents, in the “ground floor” of their theories and use them in the evaluation of actions.³ Other theories, by contrast, will attempt to derive all of the evaluative qualities of actions from the qualities of agents. They will define the goodness, value, or rightness of actions in terms of virtues and vices. Michael Slote calls theories that attempt to derive the evaluative qualities of actions from agents’ excellent traits of character “agent-prior” theories.⁴ Many of the virtue ethical theories that have been developed in recent years—including those developed by Philippa Foot, Julia Annas, Rosalind Hursthouse, and Linda Zagzebski—are agent-prior theories.⁵ Hursthouse, for example, defines *right action* as “what a virtuous agent would characteristically do in the circumstances.”⁶ A *virtuous agent* is defined in terms of the possession of the virtues. And virtues are defined as “character trait[s] a human being needs for *eudaimonia*, to flourish or live well.”⁷ Each of these normative qualities, then, is explained in terms of agents and their qualities.

Like Foot, Annas, and Hursthouse, Slote develops an agent-prior view. What distinguishes his work from theirs is that he advances a theory that is not only agent-focused and agent-prior but also what he calls “agent-based.” “An agent-based approach to virtue ethics treats the moral or ethical status of acts as entirely derivative from independent and fundamental aretaic (as opposed to deontic) characterizations of motives, character traits, or individuals.”⁸ In contrast to Hursthouse, Annas, and Foot, who ground the excellence of virtuous traits in an account of human flourishing, Slote argues that the excellence of virtuous motives, traits, and individuals is not to be explained in terms of some other quality. Rather, their excellence is fundamental, and the ethical status of actions is to be derived from these aretaic qualities of agents. Indeed, Slote goes so far as to ground not only the rightness and wrongness of actions, but also the justice of institutions, laws, and customs, and the goodness of human well-being in excellent motives.⁹

Slote considers three different forms an agent-based virtue ethic might take.¹⁰ The first is built around the notions of health and strength. Good actions, on such a view, “express or reflect inner strength” or health.¹¹ The second is built around universal benevolence. According to it, good actions are those that express or reflect the motivation to promote universal human happiness.¹² The third type is built around the notion of caring. Like universal benevolence, an ethic of caring is concerned to promote human happiness. However, an ethic of caring makes room for greater degrees of attachment to those who are near and dear to us than does an ethic of universal benevolence. As Slote is quick to point out, making room for a degree of partiality does not require indifference to those who are outside of one’s circle of relations. Humanitarian caring can still extend to all human beings; but in most day-to-day circumstances, it will play a less pronounced role than intimate caring. A *good action*, according to an agent-based ethic of caring, will be

one that expresses or reflects a balance of self-concern, intimate caring, and humanitarian caring.¹³

Slote argues that an agent-based ethic of caring has a number of things going for it. One advantage is that it makes room for empathy. Identifying what another person is feeling (or might feel) in certain circumstances is an important part of our everyday ethical deliberation: "I can't do that; it would disappoint him terribly," or "Is he heartless? Doesn't he see how much he's hurting her?" In such cases we not only recognize what others are feeling, but are moved by similar feelings. A number of psychological studies have suggested that this sort of empathy "plays a crucial enabling role in the development of genuinely altruistic concern."¹⁴ They also suggest that a lack of the capacity for empathy is strongly correlated with psychopathy.¹⁵ Insofar as it makes empathy central to ethics, then, an agent-based ethic of caring is well positioned to make sense of these findings.

A second advantage is that an ethic of caring is able to accommodate a number of our commonsense moral judgments. We ordinarily think that people should care about the suffering of others and should care even more if the other who is suffering is a friend. Furthermore, we think this is true irrespective of whether they are in a position to alleviate the other's suffering. And we ordinarily think that the people we love and to whom we are obligated are not fungible.

Given these, and other, advantages, Slote goes on to develop a caring, agent-based account of *rightness* and *wrongness*: "An action is morally wrong if and only if it expresses or exhibits a lack of full empathic concern for others. And rightness . . . is simply something's not being wrong."¹⁶ He articulates an agent-based theory of *justice*: "an agent-based account of social morality will treat customs, laws, and institutions as morally good (positively and admirably just) if they reflect virtuous (enough) motivation on the part of (enough of) those responsible for them and as morally bad (or unjust) if they reflect morally bad or deficient motivation."¹⁷ He defends an agent-based account of *practical rationality*, according to which rational actions are those that express or reflect the traits of moderation, strength of purpose, non-self-deceptiveness, and a concern for one's own well-being.¹⁸ He even offers an agent-based account of *well-being*, according to which "every element of human well-being . . . [is] compatible with or involve[s] at least some part of virtue or one or another particular virtue."¹⁹

II. ZAGZEBSKI'S EXEMPLARIST VIRTUE ETHICS

As in Slote's agent-based virtue ethics, so also in Linda Zagzebski's exemplarist approach, the agent's dispositions and motives play a significant role in defining other normative properties. And like Slote, Zagzebski takes emotions to be central to ethics: emotions are involved in both moral epistemology and moral metaphysics.

However, Zagzebski's emotional palette includes more primary colors than Slote's: she does not try to make empathy do all of the work. And her appeal to exemplars enables her to capture features of commonsense moral judgments that Slote's account is forced to rule out.

Zagzebski's approach to ethical theory has two main anchors: emotions and exemplars. The most significant point of origin for moral judgments can be found in our emotional responses to exemplars. We meet someone who treats another with kindness and we find ourselves liking them and wanting to be like them. We meet another person who treats someone cruelly and we dislike them and want not to resemble them. We have responses like these in early childhood, well before we acquire the concepts of goodness, right action, virtue, or vice. "We do not have criteria for goodness in advance of identifying the exemplars of goodness."²⁰ Some of these exemplars will be widely recognized within a society or, perhaps, across societal boundaries. Many more will be known only by a local few. What both low-key and high-profile exemplars share is that we find ourselves admiring them. And that admiration, like all admiration, involves wanting to imitate them.²¹

Moral concepts begin to take shape when we set positive exemplars alongside less positive cases. "I surmise that the move from 'I want to be like R and not like S' to 'R is better than S' is not only genetically primitive, but also basic to moral thinking."²² It is out of comparative judgments like these that we begin to formulate our notions of better and worse ways of acting, feeling, and being.

In addition to admiration, we also experience other emotions that help orient us within normative space. A long-hoped-for event occurs and we experience joy. Someone treats us rudely and we are offended. We encounter something dangerous and we feel fear. We see a person in great need and we are moved with pity. These emotions represent their objects in distinctive ways and give rise to what Zagzebski calls "thick affective concepts."²³ Feeling pity involves seeing the object of that emotion as *PITIFUL*. Taking offense involves seeing something as *RUDE*. Feeling fear involves seeing a situation, object, or agent as *FEARSOME*. Feeling love involves seeing the beloved as *LOVABLE*.

Thick affective concepts have two distinctive qualities. First, one acquires the concept through having the relevant emotional experience. In this respect, thick affective concepts are like color concepts in Frank Jackson's paper, "What Mary Didn't Know."²⁴ Jackson invites us to imagine that Mary is a scientist who has been raised in a room in which she encounters only black and white objects. In that context, even if Mary were to study the science of color and understand all there is to know about the physical processes whereby human beings come to experience color, Jackson argues, she would not yet understand the concepts of red or green. She would not obtain an understanding of these concepts until she left the black and white room and encountered red or green objects firsthand. Zagzebski argues that the same is true for a number of emotion-related concepts that play a central role in our moral thinking. "A person who has not experienced the emotion accompanying the concept could not understand the concept, just as a person who has never had the sensation of red could not understand the concept of red."²⁵ One may still be able to say true things about love, for example, based

upon the testimony of others, even if one has not experienced it oneself. But one will not yet understand the concept LOVE until one has felt love.

A second distinguishing feature of thick affective concepts is that their primary use “continues to be in the experience of that emotion.”²⁶ When one sees a situation as dangerous, one feels fear. When one sees a person as lovable, one loves her. This is not to deny that one can use the concept even when one is not presently feeling the associated emotion. Perhaps on this occasion I am too depressed to feel fear or love. Nevertheless, I can still recognize *that* this bull has a number of attributes commonly associated with being fearsome or *that* this person has attributes associated with being lovable. However, recognizing *that* something is fearsome or lovable is different from seeing it *as* fearsome or lovable. The recognizing-that usage of thick affective concepts is secondary and remains dependent on their use in experiences of emotions like pity, where we see the object as possessing the associated property of being pitiful.

Thick affective concepts are important, on Zagzebski’s account, because emotions and their associated thick affective concepts pick out values: “Emotion is a type of value perception that feels a characteristic way.”²⁷ Joy, for example, has a positive valence. Feeling joy involves valuing the object of that joy. Joy presents its object as good; or more specifically, it presents it as joyous, which is a species of goodness. Grief, by contrast, has a negative valence. Feeling grief involves taking someone’s death to be a loss. Grief presents its object as grievous, which is a distinctive species of badness. It is not that we see by some other means that the object of our joy is good and then we respond with joy, or that the object of our grief is bad and then we respond with grief. Rather, grieving is the way we perceive the badness of our loss, and joy is the way we perceive the goodness of our gain.

While our admiration and other emotions play a crucial role in valuing, they are not always consistent. When our concepts start to mature and we begin to look for systematic connections between different emotional responses, we notice certain inconsistencies between admirings. What we once admired we no longer do, or vice versa. What we admire, someone else does not. Experiences of disharmony between what we are inclined to admire or love from one moment to the next are both inconvenient and unsettling. They can lead to disruptive inconsistencies in behavior. Similarly, the differences between our responses and our neighbors’ can generate coordination problems. So we attempt to recalibrate our responses and revise our conception of the admirable in order to achieve greater consistency.²⁸

In the process of seeking harmony between our responses, both interpersonally and intrapersonally, we may find it useful for our admiring, for example, to follow rules. We may correct our tendency to admire individuals for certain sorts of behaviors when those individuals or behaviors fail to accord with these rules. We also begin to think not only in terms of what is *actually* admired, but also in terms of what is *fittingly* admired, that is, in terms of what is admirable. We begin to think of admiration as something that can be accurate or inaccurate.²⁹ And we may formulate theoretical criteria for what does or does not count as admirable. The same goes for other emotional perceptions of value. If carried out at a suitable level of abstraction and on a large enough scale, this will be part of the map-making exercise of constructing and using a moral theory.³⁰

While we may correct individual feelings of admiration in light of the criteria of admirability we have formulated, we may also correct our criteria in light of strong and persistent experiences of admiration or other emotions. This, too, is an important part of theoretical map-making. A simple map may be attractive and easy to read, but if it buys these benefits at the cost of leaving out important features of the terrain, then it may fail to help us get where we are going. Emotional perceptions that persist under critical scrutiny even though they are at odds with currently accepted rules are one way that we realize we have left something important out of our theoretical map. Within Zagzebski's account, exemplars and emotions are not superseded by moral rules and theoretical criteria. The rules are always ultimately grounded in exemplars and emotions.³¹

Our admiration of exemplars can take as its object individual actions, long-standing habits, skills they have developed, or other ways of thinking, acting, feeling, or being. It can extend to any of the qualities that distinguish them from others. Many, perhaps most, exemplars will be exemplary in some areas but not others.³² They may be good at analyzing arguments, for example, but not at reading people. Or they may stand out for their decisiveness but not their empathy. Sometimes that causes problems, if we confuse accidental qualities of an exemplar with essential ones. Nevertheless, with time, we become reasonably adept at picking out which qualities are the ones we admire and which are not.

An important subset of the qualities that distinguish people who are exemplary as people (as opposed to merely exemplary as butchers, bakers, or candlestick makers) from the rest of us will be the emotions they feel and the relations that exist between those emotions and the contexts in which they find themselves. Zagzebski argues that "the psychologically most basic difference between exemplars and ordinary persons is the kind of perception they have in emotion The emotions of exemplars are trustworthy, and what makes them trustworthy is that they fit their intentional objects."³³ The notion of "fitting" emotions is analogous to that of true beliefs. "An emotion is good or right or fitting just in case a state of affairs has the thick property that the agent sees it as having in the emotional state."³⁴ And what distinguishes exemplary people is that their emotions characteristically represent the world in reliable ways. Consequently, in the process of refining our moral maps, we should expect to make frequent reference to the emotions of exemplars. If our emotions characteristically part ways with theirs, that will provide us with reasons to try to educate our emotions to bring them more closely into line with those of recognized exemplars.

The education of our emotions is possible because they are not merely isolated, one-off occurrences. "Emotions easily become dispositions. Human beings develop patterns of emotional response in similar situations."³⁵ I do not merely become sad on this one occasion at the news that the latest government budget prioritizes military over educational spending. I have encountered news like this before and have responded in similar ways. "These circumstance/emotion pairs become part of the person's character. They express the way she emotionally fits into the world around her."³⁶ Just as these ways of fitting into the world take time to develop, so also they usually take time to change. Altering most emotional dispositions will be a lengthy and effortful process.

To this point I have emphasized the epistemic role that Zagzebski assigns to emotions. They are our way of perceiving response-dependent properties like the awesome, the adorable, the charming, the contemptible, and the shameful. However, their importance for morality is not merely epistemic. It is also motivational. Emotions combine a perception of a situation as having a certain value with an inclination to act in accordance with that appraisal.³⁷ Fear's perception of a situation as fearsome is paired with an inclination to run. When we act upon that inclination, then we say that fear is our motive for acting as we did. And when we develop a tendency to act on a certain emotion in certain kinds of circumstances, we have what Zagzebski calls a "motive-disposition": "The disposition to be motivated to act in a characteristic way in response to an emotion is a motive disposition."³⁸

Motive-dispositions are the building blocks for virtues and vices. Vices will be built out of bad motive-dispositions and virtues out of good ones. "A virtue is a deep and enduring acquired excellence of the human person that has two components: (1) a motive disposition, and (2) reliable success in bringing about the end (if any) of the motive."³⁹ This way of putting things may invite one to think that it is the goodness of a motive's end that is prior to and determines the goodness of the motive and, by extension, the goodness of virtue. However, Zagzebski argues, the priority relation is the reverse: "The goodness of the virtuous end is derivative from the goodness of the motive, not the other way around."⁴⁰ Good motives are the motives of exemplars and good ends are the ends at which exemplars aim.

From this foundation in exemplars and their motives, Zagzebski builds up an account of "thinner" moral concepts like that of *good and bad states of affairs*: "Roughly, a good state of affairs is one that is the end of a good motive. A bad state of affairs is one that is the end of a bad motive."⁴¹ Her account of obligations and right and wrong acts is similarly grounded in thick moral concepts and the actions, motives, and character traits of exemplars: "An *obligation* (duty) is a requirement of virtue (the virtuous self). It is appropriate to feel guilty for not doing it. A *right* (permissible) act is an act that is not contrary to virtue It is not appropriate to feel guilty for doing it. A *wrong* act is an act that is contrary to virtue The appropriate response to doing it is the emotion of guilt."⁴² And, not surprisingly, the same is true of her account of a virtuous act and of an act that is good in every respect: "A *virtuous* act is an act that expresses a virtue, that is to say, it is virtuously motivated and is an act that expresses the virtuous motivation An act is *good in every respect* when it is a virtuous (phronetic) act and is successful in bringing about the end of the virtuous motive because it is a virtuous (phronetic) act."⁴³

Like Slote's theory, Zagzebski's is an agent-based version of virtue ethics. Or, to use her preferred terms, it is an exemplarist, motivation-based account. However, her account avoids one of the problems that has plagued Slote's agent-based account. We commonly think there is a difference between doing the right thing and doing the right thing for the right reason or from the right motive. Slote's account is unable to draw this distinction.⁴⁴ On his account, what in fact motivates each act fully colors our assessment of that act. Zagzebski's definition of a right act, by contrast, is built around what a virtuous agent might do.⁴⁵ This enables her to distinguish between the question of whether this is the

type of action an exemplar might perform and the question of whether this token action expresses an exemplary motive-disposition.

A second strength of Zagzebski's theory lies in the way it accounts for moral disagreement. One of the features of moral life that a theory must accommodate is the fact that thoughtful, well-meaning people can disagree deeply about moral issues. Although there is considerable overlap between our moral judgments and our neighbors', there remain a number of points on which we differ—sometimes quite heatedly. It is an advantage if a theory can help us explain this fact. Zagzebski's does. There are two natural points at which the seeds of disagreement might be sown on Zagzebski's account. The first is in the interpretation of our responses to exemplars. We will each have cut our teeth with different exemplars who have different constellations of motive dispositions. Even when two people admire the same exemplar, their attempts to articulate what it is about that exemplar that they admire may lead them in different directions. So it is to be expected that, in spite of considerable overlap between the responses of thoughtful, well-meaning persons, both individuals and the communities of which they are a part may attend to or prioritize different features of the same situation. A second place in which no-fault disagreement might be introduced is in the process of seeking consistency between our past and present responses, or between our responses and our neighbors', or between our responses and the general rules. When it comes to making fine-grained distinctions between two attempts at formulating a rule, or deciding when an emotional response to a particular case warrants overriding a rule, or deciding which of two partially overlapping rules takes precedence in a given situation, there are a number of opportunities for thoughtful people to go in slightly different directions. Hence, Zagzebski's story about the origins of our moral judgments both anticipates the possibility of moral disagreement and provides a resource for explaining how thoughtful, well-meaning agents might have reached different conclusions.

III. SWANTON'S TARGET-CENTERED VIRTUE ETHICS

The third alternative to neo-Aristotelian approaches to virtue ethics we shall consider is Christine Swanton's target-centered view. Swanton has spent a number of years reminding ethicists that Aristotle's is not the only model for developing a virtue ethical theory. She has highlighted the resources that Hume, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, among others, offer.⁴⁶ And she has outlined a number of alternative frameworks that virtue ethicists might employ.

According to Swanton, "a virtue is a disposition to respond well to the 'demands of the world.'"⁴⁷ There are various ways to make sense of the world's demands, and Swanton sets up her target-centered view with an eye to accommodating a number of possible accounts of the world's demandingness. However, like Slote (2010) and Zagzebski

(2004), her preferred view employs a sentimentalist framework built around response-dependent properties. As Swanton puts it, objects, persons, actions, or situations have “a power . . . to elicit relevant responses, notably emotional ones” from suitably constituted agents.⁴⁸ Agents who respond reliably to these powers will experience emotions that “fit” the object, person, action, or situation. They will, for example, suffer when they see another in pain, feel pride at a personal achievement, and love someone who helps those in need. Like Slote, Zagzebski, and numerous others, Swanton proposes that a readiness to feel fitting emotions is an important constituent of the virtues.⁴⁹

Although there is considerable overlap, there are also a number of features that distinguish Swanton’s view from the two we have already considered. The most important difference is to be found in the role played by what Swanton calls the complex profiles of the virtues. To understand a virtue, we must understand (1) its *field*, (2) its *mode* of responsiveness, (3) its *basis* of moral acknowledgment, and (4) its *target*. The *field* of a virtue is the area with which it is concerned. For example, temperance is concerned with bodily pleasures and objects of desire, courage with what might cause us harm, patience with obstacles to our pursuits, and meekness with anger and what might provoke it. The *basis* of acknowledgment is the kind of feature a virtue responds to within its field. Love is responsive to relational bonds, respect attends to status, and generosity is oriented toward benefits.⁵⁰ How one responds to the bases of acknowledgment within the field of the virtue is what Swanton calls the *mode* of responsiveness. One might promote a worthwhile cause, honor a rule, appreciate beauty, respect an elder, nurture love, express creativity, defend justice, be open to countervailing arguments, welcome guests, and so on.⁵¹ The important thing to note is that different fields and bases call for different modes of responsiveness. Unlike some theories in which there is one basis of acknowledgment (for example, value) and one mode of responsiveness (such as promoting), Swanton is a pluralist both about what the virtues respond to and the ways in which one might respond well.

The first three components—the field, basis, and mode—provide us with what we need to define a virtue more precisely than we have heretofore. On Swanton’s account, a *virtue* is “a disposition of acknowledging or responding to items in the field of a virtue in an excellent (or good enough) way.”⁵² One could, of course, embed such an account of virtue into a eudaimonist or qualified-agent framework. The uniquely qualified agent, such as the virtuous person, might be wheeled in to determine what counts as a good enough way. Or one might appeal to *eudaimonia* to identify the fields of the virtues. However, Swanton contends, one need not appeal to either the uniquely qualified agent or *eudaimonia*. An account of response-dependent properties and the capacities of ordinary human agents is sufficient to enable us to identify the fields, bases, modes, and thresholds of virtue.

The fourth major component of Swanton’s target-centered view is the one from which the view gets its name, namely, the targets of the virtues. Virtuous agents not only notice what is worth noticing and care about what is worth caring about, they are also prompted to do things as a result of this caring attention. The world demands more than just noting and emoting. It also demands action. This is where targets come into the

account. The target of a virtue is that at which it is aimed. This will vary from one virtue to the next. Temperance is aimed at controlling desire, courage at controlling fear and handling danger. Generosity aims at sharing goods with others in ways that benefit them, toleration at respecting those who are taken to be different from oneself. Determination aims at “trying hard in a sustained way,” and modesty at not drawing attention to oneself.⁵³

Introducing the targets of the virtues puts us in a position to see how Swanton’s view differs from Slote’s. According to the target-centered view, it is possible for an agent to have a virtue (i.e., a disposition to respond well to items within the field of the virtue) and to act from that virtue, but still miss the virtue’s target. For example, a businesswoman in a first-world country might wish to benefit students in a third-world context by donating a number of surplus computers from her business to their school. But she might fail to recognize that electricity to the school is both unreliable and expensive. A less expensive gift of desks and chalkboards would be of greater benefit. So it would be more advantageous for the school if the benefactor sold the surplus computers at a marked discount and used the proceeds to purchase desks and chalkboards. In such a case, if the businesswoman chose to donate the computers, she would still be acting from generosity, but her action would fail to hit the target of generosity. In Swanton’s terms, it would count as *an action from virtue*, but it would not count as *a virtuous act*, since the latter succeeds in hitting the target of the virtue.⁵⁴

Alternatively, an agent might hit the target of a virtue, even though he was not acting from that virtue.⁵⁵ A furniture wholesaler who needs to make space in his warehouse for a new shipment of chairs and desks might choose to get rid of some of his old stock. But rather than sending the old stock to a landfill, he might donate it to a third-world school, because he could then claim it as a charitable donation on his taxes. Although the wholesaler is not acting from a generous disposition, his action still hits the target of generosity, insofar as it shares goods with others in ways that benefit them.

By defining the targets of (some of) the virtues independently of the qualities of the agents who might hit those targets, and by defining a virtuous action in respect to generosity as one that hits the target of generosity, Swanton introduces the possibility of a gap between the excellent qualities of agents and the ethical qualities of actions. As a result, the theory Swanton develops is not an agent-based form of virtue ethics. The virtues are still “central in the sense that conceptions of rightness, conceptions of the good life, conceptions of “the moral point of view” and the appropriate demandingness of morality, cannot be understood without a conception of relevant virtues.”⁵⁶ Nevertheless, she does not try to derive all other major normative concepts from the traits or motives of virtuous agents.⁵⁷

Finally, Swanton defines right and wrong actions by reference to virtuous (and vicious) actions. In order to do so, she first introduces the idea of “overall virtuousness.” This idea is needed because (1) virtues *x* and *y* might respond to different bases within their respective fields, (2) the fields of virtues *x* and *y* might overlap, and (3) it might not be possible to exemplify both *x* and *y* in a particular situation. For instance, the field of

generosity can overlap with the field of prudence, insofar as both virtues are concerned with the distribution of benefits, and they both might make demands on precisely the same limited resources. The possibility of conflicts like this means that one cannot simply move from “Action A is virtuous with respect to generosity” to “A is a (or the) right action.” To deal with this possibility, Swanton appeals to the standard of “overall virtuousness.” According to her preferred account, an act is *overall virtuous* if and only if “it is the, or a, best action possible in the circumstances” and “an act is *right* if and only if it is overall virtuous.” An action is *wrong* if it is “overall vicious.” And between these two poles are a range of actions that are “all right,” which is to say they are “good enough even if not the (or a) best action.”⁵⁸

IV. ADAMS’S NEO-PLATONIC VIRTUE ETHICS

Both Slote and Zagzebski develop theories in which the other major normative concepts, like goodness, badness, rightness, wrongness, justice, well-being, and rationality, are defined in terms of virtue. To revert to Slote’s terminology, they offer agent-prior theories. Even Swanton, who does not offer an agent-prior theory, still defines right action by reference to virtue. However, a number of theorists who are interested in virtue have resisted the attempt to make it the primary concept from which goodness, rightness, justice, and rationality are derived. Of course, one way to do this would be to reverse the order of explanation. Rather than defining goodness in terms of virtue, one might define a virtue as a trait that “generally produces good.”⁵⁹ Or, instead of explaining rightness in terms of virtue, one might define a virtuous person as one who reliably performs right actions. Those who attempted to reverse the order of explanation in either of these ways might still be engaged in the project of developing a virtue theory, insofar as they were attempting to carve out an important role for virtue within their normative theory. But they would not be offering a form of virtue ethics, insofar as virtue, within their theory, would be entirely reducible to some other normative quality or concept.

However, these two options—reducing goodness or rightness to a function of virtue, or vice versa—do not exhaust the range of possibilities. An important set of alternatives comes into view for those who resist the temptation to reduce all normative concepts to a single currency. One of the key surveyors of this intermediate logical space has been Robert Merrihew Adams. Of course, those who work within this logical space owe us a story about how apparently distinct normative concepts are related to one another. Adams, as we shall see, does a nice job of developing such a story.⁶⁰

The starting point for Adams’s story is goodness, in particular the sort of goodness he calls “excellence.” The excellent is that which “is worthy of love or admiration.”⁶¹ Already one can see how this way of characterizing excellence might make room for virtue. Individual virtues like generosity or patience taken on their own, the life of virtue taken as a whole, and particular exemplary agents might each be worthy of love or admiration. As such, virtuous persons, virtuous lives, and individual virtues would come into the

ground floor of the theory, insofar as they are members of the excellence-set upon which the rest of the theory is built.

Adams's most succinct and best-known definition of moral virtue is "persisting excellence in being for the good."⁶² However, this definition does not adequately convey his considered view. There are two ways in which this formulation is misleading. First, for those unacquainted with his earlier work, it makes it sound as though virtue comes into the account at a different level than other sorts of goods: Other goods have primacy, and virtue has a secondary or subordinate kind of goodness, which it derives from its relationship to these more fundamental goods (that is, from being for them). However, interpreting it in this way would misrepresent the role of virtue in the meta-ethics that Adams develops in *Finite and Infinite Goods*, which still underpins his more recent work.⁶³ To explain that role, we shall need to say more about how Adams defines goodness.

Adams offers a neo-Platonic—or perhaps more accurately a neo-Augustinian—account of goodness. The quality that he suggests makes something excellent is that it resembles God: "being excellent in the way that a finite thing can be consists in resembling God in a way that could serve God as a reason for loving the thing."⁶⁴ Thus God serves as the transcendent Good around which the realm of value is organized. Furthermore, he observes,

most of the excellences that are most important to us, and of whose value we are most confident, are excellences of persons or of qualities or actions or works or lives or stories of persons. So if excellence consists in resembling or imaging a being that is the Good itself, nothing is more important to the role of the Good itself than that persons and their properties should be able to resemble or image it.⁶⁵

Adams develops his account of goodness in terms of what God is *like* and what is like God. The God in question is a specifically Christian God, many of whose defining attributes are virtues like love, justice, wisdom, and faithfulness. Consequently, the goodness of virtues is to be explained in the same way as the goodness of other things, namely, in terms of resembling God.⁶⁶

The second way in which Adams's more recent definition of virtue is misleading also stems from the notion of "being for the good." Although "being for the Good" or "alliance with the Good" is one way of being excellent, it does not exhaust the possible forms of excellence. If excellence is defined in terms of what God is *like*, rather than what God is *for*, we should also consider ways of being excellent that are not readily characterized in terms of being *for* the good. Creativity is one such excellence. This is not to say that creativity never involves being for the good. Sometimes the creative endeavor involves a vision of goodness that the creator labors to bring into existence. But often creativity involves the creator giving expression to her own way of being. Part of what we appreciate in great literature, for example, are qualities of the novelist's way of seeing the world that are expressed in how she tells the story. We not only appreciate the characters she has created or the yarn she has spun, we also love the author's distinctive voice that

can be heard in these, and so many other, features of the novel. Within the Christian tradition, creativity is one of the defining qualities of God. It is not a peripheral attribute, in the way that an academic's tennis skills might be peripheral to his identity as a researcher and teacher. The Christian God's characteristic way of being is a creative one. And Adams argues that the goodness of God's creative activities is not (or not wholly) determined either by the qualities of the objects God brings into existence or by God's purposes in creating.⁶⁷

This point about the excellence of creativity not being fully captured by the idea of "excellence in being for the good" connects up with a recurring theme in Adams's work. He has repeatedly argued that moral evaluation should be concerned not only with that *for* which we act (whether in the sense of the outcome *to* which our actions are directed, or in the sense of that *in favor of* which we act), but also with that *from* which we act.⁶⁸ Motives matter, and the goodness of motives cannot always be captured by appealing to the goodness of other things (including the goodness of what we are for).

A less misleading way to represent Adams's understanding of virtue is as persisting excellence of character that "could serve God as a reason for loving" the person who has it.⁶⁹ Or, if we wished to render it useful to those who are not theists, we might define virtue as persisting excellence of character that could serve the good (i.e., those who are good) as a reason for loving the person who has it. Virtue, so defined, is "a holistic property of persons."⁷⁰ Individual virtues like benevolence and faithfulness will be excellent traits that together constitute virtue. Whether this definition is circular or not will depend upon whether one requires an account of virtue to identify either (a) those who are good, or (b) the reasons of those who are good. Our discussion of Zagzebski's exemplarist theory shows us one way in which an account like this might avoid circularity.

To this point we have been exploring the relationship between goodness and virtue in Adams's theory. How does rightness or obligation come into the account? Obligations, Adams argues, are explained in terms of relationships. They pertain to the conditions that preserve harmony within or place "a strain on one's relations with others."⁷¹ In particular, a moral obligation is constituted by the expectations and demands that "arise in a relationship or system of relationships that is good or valuable."⁷² This way of putting things makes it clear that within Adams's account, the good is prior to the right. He underscores this priority relation in his discussion of the relative strength of moral obligations, which vary on the basis both of the content of the demand or expectation (how good it is) and on the basis of the character of the person who makes the demand or has the expectation (how virtuous they are): "Where what people ask is not for their own well-being . . . I think we normally have more reason to comply with the requests and demands of the knowledgeable, wise, or saintly."⁷³

Thus, within Adams's account the logic of obligation is dependent upon the logic of goodness and virtue. Even so, the former remains distinct from the latter. For moral obligations to arise, one needs at least moderately good relationships. But those relationships bring with them a distinct set of constraints and success conditions that, while not independent of goodness and virtue, are not reducible to them either. Consequently, Adams offers an instructive model for developing an ethical theory in which rightness

is governed by virtue but not wholly determined by it. Within this model, some of what we should do will be directly determined by considerations of virtue: be patient and gracious, do the kind thing, the honest thing, and so on. Other things we should do will be shaped indirectly by considerations of virtue but will be directly determined by the expectations of the relationships in which we stand.

Some of the relationships in which we stand will be structured by social roles or affiliations and the demands and expectations associated with them. Being a member of a religious or professional community often means that other people expect you to act in recognizable ways in certain kinds of situations. A medical doctor who is on a plane is expected to attend to the passenger in row three who begins to feel chest pains and is having trouble breathing. Similarly, a Quaker at a political summit is expected to advocate nonviolent ways of resolving an international dispute. Many of these expectations will not just be directed toward a person from those around her, they will also be owned by the person herself. She will be motivated to act in accordance with the demands and expectations associated with her role. Furthermore, occupying a role or maintaining an affiliation for a long period of time can give rise to persisting dispositions to act in role-sustaining ways. If the role is a good one and the agent's identification with her role is well-motivated, then, Adams argues, an enduring disposition to act in certain ways or to care about certain things "may reasonably be regarded as a virtue or a module of virtue."⁷⁴ Consequently, within Adams's theory, some of our virtues may arise out of some of our obligations.

Adams's theoretical framework provides a number of resources for developing a theory in which virtue has a kind of "explanatory primacy." As we have noted, he does not derive rightness or goodness from virtue. Nor does he make virtue serve or promote goodness or rightness. Adams builds virtue into the ground floor of the theory. Virtue is a type of goodness—the most important type—and plays an essential role in determining what we should do, what we should be, and why. Thus, he provides an example of how a virtue ethic might be developed in which virtue has a certain kind of primacy, even though it may not be alone in possessing this quality.

V. CONCLUSION

Although most advocates of virtue ethics in recent years have worked within a neo-Aristotelian framework, there are a number of attractive alternatives for those wishing to develop a virtue ethical approach. Slote and Zagzebski illustrate two different ways in which one might develop an agent-based account. Swanton offers a target-centered view, built around the profiles of the virtues, each of which has its own characteristic field, basis, mode, and target. Finally, Adams indicates how one might develop a theory in which virtue plays a fundamental role, but in which other normative properties, such as goodness, might also play a fundamental role and where yet other properties, like obligation, might play a subordinate role that is dependent upon but not reducible to

more fundamental properties. These theories highlight an exciting range of possibilities for future virtue ethicists to explore.

NOTES

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2. Glen Pettigrove, "Ambitions," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 10 (2007): 53–68.
3. Michael Slote, "Virtue Ethics," in *Three Methods of Ethics*, edited by Marcia Baron, Philip Pettit, and Michael Slote (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 210.
4. Michael Slote, *Morals from Motives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 6.
5. Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Linda Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
6. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 28.
7. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 167.
8. Slote, *Morals from Motives*, 5; Slote, "Virtue Ethics," 206.
9. Slote, *Morals from Motives*, 99–100, 197; Slote, *From Enlightenment to Receptivity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 110.
10. Roy Perrett and I discuss a fourth in Roy Perrett and Glen Pettigrove, "Hindu Virtue Ethics," in *Routledge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, edited by Michael Slote and Lorraine Besser-Jones (New York: Routledge, 2015), 51–62.
11. Slote, *Morals from Motives*, 21.
12. Slote, *Morals from Motives*, 24–25.
13. Slote, *Morals from Motives*, 77.
14. Michael Slote, *Moral Sentimentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 13.
15. Slote, *From Enlightenment to Receptivity*, 42–43.
16. Slote, *From Enlightenment to Receptivity*, 110.
17. Slote, *Morals from Motives*, 99–100.
18. Slote, *Morals from Motives*, 200.
19. Slote, *Morals from Motives*, 154.
20. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 41.
21. Linda Zagzebski, "The Admirable Life and the Desirable Life," in *Values and Virtues*, edited by Tim Chappell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 60.
22. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 53.
23. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 62.
24. Frank Jackson, "What Mary Didn't Know," *The Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986): 291–295.
25. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 65.
26. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 64.
27. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 69.

28. Linda Zagzebski, "Emotional Self-Trust," in *Emotion and Value*, edited by Roeser and Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 170.
29. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 52, 76; Zagzebski, "The Admirable Life and the Desirable Life," 60.
30. Linda Zagzebski, "Exemplarist Virtue Theory," *Metaphilosophy* 41 (2010): 41–57.
31. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 41.
32. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 54.
33. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 58–59.
34. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 76.
35. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 71.
36. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 71.
37. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 72.
38. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 121.
39. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 121–122.
40. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 542.
41. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 542–543.
42. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 159–160.
43. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 160.
44. Michael Brady, "Against Agent-Based Virtue Ethics," *Philosophical Papers* 33 (2004): 1–10.
45. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 179.
46. Christine Swanton, "The Supposed Tension between 'Strength' and 'Gentleness' Conceptions of the Virtues," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 75 (1997): 497–510; Christine Swanton, "Outline of a Nietzschean Virtue Ethics," *International Studies in Philosophy* 30 (1998): 29–38; Christine Swanton, "Can Hume Be Read as a Virtue Ethicist?" *Hume Studies* 33 (2007): 91–113; Christine Swanton, "Heideggerian Environmental Virtue Ethics," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 23 (2010a): 145–166; Christine Swanton, "A Challenge to Intellectual Virtue from Moral Virtue: The Case of Universal Love," *Metaphilosophy* 41 (2010b): 152–171; Christine Swanton, "A New Metaphysics for Virtue Ethics: Heidegger Meets Hume," in *Aristotelian Ethics in Contemporary Perspective*, edited by Julia Peters (New York: Routledge, 2013b), 177–194; Christine Swanton, *The Virtue Ethics of Hume and Nietzsche* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015).
47. Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 21.
48. Swanton, *The Virtue Ethics of Hume and Nietzsche*, 47.
49. Swanton, "The Definition of Virtue Ethics," 331.
50. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*, 24.
51. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*, 21–22.
52. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*, 233.
53. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*, 234–238.
54. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*, 233.
55. Swanton calls this a "virtuous act," whereas Zagzebski uses "virtuous act" to pick out what Swanton calls "acting from virtue."
56. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*, 5.
57. In this respect, Swanton's account resembles an earlier incarnation of Slote's view in which he left room for other factors to play a role in an agent-based account. In particular, he allowed for the possibility that well-being might be defined independently of claims about virtue or rightness and that "aretaic evaluations of the inner life and claims about what

- constitutes human well-being [might] *both* count as fundamental and occupy the ground floor of ethics *together*” (emphasis original). But he quickly sets this possibility aside, and it is not mentioned in subsequent developments of his view. Swanton, “The Supposed Tension between ‘Strength’ and ‘Gentleness’ Conceptions of the Virtues.”
58. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*, 239–240.
 59. Julia Driver, *Uneasy Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 67.
 60. This section draws upon Glen Pettigrove, “Virtue Ethics, Virtue Theory, and Moral Theology,” *The Handbook of Virtue Ethics*, edited by Stan van Hooft (Durham, NC: Acumen, 2014).
 61. Robert M. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 13–14.
 62. Robert M. Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 14.
 63. Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good*, 6.
 64. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 36.
 65. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 42.
 66. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 14.
 67. Robert M. Adams, “Must God Create the Best?” *Philosophical Review* 81(1972): 51–64; Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*.
 68. Robert M. Adams, “Motive Utilitarianism,” *Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976): 467–481; Robert M. Adams, “Saints,” *Journal of Philosophy* 81 (1984): 164–173; Robert M. Adams, “Involuntary Sins,” *Philosophical Review* 94 (1985): 3–31.
 69. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 36.
 70. Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good*, 11.
 71. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 239.
 72. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 244.
 73. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 245.
 74. Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good*, 142.

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CHAPTER 19

FEMINIST APPROACHES TO VIRTUE ETHICS

ROBIN S. DILLON

SUSAN Moller Okin once asked, “How does virtue ethics look from a feminist point of view—that is to say, from a perspective that expects women and men to be treated as equally human and due equal concern and respect?”¹ In recent years, feminist work on issues that are central to feminist ethics, on the one hand, and virtue ethics, on the other, has provided a rich and multidimensional answer, contributing valuable insights to both feminist ethics and traditional virtue ethics. Feminist scholars have critiqued the assumptions, concepts, questions, methods, values, and theories of traditional virtue ethics; have identified some elements as irredeemable and have transformed others so as to express feminist values and advance feminist aims; have applied feminist concepts, concerns, methods, and values to issues of virtue ethics; have developed new analyses and evaluations of traditional virtues and vices; and have brought heretofore neglected virtues and vices into view and identified new ones. In so doing, they have widened the purview of feminist ethics and have developed accounts of character, virtues and vices, and good human lives that are more responsive to the lived realities of most human beings.

I. FEMINIST ETHICS AND VIRTUE ETHICS

The organizing concern for feminist ethics is twofold: the subordination in society of women and women’s interests to men and men’s interests, and the devaluation or exclusion in moral philosophy of women’s perspectives. According to Alison Jaggar, contributions to feminist ethics share two assumptions: that the subordination of women, and indeed, of any group of people, is morally wrong, and that the experiences of women are worthy of respect and serious philosophical attention.² These assumptions shape the practical and theoretical emphases of feminist ethical work, in two

ways. First, feminist theorists are concerned to examine the dimensions of women's social subordination, to articulate critiques of the actions, relations, and social systems and structures that maintain and rationalize its continuation, to identify morally justified ways of resisting subordination, and to develop guides to action and accounts of morally good modes of living that will promote the liberation of women, and indeed, all subordinated peoples. Second, feminist theorists explore and critique the ways in which concepts, methods, assumptions, and theories of mainstream ethical theories, from the beginnings of philosophy to the present, reflect and buttress the social subordination of women and devalue female experience and all that is feminine; and then they propose alternative conceptual understandings, better methods, and improved or alternative moral theories that involve the proper valuing of women and that support emancipatory projects.

The concepts of gender and power are focal for feminist ethics. Margaret Walker, for example, holds that "feminist ethics is inevitably and fundamentally about morality and power and the moral meaning of relations of unequal power";³ indeed, as Susan Sherwin says, "feminist ethics asks about power, about domination and subordination, even before it asks about good and evil."⁴ For feminists, "gender" refers to the social system that distributes the various form of power—interpersonal, economic, political, educational, religious, and so on—unequally between women and men, in ways that privilege men and disadvantage women. But inasmuch as women are members of all races, classes, religious and ethnic groups, age groups, and so on, feminists are concerned as well with all other unjust power relations. Feminist ethics begins with the recognition that in human societies that are organized along lines of gendered hierarchies of power and thus in which women are subordinated and men are dominant (which is to say, all known societies), gender makes a great deal of difference to how human lives go and to how social institutions and practices, including practices of mainstream moral philosophy, are structured, function, and shape our lives individually and collectively. The questions that feminist ethics asks about the moral life and its various individual and collective dimensions take seriously the social contexts of unequal power, opportunities, and possibilities into which we are born, in which we develop, from which we absorb values that affirm some kinds of us and devalue others kinds of us, and in which we live together, some kinds of us privileged because other kinds of us are constrained, marginalized, exploited, or harmed.

While much of the work in feminist ethics addresses modes of interpersonal interaction and social practice that constitute and maintain subordination, treating women's subordination as chiefly a sociopolitical phenomenon, an increasing number of theorists hold that examinations of character are also important for feminist theoretical and practical work. In doing so, they have creatively combined feminist ethics and traditional virtue ethics. Some feminist theorists have drawn on the particular orientation to the moral life, a set of questions, and an array of concepts that have long been of importance in virtue ethics, including the central concepts of character and the good life, to critically examine the entire scope of human character and the whole trajectory of human lives in light of gender and power. As their work demonstrates, such an approach

enables us to understand more fully the nature, mechanisms, and harms of subordination and domination, to better theorize the kinds of persons people need to be in order to survive and resist oppression in morally justifiable and non-self-corrupting ways, to expand our views of morally desirable modes of being that promote emancipation and mutual respect, and to more clearly conceive greater possibilities for genuinely free and fully human lives.

Two approaches to virtue ethics have been of particular interest to feminist theorists. The first, and traditionally predominant, approach is eudaimonism. The Greek term *eudaimonia* refers to the good life for a human, which is a life of long-term well-being, happiness, or flourishing. According to Aristotle, whose ethics is the paradigm eudaimonistic theory, the flourishing life is the greatest good and the ultimate aim of all human activity. To flourish as a human is to live a rich and fulfilling life in which one engages excellently in the activities that are distinctively human, chief among which is rational activity. The virtues, on this view, are the excellences of rational activity that are necessary for or partially constitutive of human flourishing. However, as Aristotle recognizes, the virtues, although necessary for flourishing, are not sufficient, for external goods, especially an appropriate social context and proper education, are also necessary. This attention to social context gives eudaimonism a potentially critical dimension that has made it attractive to many feminist theorists.⁵

The other approach includes a variety of non-eudaimonistic virtue theories that take virtue and morality to depend on feelings and feeling-based motivations, rather than on reason or rationality. Such theories regard the virtuousness of a character trait as not dependent on its contribution to the possessor's long-term welfare. Because this kind of approach emphasizes emotional aspects of our nature, which have long been marginalized by the male-dominant rationalistic theories of mainstream moral philosophy, it has been appealing to feminist theorists who are especially concerned to redress the relegation of emotionality to femininity and the devaluation of both, including those working from a feminist care ethics perspective.⁶

Theorists have also worked in the other direction of the relation between feminist ethics and virtue ethics, bringing feminist insights to bear on virtue ethics. Some virtue ethicists have adopted certain elements of feminist ethics to expand the virtue theoretic repertoire.⁷ Feminist ethicists have tended to take a more critical stance toward traditional virtue ethics. They have employed feminist perspectives, questions, and tools and methods to critique traditional virtue ethics, arguing that the lack of explicit, prioritized attention in traditional virtue ethics to effects of systemic forces of unjust power hierarchies on the constitutions of selves makes that approach liable both to define virtue and vice in ways that reinforce domination values, and to distort what would count as flourishing of both those who are subordinated as well as those who are privileged in various power hierarchies. Feminist theorists have applied this critique to various virtue theories and have also proposed both substantive reconstructions and distinctively new accounts of character, virtues, vices, and good lives.

At the heart of this biconditional bricolage, however, there remains a tension between the feminist dimensions and the virtue theoretic dimensions. According to many of

its adherents, virtue ethics is an approach to morality that is based on conceptions of admirable character and good lives, in which the notion of virtue is central, the focus is on the traits of individuals, and the most basic moral judgments are judgments about character. Conceptions of rightness of action, goodness of ends, the good life, the moral point of view, and so on are derived from and justified in terms of a conception of good character. But feminist ethics is the project of basing ethics on visions of liberation and humane concern for all persons, in which gender is central, the basic moral judgments are power-inflected, and the focus is not just or even first on traits of individuals, but on individuals as members of groups of people living among social institutions that organize life along lines of hierarchies of power, at least some of which are morally illegitimate. Character is important to feminist ethics, but so are actions, ends, values, and social institutions; so feminist ethics is more pluralistic with regard to the traditional core concepts of ethical theory, and it stresses the complexity of interconnections among them, rather than identifying one as the concept in terms of which to make sense of everything else.

Feminist theorists have addressed the tension in several ways. Some identify their work as engaged in feminist virtue ethics, modifying what virtue ethics involves.⁸ Others take advantage of a distinction standardly drawn by virtue theorists between virtue ethics and virtue theory, taking themselves or others to be doing feminist virtue theory. A virtue theory offers an account of what virtue and vice are, as well as accounts of particular virtues and vices, but does not take virtuous character to be the most important element in understanding morality, as virtue ethics does.⁹ Any moral theory, including a feminist one, can have a virtue theory as part of it. Still other feminist theorists reject the standard view of virtue ethics as giving primacy to virtue, arguing that it is an overly restrictive way of classifying ethical theories that reflects a problematic concern for “turf” and marginalizes approaches that address important ethical concerns using virtue concepts.¹⁰ Rather than deciding among these options, I argue that the term *feminist critical character ethics* better suits the aims of accounts that address issues of character from a feminist perspective.¹¹

One reason for highlighting character rather than virtue is this. As Tessman observes, traditional virtue ethics has proceeded as if most people are mostly good and so has emphasized virtues (hence, the name of the approach).¹² But it is implausible that mostly good people could create and maintain systems of subordination and domination, or participate in them without acknowledging the manifest injustice of their societies, or actively resist emancipatory efforts; and yet innumerable many people have done just these things. Focusing on character more generally encourages recognition of the many ways in which certain structures of character dispose or enable individuals to acquiesce in systems of domination and subordination, or to work unwittingly or intentionally to reinforce them. Such a focus also encourages recognition of ways that vices in subordinated people contribute to their acceptance of subordination, as well as ways that systems of domination and subordination inflict moral damage on characters and in so doing prevent people from living fully good lives. Thus, in what follows, the terms *feminist approaches to character* or *feminist character ethics* will be used.

II. HOW DOES CHARACTER ETHICS LOOK FROM A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE?

One thing is true: feminist character ethics doesn't look exactly like traditional virtue ethics. In particular, Okin argues, it doesn't look much like Aristotle's virtue ethics, which she criticized for the androcentrism and elitism in its list and characterizations of virtues and vices, and for its total disregard of virtues involved in the morally vital activities of raising children and sustaining life, in which women by far more than men have been engaged.¹³ So how does feminist character ethics look?

As a species of feminist ethics, a feminist approach to character ethics has a political orientation and aim. Putting front and center the notion that, as Okin (1996) says, women and men are equally human and equally due concern and respect, feminist character ethics condemns the subordination of women and the devaluation of women's perspectives, and aims to ameliorate or eliminate subordination and devaluation through critical attention both to character and lives and to philosophical theories about character and lives. Like the rest of feminist ethics, it centers the concepts of power and gender in the analysis of characters, lives, and theories. Feminist character ethics thus has two tasks. The first is to understand character in circumstances of domination and subordination with an eye toward dismantling unjust hierarchies of power both for and through the liberation of character; the second is to examine mainstream character ethics to understand how dominant accounts of "character," "virtue," "vice," and "good life" operate ideologically in the service of power. Thus, it examines the significance for character and life possibilities of social contexts, practices, and institutions shaped by power, and it critiques power-inflected theories that are blind to their inflection and so analyze and evaluate character and lives in ways that reflect and reinforce gender subordination. It identifies problems for character in contexts of domination and subordination and proposes ways of addressing those problems, and it identifies problems of unreflective theory and proposes power-conscious alternatives. I'll address the character focus and the theory focus in turn.

One of the chief concerns of feminist character ethics is to understand the ways in which, in contexts of domination and subordination, character is damaged, distorted, or shaped differentially, and how such things might be ameliorated or prevented. It takes unequal relations of power to be central to character: to its development, its structure and functioning, its social and moral meaning and value, and the differential possibilities for different groups of humans for becoming good or bad and so for living good or bad lives. Feminist character ethics thus seeks to understand how character, vice, and virtue are gendered (and racialized, classed, sexualized, and so on) and how domination and subordination damage character and distort lives. Many feminist theorists call on Claudia Card's (1996) work on moral luck to analyze character damage. Card argues that whether an individual develops a good or a distorted character is not entirely within her control; rather, it is to a great extent a matter of moral luck. Character is shaped by social

circumstances and socially constructed categories such as gender, race, and sexual orientation; and the character one develops depends not only on what one does, but also on whether one had a good upbringing with loving and wise interpersonal relationships or was subject to child abuse, or was born into a position of privilege and advantage or was burdened and constrained by subordination, or was able to freely express one's sexuality or had to hide or repress it. Subordination can damage character through the lack of opportunities to develop or exercise certain virtues deemed especially distinctive of a good or fully human life, and feminist character ethics asks how interpersonal relations and social practices and institutions would have to be reconfigured so that no group of humans is excluded from the possibility of becoming and staying good. Of course, feminist character ethics is concerned not only with damaged character, but also with identifying virtues that enable subordinated people to survive or resist subordination and with envisioning constructions of character that can be deemed genuinely good, toward which to struggle.

In addition to examining character damage and strengths developed in contexts of subordination and domination, feminist character ethics also seeks to understand the roles played in maintaining unjust power hierarchies by the possession and exercise of vices such as arrogance, self-centeredness, callousness, indifference, and social irresponsibility in social dominants, and passivity, self-sacrificing altruism, a tendency to hopelessness and despair, misplaced gratitude, timidity, and servility in social subordinates (often developed as survival strategies).¹⁴

Feminist character ethics further explores effects of power on character and lives indirectly by examining how power shapes social understandings and evaluations of character. It recognizes that the moral evaluation of character has political dimensions and functions: certain traits are differentially identified as virtues, vices, or morally unimportant, and are given differential social moral attention and inattention, depending on what groups of people are being evaluated; and the political function of labeling some trait as vice or virtue *x* can be different, depending on where the subjects stand in some power hierarchy. For example, giving attention and priority to oneself is typically regarded as the vice of selfishness in women, especially mothers, but as normal and even necessary (e.g., for success) in men. So feminist approaches ask, among other things, about how distributions and exercises of power affect what particular vices and virtues are understood to involve and entail, whether and how they get recognized and in whom, and whether the possession and exercise of certain vices in members of certain groups are regarded as making them and their lives less morally good. Hence, it asks what traits get identified as virtues or vices in women but not men, and vice versa, and whether some traits are given different content or valence for women and men, or are regarded as more or less appropriate, possible, or typical for each. It also asks which domains of human experience are regarded as ones in which virtue or vice may be displayed, as opposed to biologically driven or morally unexceptional or irrelevant or tolerable dispositions, noting that domains of life in which women have traditionally been required to focus their energies, such as those involving care of children and activities that sustain life and support flourishing, have typically either not been regarded

as domains in which human virtue can be displayed, or have been seen as the ambit of specifically womanly virtues such as compassion, tenderness, willing self-sacrifice, and so on.

In addition to exploring problems of character in contexts of domination and subordination, feminist character ethics also explores problems in theories of character and good human living. Given the gender (and race, class, etc.) of those who, until very recently, have done nearly all the theorizing in this area, it is unsurprising that much of virtue ethics reflects and reinforces gendered (raced, classed, etc.) domination and subordination.

Traditional Western philosophical approaches to virtue, such as the accounts of Aristotle, Hume, Rousseau, Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, have been examined by feminist theorists and have been found to be deeply flawed. Accounts like these, Nancy Snow says, “either expound different lists of virtues that apply separately to men and women and privilege men’s virtues over women’s; apply the same virtues, such as chastity, unequally to men and women; or elaborate social roles with accompanying virtues—such as wife and mother—that require women to subordinate themselves to men.” More troubling, she says, is the way in which such accounts “set identity conditions for women by making descriptive claims about women’s nature that have normative implications for the kinds of virtues women can hope to achieve . . . [and so] limit who they can and should be. At their worst, these claims deny women’s full and equal humanity.”¹⁵ Consider Aristotle, Hume, and Nietzsche. According to Aristotle, women are naturally inferior beings, less fully human than men, incapable of full rationality, and so both capable only of lesser virtue or virtues of subordinates, such as obedience, and also subject to vices in ways men are not. In *The History of Animals* he criticizes women as “more jealous, more querulous, . . . more void of shame and self-respect, more false of speech, more deceptive, . . . more shrinking, . . . [and] more difficult to rouse to action . . .”¹⁶ Hume is less critical of women overall, yet he treats modesty and chastity as virtues for women but not men, necessary for women because of feminine susceptibility to temptations of marital infidelity and the need of men to be certain of the fatherhood of their wives’ children, while there is reasonably weaker social interest in men’s chastity.¹⁷ Such womanly virtues, of course, ensure that women remain confined, restrained, and dependent on men. Although in *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche says that “the perfect woman is a higher type than the perfect man” (immediately limiting the “compliment” by adding “also something much more rare”), throughout his writings he also ascribes to women but not men such vices as cunning, naïve egoism, uneducability, vanity, antipathy to truth, injustice, slavishness, resentment, shallowness, and deceptiveness.¹⁸ Moreover, the traits he denigrates as “virtues” of “slave morality,” such as kindness, humility, and sympathy, are precisely the traits Western culture associates with women, while what he valorizes as the true virtues of “master morality” are traits like assertiveness, independence, strength, and pride, which are associated with men. For Nietzsche, as for Aristotle, human virtue is male virtue, and only men have the capacity to become truly virtuous. (In the next section, I return to other accounts.)

To counter this bias, a chief concern of feminist character ethics is to develop accounts of virtue(s) and vice(s) that express right valuing of women and that build understandings of sociopolitical realities and emancipatory goals into the evaluation of traits as vices or virtues. In some cases, this involves rethinking the concepts of virtue and vice, incorporating into their very definitions criteria that link the goodness of virtue to the tendency to subvert subordination and the badness of vice to its tendency to reinforce it. In other cases, it involves asking whether certain traits that are traditionally called virtues, such as patience, obedience, humility, and other virtues of the “good woman,” are in fact vices that contribute to women’s subordination, and whether traits traditionally regarded as vices, such as defiance, distrustfulness, unreliability, and arrogance, might be reclaimed through reconceptualization or revaluation as potentially liberatory virtues for women and other subordinated people.

In addition to critiques of specific theories, feminist character ethics also assesses the concepts and assumptions of mainstream theories. For example, traditional virtue ethics assumes that character psychology is universally human, that virtues and vices are linked to human goodness and human flourishing, and that all humans are liable to the same deficiencies of character for which the same virtues are universally corrective. But feminist approaches are non-universalizing and are more likely to attend to the diversity among people who are differentially shaped by gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and social and historical context. Thus, they are more likely to recognize that social context matters to the development of various character traits and to possibilities for flourishing, and that differently situated people may be subject to different kinds of character problems calling for different forms of character transformation, or may have opportunities for or the need to develop different, context-specific virtues.

Traditional virtue ethics also has an individualist focus: it evaluates character based on facts about individuals’ psychologies, such as individuals’ motivations, values, and cognitive, affective, and desiderative dispositions; and it often regards individuals as having much of the responsibility for developing their characters and primary responsibility for maintaining or changing them. Feminist approaches, by contrast, take the more realistic view that character dispositions are inculcated, nurtured, directed, shaped, and given significance and value by social interactions, institutions, cultural understandings, and traditions, and so they hold that the characters of individuals cannot be evaluated, or even understood, in isolation from sociopolitical context. Thus, to understand whether and how an individual is arrogant or compassionate or selfish or generous, we cannot look only or even primarily “inside” the individual, treating the trait as a function or result solely of individual motivation and life choices. Rather, we must examine the sociopolitical context in which character develops and in which certain complexes of psychological elements are identified as character traits or not, and are given meaning and moral valence. Moreover, certain character traits may not be well understood or even visible apart from particular social contexts; some theories, such as Nancy Potter’s account of trustworthiness (2002), maintain that some virtues and vices are not dispositions of individuals at all but are constituted by relations among individuals.

Feminist character ethics also holds that just as individuals are never the sole architects of their own characters, so it may take interpersonal interaction or social change to make character transformation possible, although social circumstances can damage people's characters in ways that are not reparable. At the same time, however, feminist character ethics does not deny that human individuals (at least many of us much of the time, but not all of us all of the time) are, or are capable of becoming, if circumstances are kind, fully agents, with powers and responsibilities that are morally relevant to the transformation of the characters of individuals and of societies. That is, feminist approaches recognize that the characters of individuals are actively and continually shaped not only by interpersonal, cultural, and sociopolitical dimensions of human living, but also by and through the exercise of individual and collective agency in actively and continually shaping the interpersonal, cultural, social, and political. Theorizing character from a feminist perspective thus involves holding together in creative tension both a perspective that views the individual through the social and one that views the social through the individual.

Feminist approaches also challenge the assumption of traditional virtue ethics that character psychology is typically coherent, even if multifaceted. Instead, they emphasize the complexity of selves shaped by multiple and sometimes fractious sources of social identity, recognizing, as Claudia Card does, that fragmentation can be characteristic of selves formed under conditions of domination and subordination and that the resulting warring inclinations, needs, and motivations can distort character and make development or exercise of certain vices more likely or of certain virtues less likely.¹⁹ Feminist approaches also take seriously the possibility that such disunity may be something that people who are members of multiple subordinated communities find valuable,²⁰ that there might be virtues that are especially called for in circumstances of psychic disunity, such as integrity or autonomy,²¹ and that certain traits that might in other circumstances reasonably be viewed as virtues (or vices) are in these circumstances better understood as vices (or virtues) because of their role in disabling (or enabling) individuals in the project of living well despite or through their psychic disunity. Loyalty to or gratitude toward one's oppressors, for example, which might develop as a survival strategy, might also signal inner fragmentation and preclude emancipatory struggle.

Even more striking, feminist character theories problematize the traditional central background concepts of virtue theory. Traditional theories of virtue are built on particular conceptions of human nature and human psychology, and of human flourishing or happiness and their connection to human virtue. But as feminists have long observed, conceptions of "human nature" are often conceptions of only certain kinds of humans, namely the dominant ones, and theories of the structure and functioning of "normal" humans are often depictions of how dominants do or want to see themselves. Thus, some feminist character ethicists ask of conceptions of virtue and virtues and vice and vices, "what kind of human does this take as its model, and whose interests are reflected in and protected by the identification of this as *human* virtue or vice?" Feminist theorists also call into question the assumption that the flourishing or happiness of every human being is intrinsically valuable. In particular, flourishing and happiness that depend on

the subordination of others is morally objectionable, never mind how the privileged individual experiences his life. The problematizing of flourishing means that a feminist character ethics has to either reconceptualize flourishing or else decenter or remove it altogether as a criterion of virtue.

Two other dimensions of feminist character ethics address further deficiencies in traditional virtue ethics. First, feminist approaches emphasize issues of character development and transformation to a much greater extent than do traditional approaches, and in particular call attention, as traditional approaches do not, to which groups are assigned what kinds of responsibility, and with what kind of acknowledgment (or lack thereof), for what dimensions of character development and transformation. With the notable exception of Aristotle, most non-feminist theories of virtue ignore issues of character development, or acknowledge that character is something that develops, but then focus almost exclusively on adult character.²² Most egregiously, mainstream theories fail to address the character-focused tasks that are part of rearing children insofar as they take place within systems of domination and subordination. As Okin has argued, even when traditional accounts, such as Aristotle's, attend to character development and point to the importance of proper moral education, they typically covertly rely on women, who are subordinated in the family and the larger society, to do the important work of guiding character development in early childhood, while simultaneously regarding women as inherently defective beings who are incapable of full human virtue, without facing the question of how children could develop good moral characters within a defective, not to mention unjust, environment.²³ Feminist character ethics, however, insists on carefully examining how people develop virtues and vices from early childhood on, examining the interpersonal, social, cultural, political, and educational contexts within which the characters of differently situated people develop differently from early childhood on, as well as the sociopolitical conditions that make characters more or less resistant or amenable to change.

Finally, but by no means least important, feminist character ethics takes women's experiences seriously but not uncritically, as every bit as worthy of respect as men's experiences, and yet as likely to reflect in manifold ways the circumstances of domination and subordination within which women live and develop characters and moral conceptions of themselves as women and as good or bad. Two aspects of centering women's perspectives are worth mentioning. First, because so much of women's lives has always involved being in close interpersonal relationships, very often caring for other people, feminist ethics gives special emphasis to women's relational and caring experiences. Consequently, feminist perspectives also address character issues in contexts of interpersonal relationships and caregiving. The second aspect concerns women's self-valuing. There is a long tradition of regarding women's self-abnegation as essential to the sustenance of human life and community, while simultaneously taking that sacrificing not as virtuous but as merely "natural," and also of regarding women's positive self-valuing (but not men's) as exhibiting the vice of selfishness. In opposition to these views, feminist approaches highlight the moral importance of self-respect and proper

self-love, not only as specific virtues but also, perhaps, as infusing some, if not all, genuine virtues, and see inappropriate self-valuing as involved in or related to some, if not all, vices.²⁴

III. DEBATES ABOUT “WOMANLY VIRTUES” AND VIRTUES OF CARE

i. Historical Debates

Philosophical attention to character that focuses on women and gender did not, of course, begin with the advent of specifically feminist character ethics. Philosophical interest in whether character is gendered has a long history, and nearly every traditional virtue theory has had something to say on the issue. As Rosemarie Tong (2016) has usefully chronicled, there was a rich debate in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries about “womanly virtues,” which is echoed in certain ways in contemporary debates.

On the one side of the historical debate are those who follow Aristotle in regarding women and men as having different natures and so as capable of developing, or only properly developing, quite different virtues. As we saw, Aristotle held that because women are naturally inferior to men, particularly as regards rationality, they are unable to develop fully human virtues at all, or to the same extent as men. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, by contrast, held that although women could develop the same virtues as men, they should not. Rather, because women and men have different, though complementary, natures and different, though complementary, social roles and duties, different and complementary virtues are appropriate for each. Men are, by nature, more rational and autonomous, women more emotional and dependent. Thus, those virtues that the admirable man develops, such as temperance, justice, and fortitude, are ones that fully express rationality and befit his natural superiority, make him a self-governing, self-sufficient person and a good husband and father, and suit him for life in the public realm of a citizen. The womanly virtues of patience, gentleness, docility, modesty, and submissiveness channel a woman’s emotionality so that she will be a caring and supportive companion for her husband and a loving mother, properly confined to the domestic sphere and subordinated to and dependent on her husband. In *Emile*, Rousseau laid out educational programs aimed at developing the proper characters for men and women, and warned against allowing women to develop masculine qualities and virtues: “To cultivate in women the qualities of the men and to neglect those that are their own is, then, obviously to work to their detriment . . . they fall short of their own possibilities without attaining to ours, and thus lose half their value.”²⁵ It is clear, however, that Rousseauian womanly virtues are second-rate traits, and they make good women second-class persons.

Some nineteenth-century thinkers, such as those involved in the Cult of True Womanhood in the early to mid-1800s, Catherine Beecher (1869), and Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1881), sided with Rousseau in denying that women and men are the same by nature and that virtue is or should be the same for women and for men. But they part company with him in holding, as Tong explains, either that the gendered virtues are equally good and valuable whether they are masculine or feminine, or that women's virtues are superior. Beecher, for example, held that women are naturally suited, as men are not, to develop and exercise the virtue of "Christlike" self-sacrificial benevolence, which is essential to the goodness and advancement of society, and then to teach this virtue to their husbands and children. Stanton held that men are morally inferior in every way to women, their vices being responsible for the disorder, violence, and cruelty that marks human history, and that women must bring their moral superiority into the public realm if society is to survive and thrive. At the same time, however, although Stanton regarded women's self-sacrifice as morally valuable, she maintained that a more important virtue for women was self-development.

On the other side of the debate in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were thinkers such as Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill, who believed that "womanly virtues" were not the result of women's nature and that genuine human virtue is not gendered. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Wollstonecraft responded to views like Rousseau's and Aristotle's, arguing that women are not by nature deficient in qualities that make full human virtue possible. The only moral virtue is human virtue, she held, which both women and men can and should develop. Women are no less rational by nature than men; but, she noted, when women are denied opportunities and the material means to develop their rational and moral powers and when they are socially encouraged to be vain, dependent, and cunning, they develop vices like pettiness, narcissism, self-indulgence, and obsequiousness. Moreover, even the "virtues" they do develop, such as Rousseau's gentleness, patience, flexibility, and love, are, from Wollstonecraft's perspective, only demeaning, subhuman vices of dependence, submissiveness, and dishonesty. However, she maintained, if women receive the same kind of rigorously rational education as men, they will develop into morally mature and virtuous human beings. What Wollstonecraft's society deemed to be "womanly virtues," then, were neither womanly nor virtues. The proper virtues for women are precisely those that make men morally virtuous.

In *Subjection of Women* (1869), John Stuart Mill argued for a position similar to Wollstonecraft's: virtue is gender neutral, and it is wrong to assess women's characters differently from those of men. He argued further that women's alleged moral inferiority is not the product of any innate female quality but is simply the result of systematic social conditioning that functions together with the denial of educational and economic opportunities and of political equality to keep women socially subordinated to the benefit only of men. There is but one form of virtue—human virtue—that both men and women should be directed to develop, to the benefit of each and society generally.

While Rousseau and Wollstonecraft disagreed about what the proper virtues for women are, they shared this assumption: the more admirable and truly human virtues

are those associated with men, and in particular, with the rationality that has long been regarded as the hallmark of being male and being human. The standard of virtue, that is, is a masculine one. Either women fail to measure up, even when they are as good as they can or should be, or they have to become masculine to be virtuous and live a good human life. Beecher, by contrast, flipped the standards, holding that the truly important virtues, at least from a social standpoint, are the genuinely womanly ones, which express women's fundamentally emotional nature. Questions about whether rationality or emotionality is the superior basis of morality and virtue, and whether virtues are or ought to be gendered, are reflected in contemporary debates about feminist care ethics and the virtues of caring.²⁶

ii. Contemporary Debates

One prominent branch of feminist ethics is care ethics. Psychologist Carol Gilligan (1982) argued that there is a distinctive moral voice speaking a language of care that emphasizes relationships and responsibilities, which she claimed (at least initially) women more than men speak, in contrast to the dominant, male voice whose language of justice stresses rights and principles. Drawing on Gilligan, feminist theorists developed accounts of an ethics of care, commending virtues and values traditionally linked to women and to activities for which women have traditionally borne the primary responsibility.²⁷ Seeking to retrieve emotionality from the disdain with which it has been treated in the dominant rationalistic approaches to morality—a disdain that expresses and reinforces the identification of emotionality with femininity—and seeking also to counter the connected view of morality as regulating arms-length interactions among self-interested, competitive, and independent (male) humans, care ethics emphasizes emotion-based human relationships, especially those that have long been both assigned to women and neglected in mainstream philosophy, such as mothering and caring for dependent elderly, disabled, and infirm persons.

Although care is often treated chiefly as a practice, some theorists have developed non-eudaimonistic accounts of care as a virtue or of virtues that are necessary or especially valuable in caregiving or relational contexts. For example, in *Maternal Thinking*, Ruddick analyzes virtues of what she calls “maternal practice,” such as the ability to see things in perspective, humility, cheerfulness, and conscientiousness, which equip mothers to engage in activities necessary for realizing the maternal goals of preserving the lives and fostering the growth of their children and also for negotiating tensions between training children to conform to society's needs and expectations and encouraging them to challenge morally objectionable social norms. While the initial focus of care ethics was on personal relationships in the private realm, these theorists and others have argued that values central to care ethics can and should be extended to the public realm, relations among strangers, and even global contexts.²⁸

Care ethics has drawn criticisms from many feminists who identified problems facing the project of what Barbara Houston (1987) called “rescuing womanly virtues.” While

virtues such as care, compassion, and altruism have long been assigned to women, not only have these traits been valued less than virtues traditionally assigned to men, such as justice, rationality, and self-sufficiency, but the gendering of caring virtues bolsters the subordinating view that women are well suited to domestic duties but unsuited to public life. An uncritical valorization of care, critics fear, may promote gender essentialism by implying that the virtues of caring are ones that only women can have or that all women have—so that caring is something that all and only women should do—or it may reinforce the view that women's other-directed care is virtuous no matter the cost to the caregiver. In either case, it would buttress, rather than undermine, women's continued subordination. Moreover, the virtues of caring of some groups of women (e.g., white, middle-class, heterosexual women) have more often than not been focused on men and children of their own race, class, and sexual orientation, thus further privileging them; and caring virtues have been required in some women of certain races and classes, such as black and Hispanic domestics, and exploited but not fully valued by their privileged women employers, which reinforces racial, class, and other unjust power hierarchies. Nevertheless, many feminist theorists regard care as the *sine qua non* of genuinely good human relations, and so they have engaged in rethinking virtues of care to avoid reinforcing subordinating implications.

IV. CRITICAL FEMINIST EUDAIMONISM

Care ethics was for some time the dominant approach in feminist ethics and so in feminist discussions of virtue. More recently, however, as feminist ethics has broadened, so feminist work on virtues has embraced other approaches, especially eudaimonism. Despite the sexism inherent in his writings, Aristotle's virtue ethics has been of particular importance. For example, Martha Nussbaum's work on the capability approach to justice and development ethics, especially as it affects women, draws on an Aristotelian view of human flourishing.²⁹ According to Nussbaum, because humans have certain inherent capabilities, the development and exercise of which are essential for living a life that is both recognizably human and flourishing, justice requires that societies be organized so as to enable every human to flourish through developing and exercising the distinctively human capabilities. Marcia Homiak has argued that Aristotle's ideal of flourishing for a rational being provides valuable resources for feminist theory and has defended his account against charges of elitism that, if applicable, would make it uncongenial for feminist theorizing.³⁰ Lisa Tessman draws on a reconstructed Aristotelian eudaimonism to focus on ways that domination and subordination can damage character and so interfere with flourishing.³¹

Tessman's critical feminist eudaimonism is perhaps the most well-developed instance of this approach. In order to make eudaimonism useful for analyzing domination and subordination, Tessman modifies several features of traditional Aristotelian virtue theory. Aristotelian eudaimonism takes the flourishing life to be the ultimate aim of

all human activity; Tessman holds further that flourishing is the implicit aim of liberatory struggles and an ideal that guides feminist activism, and that flourishing provides a framework for analyzing the badness of systems of domination and subordination. While Aristotelian eudaimonism takes a flourishing life to be possible for humans provided the social conditions are appropriate, Tessman (2009) emphasizes that flourishing may be an unattainable goal under the actual non-ideal conditions of oppression. While Aristotelian eudaimonism emphasizes that virtues contribute to the possessor's well-being, Tessman holds that a trait cannot count as a virtue if it does not also contribute to the general flourishing of the members of an inclusive community.

Instead of focusing, as does traditional Aristotelian eudaimonism, on the goodness of the virtuous and flourishing life, Tessman (2005) employs her reconstructed eudaimonism to focus on ways that domination and subordination seriously harm people. She identifies three kinds of character-related harm. First, subordination can impede the development or exercise of certain virtues or encourage the development of certain vices, such as dishonesty, cunning, or manipulateness. Since the possession of virtue and the absence of vice are required for flourishing, oppression thus interferes with individuals living good lives.

Second, surviving or resisting subordination can require the cultivation of certain traits, which Tessman calls "burdened virtues," that are virtues only under non-ideal conditions, that do not contribute to the possessor's well-being, and that one has good reason to regret having to cultivate. Among the burdened virtues is sensitivity to others' unjust suffering, which can be burdensomely painful in a world of enormous unjust suffering but the absence of which would be "morally horrifying" in its indifference to that to which no one should be indifferent.³² Another is the fierceness, rage against oppressors, and whole-hearted dedication to liberatory struggle that are admired in political resistance fighters but that can be psychologically corrosive or lead to self-sacrifice. So, whereas Aristotle held that virtues necessarily contribute to or constitute the possessor's flourishing, Tessman argues that subordination disrupts the connection between virtue and flourishing.

Third, Tessman identifies vices in members of privileged groups, which she calls "ordinary vices of domination," that enable them to ignore the suffering of subordinates and maintain their dominant positions without thinking themselves unjust or sacrificing their subjectively felt happiness. Such vices include cruelty, indifference, contempt, callousness, greed, self-centeredness, dishonesty, cowardice, injustice, lack of respect, and passive acceptance of unjust privileges. Since vices make flourishing impossible; the widespread possession of these ordinary vices means that members of dominant groups cannot live flourishing lives.

Several criticisms have been raised against feminist eudaimonism. Marilyn Friedman (2009) has argued that it is not obvious that members of dominant groups who live lives of privilege and are socially supported in their view of themselves as good persons living worthy lives are not happy or living flourishing lives. To maintain that they don't flourish seems question-begging, yet without such a claim, feminist eudaimonism lacks motivational power for convincing members of dominant groups to resist their privilege and

subordinating power. This leads to a second criticism, which Cheshire Calhoun (2008) has raised. The justification that eudaimonistic theories provide for ending domination and subordination points primarily to the consequences for the possessors of virtue or vice (and, on Tessman's view, for other members of the community). Since most of those putatively experiencing character harms from oppression don't perceive their lives as unhappy and defective, the virtue-consequentialist justification seems a less strong moral argument against oppression than, say, a Kantian one that centers the inherent injustice of not respecting all persons as equals. A third criticism addresses the conceptual relation between flourishing and virtues. Feminist eudaimonism needs liberatory accounts of both. But the history of accounts of virtues that rationalize the subordination of women makes the project of developing an account of flourishing from a list of virtues problematic. It would seem, then, that a specific account of flourishing is required in order to determine which traits of character are really virtues and which are vices. But, as Macalester Bell (2006) has noted, different theorists and groups engaged in liberatory struggle, such as liberal feminists and lesbian separatists, have quite different conceptions of flourishing; which one should be the basis for feminist eudaimonism? Fully resolving these problems requires further work on flourishing, virtues, and vices.

V. FEMINIST ACCOUNTS OF SPECIFIC VIRTUES AND VICES

While Tessman's work points toward a full-blown ethical theory, most work in this area has more modest aims, focusing on analyses of specific virtues or vices without embedding them in complete theories of character and good lives. Feminist theorists have addressed specific virtues and vices in three ways. First, some theorists have analyzed both traditional virtues, such as integrity, modesty, self-trust, and self-respect, in new ways that take seriously the experiences of people facing multiple and conflicting oppressions, or show their special value for women and other subordinated people, as well as traditional vices such as arrogance of dominants and servility of subordinates as contributing to the persistence of unjust power hierarchies. Second, theorists have brought forward neglected virtues or have identified new ones that are important for resistance or liberatory struggle or for fostering human well-being, such as virtues of caring and Tessman's burdened virtues.

Finally, some theorists have engaged in the transvaluation of character traits, arguing that some traits traditionally viewed as virtues are actually vices that keep women subordinated, or advocating other traits, traditionally viewed as vices, as feminist virtues. For example, Claudia Card argued that women's gratitude to men who don't abuse them or who protect them in *quid pro quo* arrangements is a vice, and that politeness is not a feminist virtue, but feisty insubordination is.³³ In contrast to the dominant view that trust is unqualifiedly a virtue, Annette Baier (1995) took a more cautious approach,

advocating women's cultivation of appropriate distrust in exploitative conditions. Lisa Heldke has praised unreliability and being a responsible traitor.³⁴ I have suggested that arrogance might be a virtue that enables subordinated people to demand respect and develop self-respect.³⁵ Among other traits that have been analyzed non-standardly are forgiveness, defiance, altruism, bitterness, obedience, resentfulness, self-coherence, envy, selflessness, selfishness, vulnerability, and deference.

One valuable aspect of feminist work in this area has been an increased emphasis on vice. Some theorists have addressed vices in members of subordinated groups, such as deceit, cunning, manipulateness, ingratiation, "chameleonism," and self-sacrificial altruism. As Card (1996) points out, such traits, even if they are useful skills needed for survival under domination and even if they pass for virtues, are far from virtuous and do not promote human good. Other theorists have examined vices in members of dominant groups. Like Tessman, Anita Superson (2004) has identified vices in members of dominant groups, such as arrogance, self-centeredness, and denial of responsibility regarding one's privilege, that can cause individuals both to resist recognizing and eradicating women's subordination and to engage in immoral behavior that functions to maintain privilege. The widespread possession of ordinary vices of domination and privilege entails (on a eudaimonistic view) that dominants as well as subordinates, and hence most people, do not live flourishing lives.

In sum, feminist approaches to character ethics have criticized and revised many aspects of traditional virtue ethics, have highlighted character issues connected with unjust hierarchies of power, have uncovered admirable dimensions of women's lives that have too-long been ignored, have re-examined traditional conceptions of flourishing, have identified virtues needed for resisting oppression and living fully human lives, and have drawn attention to vices of both privilege and subordination that contribute to the maintenance of injustice. Thus, feminist approaches both enrich feminist ethics and broaden, reorient, and improve traditional virtue ethics.

NOTES

1. Susan Okin, "Feminism, Moral Development, and the Virtues," in *How Should One Live? Essays on the Virtues*, edited by Roger Crisp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 211.
2. Alison Jaggar, "Feminist Ethics: Projects, Problems, Prospects," in *Feminist Ethics*, edited by Claudia Card (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), pp. 78–104.
3. Margaret Urban Walker, "Seeing Power in Morality: A Proposal for Feminist Naturalism in Ethics," in *Feminist Doing Ethics*, edited by Peggy DesAutels and Joanne Waugh (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 4.
4. Susan Sherwin, *No Longer Patient: Feminist Ethics and Health Care* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 54.
5. Such as Martha Nussbaum, "Human Functioning and Social Justice: In Defense of Aristotelian Essentialism," *Political Theory* 20 (1992): 202–246; Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Marcia Homiak, "Feminism and Aristotle's Rational Ideal," in *A Mind of One's*

- Own: Feminist Essays in Reason and Objectivity*, edited by Louise M. Antony and Charlotte E. Witt (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1993), pp. 1–18; Marcia Homiak, “Virtue and the Skills of Ordinary Life,” in *Setting the Moral Compass: Essays by Women Philosophers*, edited by Cheshire Calhoun (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 23–42; Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Lisa Tessman, “Feminist Eudaimonism: Eudaimonism and Non-Ideal Theory,” in *Feminist Ethics and Social and Political Philosophy: Theorizing the Non-Ideal*, edited by Lisa Tessman (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), pp. 47–58.
6. Such as Annette Baier, *Moral Prejudices: Essays on Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); Rosemarie Tong, “The Ethics of Care: A Feminist Virtue Ethics of Care for Healthcare Practitioners,” *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 23 (1998): 131–152.
 7. Such as Michael Slote, *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* (London: Routledge, 2007).
 8. E.g. Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles*.
 9. Julia Driver, “The Virtues and Human Nature,” in *How Should One Live? Essays on the Virtues*, edited by Roger Crisp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 111–129.
 10. E.g., Anne Barnhill, “Modesty as a Feminist Sexual Virtue,” in *Out From the Shadows: Analytical Feminist Contributions to Traditional Philosophy*, edited by Sharon L. Crasnow and Anita M. Superson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 115–137.
 11. Robin S. Dillon, “Critical Character Theory: Toward a Feminist Theory of ‘Vice,’” in *Out From the Shadows: Analytical Feminist Contributions to Traditional Philosophy*, edited by Sharon Crasnow and Anita Superson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 83–114.
 12. Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles*, 55.
 13. Okin, “Feminism, Moral Development, and the Virtues.”
 14. Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles*, and Claudia Card, *The Unnatural Lottery: Character and Moral Luck* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), have good discussions.
 15. Nancy Snow, “Virtue and the Oppression of Women,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 32 (1992): 34–35.
 16. Aristotle, *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, edited by Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 608b8–14.
 17. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd edition., edited by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).
 18. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, translated by R. J. Collingwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 377.
 19. Card, *The Unnatural Lottery: Character and Moral Luck*.
 20. Maria Lugones, “Hispaneando y Lesbiando: On Sarah Hoagland’s Lesbian Ethics,” *Hypatia* 5 (1990): 138–146.
 21. Card, *The Unnatural Lottery: Character and Moral Luck*; Cheshire Calhoun, “Standing For Something,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 92 (1995): 235–260.
 22. One noteworthy contemporary exception is Snow, “Virtue and the Oppression of Women.”
 23. Okin, “Feminism, Moral Development, and the Virtues.”
 24. E.g., Robin S. Dillon, “‘What’s a Woman Worth? What’s Life Worth? Without Self-Respect?’: On the Value of Evaluative Self-Respect,” in *Moral Psychology: Feminist Ethics and Social Theory*, edited by Peggy DesAutels and Margaret Urban Walker (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), pp. 47–66.

25. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Rousseau, Emile, or Education*, translated by Barbara Foxley (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1921), 328.
26. Sandrine Berges, *A Feminist Perspective on Virtue Ethics* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), explores connections.
27. Such as Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Sarah Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989); Eva F. Kittay, *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
28. E.g., Serene Khader, "Beyond Inadvertent Ventriloquism: Caring Virtues for Anti-Paternalist Development Practices," *Hypatia* 26 (2011): 742–761.
29. Nussbaum, "Human Functioning and Social Justice: In Defense of Aristotelian Essentialism"; Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*.
30. Homiak, "Feminism and Aristotle's Rational Ideal"; Homiak, "Virtue and the Skills of Ordinary Life."
31. Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles*; Tessman, "Feminist Eudaimonism: Eudaimonism and Non-Ideal Theory."
32. Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles*, 9.
33. Card, *The Unnatural Lottery: Character and Moral Luck*.
34. Lisa Heldke, "In Praise of Unreliability," *Hypatia* 12 (1997): 174–182; Lisa Heldke, "On Being a Responsible Traitor: A Primer," in *Daring to Be Good: Essays in Feminist Ethico-Politics*, edited by Bat-Ami Bar On and Ann Ferguson (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 41–54.
35. Robin S. Dillon, "Kant on Arrogance and Self-Respect," in *Setting the Moral Compass: Essays by Women Philosophers*, edited by Cheshire Calhoun (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 191–216.

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CHAPTER 20

CONTEMPORARY CONSEQUENTIALIST THEORIES OF VIRTUE

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THE theory of virtue has recently been dominated by Aristotelians.¹ This is unsurprising given Aristotle's status in the profession, the extensive treatment of virtue found in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and the centrality of virtue to Aristotelian ethics (as compared to its subsidiary status in, e.g., the utilitarian tradition). But from the standpoint of the philosophical understanding of virtue, Aristotle's dominance is arguably lamentable, since the "Doctrine of the Mean" is virtually devoid of content.² Consequentialism about the virtues offers a potentially more informative alternative. Roughly speaking, consequentialist theories of virtue explain a character trait's status as a virtue or vice by appealing to the value of the consequences of the trait, unlike the dominant Aristotelian and Kantian views, according to which an agent's virtue is determined largely or entirely by the intrinsic quality of her psychological states. I will begin by tracing the development of virtue consequentialism and spelling out some ways to develop a consequentialist theory of virtue. Then I will discuss some of the advantages and shortcomings of consequentialist theories.

I. THE DEVELOPMENT AND VARIETIES OF VIRTUE CONSEQUENTIALISM

The roots of virtue consequentialism can be found as long ago as 1689 in Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. According to Locke, God has "by an inseparable connexion, joined *Virtue* and publick Happiness together; and made the Practice thereof, necessary to the preservation of Society, and visibly *beneficial* to all, with

whome the Virtuous Man has to do.”³ We can find virtue consequentialist ideas also in Frances Hutcheson and David Hume. Here is a nice statement from Hutcheson’s *Inquiry concerning the Original of our Ideas of Virtue or Moral Good*: “these four qualities, commonly called *cardinal virtues*, obtain that name, because they are dispositions universally necessary to promote *public good*, and denote *affections* toward *rational agents*; otherwise there would appear no *virtue* in them.”⁴ In his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Hume claims that good consequences are at least part of the explanation of what makes a character trait a virtue, or at least what makes benevolence a virtue: “upon the whole, then, it seems undeniable, that nothing can bestow more merit on any human creature than the sentiment of benevolence in an eminent degree; and that a part, at least, of its merit arises from its tendency to promote the interests of our species, and bestow happiness on human society.”⁵

A closely related view, which Robert Adams calls “Motive Utilitarianism,”⁶ can also be found in the utilitarian tradition, in Jeremy Bentham and Henry Sidgwick: “If [motives] are good or bad, it is only on account of their effects: good, on account of their tendency to produce pleasure, or avert pain: bad, on account of their tendency to produce pain, or avert pleasure”;⁷ “the doctrine that Universal Happiness is the ultimate *standard* must not be understood to imply that Universal Benevolence is the only right or always best *motive* of action . . . if experience shows that the general happiness will be more satisfactorily attained if men frequently act from other motives than pure universal philanthropy, it is obvious that these other motives are reasonably to be preferred on Utilitarian principles.”⁸

None of these views is quite the view we are after. Locke’s claim that the virtues are necessary to the preservation of society seems overblown. Couldn’t a virtue be good for people, and thus a virtue on consequentialist grounds, without being necessary for there to be a society at all? Hutcheson’s view seems too weak; many dispositions might be *necessary* for bringing about good outcomes without being *sufficient* to do so. Hume endorses, at best, a partial version of virtue consequentialism, since he claims merely that benevolence is the greatest virtue (not the only one), and that its status as a virtue is at least *partly* explained by its consequences. Bentham and Sidgwick are consequentialists about *motives*, but motives and character traits are not quite the same thing. We must look just a bit later than Sidgwick to find a real statement of virtue consequentialism.

A clear statement of a virtue consequentialist view is found in G. E. Moore’s *Principia Ethica*: “a virtue may be defined as an habitual disposition to perform certain actions, which generally produce the best possible results.”⁹ We will take Moore’s view as our starting point in formulating varieties of virtue consequentialism. Moore’s view about virtue is adapted from his consequentialism about moral duties, according to which an act is morally required if and only if its consequences are better than those of any of its alternatives.¹⁰ Moore’s view is that virtues are dispositions to perform actions we are morally required to do.

Moore’s view is only one of at least two ways to adapt consequentialism about moral requirement into consequentialism about the virtues. Another would be to say that a character trait is a virtue if and only if its possession maximizes utility (i.e., possessing

that character trait has consequences at least as good as possessing any alternative character trait).¹¹ This view is preferable to Moore's. On Moore's view, it could turn out that there are no virtues, since it could turn out that there simply are no character traits that always or generally dispose the bearer to perform acts with better consequences than any alternative. Furthermore, suppose there are two character traits with the following features. The first disposes the bearer to perform utility-maximizing actions in situations where the choice is of little consequence, but in certain rare but very important situations disposes the bearer to perform acts with terrible consequences. The second *always* disposes the bearer to perform actions that are very nearly, but not quite, as good as the best alternative. The virtue consequentialist should rate the second trait higher. It has better consequences overall, even though it is not a disposition to perform the best option.

So here is a first pass at formulating virtue consequentialism:

Maximizing Virtue Consequentialism (MVC): a character trait is a virtue if and only if its consequences are at least as good as any alternative character trait.

MVC employs the notion of an "alternative" character trait. Let us understand this as follows: two traits are alternatives if and only if it is impossible to have both at the same time.

One important feature of MVC is that whether a trait counts as a virtue is not determined in isolation. It is determined by a comparison with alternative traits. This is a departure from many other views about virtue; for example, if virtue were a disposition to love the good, then a trait's status as a virtue would be independent of facts about other traits.

Understanding virtue consequentialism in a maximizing way is probably a mistake. It is overly demanding; it entails that any character trait that is less than the best possible trait is not a virtue, which seems wrong.¹² Among consequentialists about permissible action, it is controversial whether an act must maximize utility in order to be permissible. But maximizing views at least have some plausibility in the context of permissible action since permissibility does not come in degrees: either an act is permissible or it is impermissible, and arguably it does not make sense to say that one act is *more* permissible than another. Virtue is not like that. One trait can be more of a virtue than another. MVC gives us no way to evaluate whether one trait is more of a virtue than another if neither is maximally good.

Since virtue seems to be scalar, the virtue consequentialist should perhaps formulate her view accordingly:

Scalar Virtue Consequentialism (SVC): one character trait is more of a virtue (vice) than another if it has better (worse) consequences.¹³

SVC, however, does not tell us which character traits are virtues; it does not specify a threshold separating the virtues from the vices. One trait could be more of a virtue than

another—could be higher on the virtue scale—even though both are vices. We would need an additional principle to specify this threshold, and MVC has already been ruled out.

We might wish to say that a character trait is a virtue if it has *good* consequences (not necessarily better than any alternative—just good). Julia Driver's version of virtue consequentialism takes this route. According to Driver, a trait is a virtue if and only if it has on balance good consequences.¹⁴ The question is, what does this mean? It cannot mean that its consequences are on balance good *in themselves*, for there are virtues whose value comes not from bringing about what is intrinsically good but rather from *preventing* what is intrinsically *bad*. This is especially important in cases where background conditions render it impossible for any trait to have consequences that are on balance intrinsically good, and the best traits will merely make things less bad for people.¹⁵

In attempting to identify a suboptimal threshold trait, from among the set of alternative traits one might have, such that any trait that has better consequences than that trait is a virtue and any that has worse consequences is a vice, we run into the same sorts of well-known problems that consequentialists encounter when attempting to formulate “satisficing” versions of consequentialism about permissible action. For example, where is the threshold to be drawn, and why? Such questions will be no easier to answer concerning character traits than concerning actions.

The best route for the virtue consequentialist is to say that there simply is no *absolute* fact of the matter about whether any character trait is a virtue or a vice, even in a given society at a given time. To call a trait a virtue is to say that it is better than some alternative character trait you are comparing it with, and in different conversational contexts we may have in mind different alternative traits. This contrastive view gives us a way to provide truth-conditions for statements attributing virtue status to traits, without requiring us to determine a threshold. Just as we can truly call someone “tall” even though there is no absolute threshold of tallness, we can truly call a trait a virtue even though there is no absolute threshold of virtue.¹⁶

Questions remain about which consequences we are to consider in evaluating a trait. When comparing two traits, it might turn out that one has better consequences if possessed by a particular individual, while the other has better consequences if possessed by all of humanity or if generally possessed by members of a given society. For example, a certain degree of honesty might have good consequences if possessed by society generally but bad consequences if possessed by a diplomat. If so, is honesty a virtue or a vice for the diplomat?

On the one hand, it may be unintuitive to say that what is a virtue for someone depends only on the consequences of that person's having it. As Robert Adams says, “an industrialist's greed, a general's bloodthirstiness, may on some occasions have better consequences on the whole than kinder motives would . . . But we want to say that they remain worse motives.”¹⁷ We may want to say this even if the industrialist's greed has better consequences than kinder motives, not just on some occasions, but throughout the industrialist's life. On the other hand, it may seem odd to say that whether it is

a virtue for one person to have a character trait depends at all on the consequences of some *other* person or people having it. Furthermore, as Adams notes, it seems we should leave room for there being a necessary or useful *diversity* of virtuous motives in a population.¹⁸ Perhaps it is best for the virtue consequentialist to say that virtues and vices are relative to an individual or a population, so that it is at once both a virtue and a vice for the diplomat to be honest, relative to different populations.¹⁹

Another question is whether we are to look at the consequences of a trait in counterfactual situations in order to determine whether it is actually a virtue. The concern here is the extent to which luck might determine whether a trait is a virtue. We might wish to refrain from calling a trait a virtue if its actual good consequences are merely an accident, and therefore look at its consequences across a range of realistic but non-actual situations to determine whether it is a virtue.

Driver argues that we need not look to such consequences. According to Driver, the consequences of a trait across actual situations are sufficient to determine its status as a virtue or vice, and looking at counterfactual situations yields some wrong results. Here is her main argument:

Suppose, for example, that Sally would have had bad traits if she had not been raised by her mother, who, it turns out, did raise her only through amazing luck—the mother was almost run over by a truck but avoided death through an amazing fluke. Well, in worlds very close to this one, Sally is a bad person. Her high spirits become disruptive Sally's high spirits are still virtuous.²⁰

Here it may be helpful to recall that for the virtue consequentialist, a virtue may be relative to a population or to a person. Even if high spirits have bad consequences when possessed by Sally in nearby worlds, they might have good consequences when *generally* possessed, and thus might be virtuous relative to the general population. Still, we might want to say that it is virtuous *for Sally* to have high spirits given their actual good consequences when possessed by her. The counterfactualist can accommodate this thought by pointing out that which worlds are “closest” to the actual world is not an absolute matter.²¹ Worlds in which Sally's mother is run over by the truck, Sally is raised badly, and so her high spirits have bad consequences, differ from the actual world in some ways; worlds in which Sally's mother is not run over, Sally is raised well by her mother, but Sally's high spirits nevertheless accidentally have bad consequences despite her mother's good guidance, differ from the actual world in other ways. Which worlds count as “closer” depends on which similarity relation we employ.

One consideration that might lead us toward a counterfactual view is that if actualism were true, then any character trait that failed to have any actual consequences would fail to be a virtue—even if the reason it has no actual consequences is that nobody possesses the trait.²² It is odd to say that a trait is not a virtue merely because nobody has it; it seems natural, for example, to lament the fact that nobody has a certain virtue. If actualism were true, we could at best lament the fact that nobody has a trait because the trait *would be* a virtue if someone were to have it.

Consequentialism about morally permissible action comes in objective and subjective varieties. Objective consequentialism is the view that an act is morally permissible if it maximizes utility, while subjective consequentialism is the view that an act is morally permissible if it maximizes *expected* utility. The expected utility of an act is determined by the values of the consequences that *might* result from the act, weighted by the *subjective probability* that those consequences would result. Subjective probability is determined by the credence of the agent performing the act. The move to subjective probability is again motivated, in part at least, by concerns about moral luck. If an agent takes a great gamble and brings about the best possible consequences only by luck, while knowingly risking calamity, the subjective consequentialist can part ways from the objective consequentialist and give what seems to be the correct account of the situation: the agent acts wrongly. We might wish to formulate virtue consequentialism in a subjective form, so as to minimize the extent to which a trait may be a virtue as a result of luck. However, it is unclear how such a view could be formulated. Whose subjective probabilities would be used, and at what time? In evaluating the permissibility of an action, the answers to these questions are the agent of the act, at the time it is performed. Such answers are not available when evaluating a trait, since it is possessed by many people and exemplified at many times.²³

Finally, virtue consequentialism may be pure or impure (or partial). I have focused on pure versions; but one might wish to say that while the values of the consequences of a trait are part of what make it a virtue, other features are also relevant. A common modification to the basic virtue consequentialist idea is the notion of virtue as a *corrective*. According to Philippa Foot, virtues “are *corrective*, each one standing at a point at which there is some temptation to be resisted or deficiency of motivation to be made good.”²⁴ This idea is widely endorsed throughout the history of virtue theory, including, for example, by Bernard Mandeville, G. E. Moore, Franz Brentano, and G. H. Von Wright.²⁵ The suggestion here is that we should add a clause to virtue consequentialism so that in addition to having good consequences (however this is understood), a virtue must also involve resisting temptation, or controlling natural inclinations to bad behavior. Adopting this more complicated proposal would help rule out certain traits as virtues. For example, suppose that in a certain society, people can bring about good consequences merely by acting in their own narrow self-interest. By engaging in greedy or wasteful consumer behavior, people would generally improve economic conditions so that everyone is better off than if people were generally more altruistic. On the simple version of virtue consequentialism, these people’s greedy dispositions would count as virtuous; but since they would not be resisting any temptation by acting in these ways, such dispositions would fail to count as virtues on the corrective account.²⁶ But perhaps such a view is too Kantian for the consequentialist. If being helpful and truthful has good consequences, why wouldn’t it be virtuous to be helpful and truthful, even for someone who found it easy or even pleasant to be that way?

Another notable theory of virtue that may be regarded as consequentialist is the neo-Aristotelian view defended by Rosalind Hursthouse (1999). According to Hursthouse, what makes a trait a virtue is that it promotes the agent’s survival, the survival of the

agent's species, the "characteristic" enjoyment of the agent, and the functioning of the agent's social group.²⁷ It seems fair to call Hursthouse a kind of virtue consequentialist, since the features of a trait that make it a virtue are not intrinsic features of the trait; they are causally downstream from the trait and largely external to its possessor. On the other hand, it is not because of the *value* of the consequences of the trait that Hursthouse calls the trait a virtue; rather, it is because having traits with those consequences is what it is to be good *qua* human being.²⁸ Nevertheless, many of the arguments for and against virtue consequentialism will apply to Hursthouse's theory as well.

II. THE CASE FOR VIRTUE CONSEQUENTIALISM

Why be a consequentialist about the virtues? Some of the motivations are the same as those for being a consequentialist about permissible action or about social policy. It is plausible that the purpose of morality and moral rules is to make people (or sentient beings generally—but *someone*, at least!) better off. If so, then we should not call a character trait a virtue if it does not help anyone or if it harms more than it helps. For instance, just as we might criticize racist, sexist, or homophobic actions, laws, or institutions on the grounds that they harm a group of people without helping anyone, we might also criticize certain racist, sexist, or homophobic *character traits* on the grounds that their possession harms people.

The consequentialist about virtue need not think that welfare is the only goal of morality. Some acts and rules have consequences that are bad in a way that goes beyond negative effects on the total well-being—for example, they result in unjust distributions of goods, or in unjust punishments or rewards. Just as acts, rules, and institutions can have such results, so can character traits. The consequentialist about virtue thinks that such bad results are at least part of the explanation of the fact that those traits are vices, and this is a plausible explanation.

According to Driver, a main point in favor of virtue consequentialism is that it entails that what counts as a virtue can change over time as circumstances change.²⁹ Thus virtue consequentialism can explain why our attitudes toward certain traits have changed over time. For example, chastity was once considered to be an important virtue for women in Western societies, but this is no longer the case. "If women were not chaste, men would have no confidence in paternity and would not support children. The social consequences of this would be disastrous."³⁰ As societal attitudes about such matters change (and, e.g., paternity testing develops), chastity ceases to be required to prevent disaster, and thus chastity ceases to be a virtue. Of course, attitudes about what is a virtue can be wrong. But it is a nice feature of virtue consequentialism that it does not require us to attribute widespread mistakes to people about what the virtues are, at least in cases like this.

This is not a decisive consideration in favor of virtue consequentialism. Robert Adams argues that given the impact of AIDS, if people regarded the consequences of sexual activity as relevant to chastity's status as a virtue, chastity ought to have made a comeback and been regarded as a virtue; the fact that this didn't happen undermines Driver's argument.³¹ Todd Calder points out that there are alternative explanations of why a trait may go from a virtue to a non-virtue.³² This can happen in the case of a trait that is not a *fundamental* virtue, but is a virtue only because it is a way of having some other virtue. Chastity can lose its status as a virtue because, at one time, being chaste is a way of loving the good (one's own or others'), which is a fundamental virtue, while at another time it is not a way of loving the good. In general, the anti-consequentialist is not committed to the view that all virtues are *necessarily* virtues. Luke Russell suggests a different reply. He says that while in the case of chastity we would be content to say that chastity simply ceases to be a virtue when it stops having good consequences, this would not be the case with other virtues such as honesty or sympathy.³³ In those cases we would be conflicted about whether honesty and sympathy remain virtues. He thinks this supports a "disjunctive" view according to which virtues are *either* intrinsically or instrumentally good.

According to Driver, it is also a point in favor of consequentialist theories of virtue that they do not require knowledge (e.g., knowledge of the good) for virtue. This is important because she thinks that some virtues, such as modesty, actually *require* ignorance. Modesty necessarily involves ignorance of one's own excellence: to be modest is to believe that one is not as good as one really is.³⁴ Whether this is an accurate account of modesty is debatable. Consider Erik Wielenberg's example of Amazing Bob, who is actually the strongest and most intelligent person in the world but believes himself to be only the hundredth-strongest and hundredth-most-intelligent, and brags constantly about his status as the hundredth-best person in the world.³⁵ Amazing Bob is not modest, but counts as modest on Driver's account.

Even if Driver is wrong to say that modesty requires ignorance, virtue may still be *compatible* with lack of knowledge. Driver argues that it is not necessary to have any particular psychological state, such as knowledge of the good or good intentions, to be virtuous. Good intentions are no guarantee of virtue, and bad intentions are no guarantee of vice. Consider Huck Finn, who intentionally performs actions benefiting Jim *while believing he acts wrongly*. Arguably, his intentions fail to be good, but this does not make him vicious; on the contrary, he is virtuous in spite of his intent not to do what is good.³⁶ The virtue consequentialist can explain this by appeal to the good consequences of his character. Of course, this does not show that virtue consequentialism is true, since the intention to do what is right or good is not essential to non-consequentialist theories of virtue. Furthermore, it is possible that even if Driver is right that *some* virtues do not require good intentions or other particular psychological states, other virtues do.³⁷ Nevertheless, Driver's argument is an important move in defending virtue consequentialism against the charge that it is essential to virtue that one have one's heart in the right place; if this amounts to the claim that intention to do good is essential to virtue, it is a highly contestable claim.

Experimental philosophy has provided some recent support for virtue consequentialism. According to a recent study by Adam Feltz and Edward Cokely, the folk are more inclined to call a trait a virtue if it has good consequences. Feltz and Cokely claim that their study supports the view that “while other factors may be relevant to virtue attribution, the predominant factor is the consequences that those character traits bring about”—not pure virtue consequentialism, but closer to it than any other theory.³⁸ Of course this is only one study, asking fairly abstract questions to participants about a scenario involving “Pat,” who has a trait characterized only by the extent to which people feel good or protected, or ashamed or unsafe, when it is exercised.³⁹ Perhaps further studies asking more specific questions would yield different results. And of course whatever such studies show, they do not demonstrate the truth of any theory of virtue, only what people believe about virtue. So whatever support virtue consequentialism gets from this study is limited; but it can at least provide some defense against claims that virtue consequentialism is objectionably unintuitive, since that claim has no experimental support yet.

A final important motivation for virtue consequentialism is its potential for use in indirect consequentialist explanations of morally permissible action. While a direct consequentialist determines the permissibility of an act by looking at its consequences and those of its alternatives, an indirect consequentialist does so by looking at the consequences of some other thing associated in some way with the act. Rule consequentialism is one well-known version of indirect consequentialism. According to the rule consequentialist, the permissibility of an act is determined by whether it accords with or violates a correct rule, and the correctness of a rule is determined by its consequences.⁴⁰

Consequentialism about the virtues can be employed in an analogous way. There are at least two possible ways to do this. One is suggested by Peter Railton: “an act is right just in case it would be done by someone having a character, the general possession of which would bring about at least as much utility as any alternative.”⁴¹ Whether an action is permissible is determined by what a virtuous person would do under the circumstances, and whether someone is virtuous is determined according to Maximizing Virtue Consequentialism. A slightly different view is suggested by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong: “whether an act is morally right depends on whether it stems from or expresses a state of character that maximizes good consequences and, hence, is a virtue.”⁴² Here we do not look counterfactually at what a virtuous person *would* do, but rather at what trait actually motivates the action; but again we evaluate that trait according to MVC.

III. THE CASE AGAINST VIRTUE CONSEQUENTIALISM

In discussing Hume’s view about virtue, after agreeing with Hume that virtues are generally beneficial, Adam Smith gives the following argument against virtue consequentialism: “it

seems impossible that the approbation of virtue should be a sentiment of the same kind with that by which we approve of a convenient and well-contrived building; or that we should have no other reason for praising a man than that for which we commend a chest of drawers."⁴³ To call someone virtuous is to praise her; if virtue consequentialism is true, this praise is for her beneficial qualities. But just about any sort of thing can have beneficial qualities. Though we might praise a chest of drawers, the praise is different from the praise we give a person. To praise a person for her virtue is to express admiration. Nobody sees a chest of drawers and thinks: *I'd really like to be like that*.

But Smith's humorous example is perhaps not decisive. The important difference between a person and a chest of drawers is that a person has mental states and acts intentionally; and we have already seen that a primary motivation for virtue consequentialism is that mental states such as intentions to do good are *not* necessary for virtue. So perhaps the virtue consequentialist can plausibly claim that we should not see such a big difference between the virtues of people and the virtues of furniture.

If Smith is right, then there should be some character traits that we do not find admirable yet that count as virtues on the virtue consequentialist view: having good consequences should fail to be sufficient for a trait to count as a virtue. Contemporary criticisms of virtue consequentialism have focused mainly on establishing this insufficiency claim. For example, Robert Adams argues that even if a trait like competitiveness has good consequences, it is not a virtue since it involves wanting to do better than others.⁴⁴ Perhaps, though, it is not so counterintuitive to say that a certain degree of competitiveness is a virtue. It is a trait for which we sometimes praise people. Why couldn't it be a virtue to want to do better than others, as long as it does not lead to, for example, cheating or harming others?

Other traits might pose more of a problem. Given the right circumstances, traits like malevolence or dishonesty could have good consequences, and would therefore count as virtues.⁴⁵ Of course, such circumstances would be far-fetched. In order for malevolence to cause good consequences systematically, some magical demon would have to systematically interfere with people's actions, bringing about the opposite of what they intend. Still, the objection goes, malevolence would not be a virtue in such circumstances. The malevolent person would still be intending to cause harm to his "victims." "The problem for consequentialist theories of virtue and vice is that, although maliciousness in such a world systematically promotes the good, it does not make the characters of malicious people, such as the one described above, any better, and thus, maliciousness is still a vice. Yet on a consequentialist account of virtue and vice, maliciousness would be a virtue in these worlds because it promotes the good."⁴⁶

Should the virtue consequentialist be moved by this argument? Under these bizarre circumstances, wouldn't it be more virtuous to be malevolent? Calder argues that even though a virtuous person would choose to be malevolent in such cases, this is not because malevolence is virtuous in those circumstances; rather, it is because *benevolence* is a virtue, and being malevolent would be the best way to benefit people. Malevolence would be chosen as a means, not as an end.⁴⁷ So we have two competing ways to think about this situation. Either malevolence has become a virtue in light of its good

consequences, or it remains a vice that would nevertheless be chosen as a means by the virtuous person because it serves another virtue. Calder argues that the second way is the better way to think about things, but it is unclear why it is better. The virtue consequentialist should say: we have reached a stalemate with clashing intuitions about the status of malevolence. As seen in the previous section, the folk may well side with the virtue consequentialist in this clash of intuitions (for what that is worth).

Calder also objects that virtue consequentialism doesn't tell us anything about the intrinsic properties of virtues and vices.⁴⁸ Thus, it does not tell us anything about the "common structure" of the virtues.⁴⁹ This is certainly true and follows from the basic virtue consequentialist idea that it is the consequences of a trait that determine its status as a virtue or vice. The question is, why think that virtues have a common intrinsic structure? Only if we thought that virtues are defined by internal psychological states would we think this to be so; but a large part of the motivation behind virtue consequentialism is the denial of that Aristotelian/Kantian idea. It seems question-begging to argue against the virtue consequentialist on these grounds.

Virtue consequentialism may face some of the same kinds of problems that consequentialism about permissible action faces. For one thing, virtue consequentialism seems to entail that it is very difficult to be sure that any given character trait is a virtue. A trait that we think of as being a virtue might, in the long run, have bad consequences. Virtue consequentialism requires a good deal of epistemic modesty. Non-consequentialist views do not require the same degree of modesty, since events taking place in the distant future will have no bearing on a character trait's current status as a virtue.

Consequentialist views about permissible action face well-known problems involving cases where a better consequence can be brought about via means that seem impermissible, such as executing an innocent person to prevent a riot, killing an innocent person to distribute his organs to several others who need them, or torturing one person for the amusement of billions. These sorts of objections do not carry over straightforwardly to virtue consequentialism, since someone whose character disposes her to perform such actions would likely be disposed to kill or torture people in other circumstances where doing so would not have the best consequences. Still, if someone were disposed to perform such acts *only* when it really would maximize utility, she would count as virtuous. This may be hard to accept.

The virtue consequentialist may wish to say that being disposed never to harm innocents is a virtue, even though in these rare cases harming innocents would have good consequences, because it *generally* has good consequences to be disposed never to perform such actions. Of course, as I pointed out in Section I, the most plausible version of virtue consequentialism will not entail that a character trait is a virtue or a vice full stop; the most fundamental virtue facts are of the form "V1 is more of a virtue than V2." So we must be a bit more careful in formulating the objection. Virtue consequentialism entails that being disposed never to harm innocents is more of a virtue than being disposed to punish or harm arbitrarily, haphazardly, or self-interestedly (which is probably not a virtue to *any* degree); but it also entails that being disposed never to harm innocents is *less*

of a virtue than being disposed to punish or harm only in cases where it brings about the best outcome. It is the latter claim that seems counterintuitive.

A final problem concerns the place of virtue in moral theory. Virtue has been alleged to play many roles. In the previous section we saw that it has been employed in theories of morally permissible behavior. Another role is in axiology and the theory of well-being: virtue is among the things alleged to make the world, or a human life, better just by being a part of it.⁵⁰ A more indirect role in axiology is also possible: the world has been alleged to be made better by the virtuous getting pleasure, and worse by the vicious getting pleasure.⁵¹

If virtue consequentialism is true, virtue probably cannot play these axiological roles (Bradley 2016). As explained earlier, the best version of virtue consequentialism is scalar, and on the most plausible version of the scalar view there is no absolute threshold between virtue and vice. This fact wreaks havoc on our ability to employ virtue in normative ethics, axiology, and the theory of well-being. For example, suppose we are trying to determine the contribution that a particular character trait makes to the value of the world. If the scalar view is true, there is no absolute fact of the matter about whether that trait makes a positive or negative contribution to the value of the world! Thus in some cases there will be no fact of the matter about whether the world has on balance positive value. The same difficulty arises if virtue contributes directly to individual well-being: there will be cases where there is no fact of the matter about whether such a life is worth living. In order for virtue to be theoretically useful in these projects, the virtue consequentialist must provide a plausible account of the threshold between virtue and vice, and this seems impossible.

So where does this leave us? Virtue consequentialism's theoretical utility seems limited in some ways. But this is perhaps unsurprising given that on the virtue consequentialist approach, virtue is a *derivative* notion, not a fundamental one. Within a consequentialist framework, considerations of *intrinsic value* are fundamental; virtues are understood in terms of their conduciveness to the value of the world. For this reason, those who think virtue is a crucially important theoretical notion are not likely to be attracted to virtue consequentialism. Thus, whether one is at all persuaded by the defenses of virtue consequentialism offered here is likely to depend on one's attitude concerning the theoretical importance of virtue.

NOTES

1. Thanks to Dave Sobel and Nancy Snow for helpful discussion and comments.
2. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by J. A. K. Thomson (Penguin, 1976), chap. 2.
3. John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, edited by P. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1689/1975), I.iii.6.
4. Frances Hutcheson, *An Inquiry concerning the Original of our Ideas of Virtue or Moral Good*, in *British Moralists 1650–1800*, Vol. I, edited by D. D. Raphael (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1725/1991), 271.

5. David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3rd edition, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1777/1975), 181.
6. Robert Adams, "Motive Utilitarianism," *Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976): 467–481.
7. Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1789/1907), X.12.
8. Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1907/1981), 413.
9. G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), 172.
10. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 148.
11. This view is suggested by a version of "character utilitarianism" formulated by Peter Railton: "an act is right just in case it would be done by someone having a character, the general possession of which would bring about at least as much utility as any alternative." Peter Railton, *Facts, Values, and Norms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 227. This is a view about morally right action, but it presupposes a maximizing consequentialist view of the virtues. See Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, "Consequentialism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2015 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/consequentialism/>, for a similar formulation.
12. Robert Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 53.
13. This view is similar to views proposed by Railton and Adams, though neither Railton nor Adams provides any motivation for formulating the view in a scalar way. Railton, *Facts, Values, and Norms*, 228; Adams, "Motive Utilitarianism," 470.
14. Julia Driver, *Uneasy Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 82.
15. Ben Bradley, "Virtue Consequentialism," *Utilitas* 17 (2005): 282–298.
16. Bradley, "Virtue Consequentialism"; Ben Bradley, "Character and Consequences," in *Perspectives on Character*, edited by Iskra Fileva (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 78–88.
17. Adams, "Motive Utilitarianism," 480.
18. Adams, "Motive Utilitarianism," 480.
19. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 173; Bradley, "Virtue Consequentialism," 289.
20. Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, 81.
21. David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1986).
22. Bradley, "Virtue Consequentialism," 293.
23. See Bradley, "Virtue Consequentialism," 295, for an attempt to formulate such a view; also see Adams, who suggests that the most plausible version of "motive utilitarianism" will appeal to something he calls "average probable utility," which sounds like an expected utility view. Adams "Motive Utilitarianism," 480.
24. Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 8.
25. Bernard Mandeville, *An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue*, in *British Moralists 1650–1800*, Vol. I, edited by D. D. Raphael (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1714/1991), 233; Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 172; Franz Brentano, *The Foundation and Construction of Ethics*, translated by E. Schneewind (London: Routledge, 1952/2009), 309; G. H. Von Wright, *The Varieties of Goodness* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), 147–150.
26. In this way the virtue consequentialist could avoid Adams's objection that competitiveness is not a virtue despite its good consequences. Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good*, 56.
27. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 202.

28. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 167.
29. Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, 84–86.
30. Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, 84.
31. Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good*, 57.
32. Todd Calder, “Against Consequentialist Theories of Virtue and Vice,” *Utilitas* 19 (2007): 211.
33. Luke Russell, “What Even Consequentialists Should Say about the Virtues,” *Utilitas* 19 (2007): 477.
34. Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, chap. 2.
35. Erik Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 105–106.
36. Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, 54–55.
37. Russell, “What Even Consequentialists Should Say about the Virtues.”
38. Adam Feltz and Edward T. Cokely, “Virtue or Consequences: The Folk against Pure Evaluational Internalism,” *Philosophical Psychology* 26 (2013): 713.
39. Feltz and Cokely, “Virtue or Consequences: The Folk against Pure Evaluational Internalism,” 705.
40. See Brad Hooker, *Ideal Code, Real World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) for a recent defense of this view.
41. Railton, *Facts, Values, and Norms*, 227.
42. Sinnott-Armstrong, “Consequentialism.”
43. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, in *British Moralists 1650–1800*, Vol. II, edited by D. D. Raphael (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1759/1991), 246.
44. Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good*, 56.
45. Michael Slote, “Driver’s Virtues,” *Utilitas* 16 (2004): 30; Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good*, 54–55; Calder, “Against Consequentialist Theories of Virtue and Vice,” 204.
46. Calder, “Against Consequentialist Theories of Virtue and Vice,” 205.
47. Calder, “Against Consequentialist Theories of Virtue and Vice,” 206.
48. Calder, “Against Consequentialist Theories of Virtue and Vice,” 208.
49. Calder, “Against Consequentialist Theories of Virtue and Vice,” 209.
50. W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1988), 134.
51. Ross, *The Right and the Good*, 138; Fred Feldman, *Utilitarianism, Hedonism, and Desert* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 162; Shelly Kagan, *The Geometry of Desert* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6.

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PART IV

CENTRAL CONCEPTS
AND ISSUES
IN VIRTUE ETHICS
AND THEORIES
OF VIRTUE

CHAPTER 21

ACQUIRING ARISTOTELIAN VIRTUE

NAFSIKA ATHANASSOULIS

I. INTRODUCTION

A few years ago I used to teach one-day training sessions in ethics for members of research ethics committees. At the start of one of the sessions, an extra person showed up and passed me a note which read, “Please include Dr. X in this training session. We have received complaints from patients and colleagues about Dr. X’s behavior and he needs further training in ethics.” Needless to say, Dr. X spent his compulsory ethics training session sulking, uncommunicative, and sullen. If the session taught him anything, it was to confirm his view of ethics as a waste of time.

I don’t think anyone, or perhaps anyone other than National Health Service managers, expects ethics to be taught in one-off sessions, but we do hope that we can, somehow, shape moral characters, even if this is a long and not entirely transparent or fully regulated process. We hope the best for our children and we try to encourage them to become kind, courageous, loyal, and fair people. We examine our own behavior and subject it to criticism and, hopefully, improvement. We wish for reform in the behavior of others, especially the kind of behavior that impacts heavily or negatively on us. We spend time teaching ethics classes in universities, to professionals, to committee members, and to random unethical doctors imposed on us, all in an effort to learn from the writings and behavior of those who went before us.

In this chapter I want to touch upon some topics relevant to the development of Aristotelian virtue. I am conscious of the enormity of the topic, a topic that ranges from exegeses of Aristotle’s own views, to the revival of virtue ethics in recent decades; from abstract debates carried out in professional journals, to practical concerns raised by teachers; from considering the foundations necessary for the moral development of children, to understanding moral weakness in adults and to determining whether there is anything that will help those who have already strayed widely from the path of virtue;

from the discipline of philosophy, to psychology, to public policy and educational theory. It is impossible to do justice to the breadth and significance of this topic in one chapter, but I want to take inspiration from Aristotle when he tells us that “[t]he purpose of our examination is not to know what virtue is, but to become good, since otherwise the inquiry would be of no benefit to us.”¹ In asking how we become good, how we come to acquire virtue, I will be concentrating on a handful of debates that I judge to be of particular importance in current literature.

A good place to start is to consider the role of the virtuous person; if one wants to acquire virtue, it makes sense to look at those who have it. Early virtue ethicists relied on the virtuous person as a direct imitational model, but as we shall see, there are a number of objections to this approach. Instead, more recent research has focused not so much on copying the virtuous but understanding the qualities that make them virtuous. At the heart of these qualities is *phronesis* or practical wisdom, an intellectual virtue that underpins all the others. We will look at *phronesis* in detail, considering both theoretical analyses and practical inquiries by authors who try to make sense of the concept by comparison with skills in other areas and by using empirical studies to shed light on the notion of “expertise” in diverse fields. *Phronesis* will turn out to be a skilled “know-how” type of practical knowledge concerning itself with moral matters in diverse and unpredictable situations. The final section of this chapter will briefly outline research projects by a selection of authors who discuss the many practical ways the “know-how” of *phronesis* becomes relevant in a variety of contexts.

II. THE ROLE OF THE VIRTUOUS PERSON

How do we acquire virtue? A plausible suggestion is to look at those who already have virtue for inspiration. Aristotle’s definition of virtue seems to point to the value of the virtuous person as a model for virtue:

Virtue is a deliberate choice, resulting in a permanent disposition, based on a judgment of the mean as relative to us and the situation, as determined by the right reason, that is, as the virtuous person would determine it.²

The virtuous person is able to determine the right reason, which leads to virtuous action, so perhaps we can follow his example to both perceive what the right reason requires and act accordingly. Early proponents of virtue ethics relied on this definition of virtue, among other passages, to make the role of the virtuous person pivotal in their accounts. According to one influential version, virtue ethics claims that an action is right if and only if it is what the virtuous person would do in the circumstances.³ At times this has been interpreted to mean that if you want to know what to do in particular circumstances, all you have to do is look for the virtuous person and follow her example.⁴ This particular interpretation of the role of the virtuous person has to be understood within

the context from which it emerged, as it ties in with moral theory's preoccupation with action guidedness. Conceiving the role of the virtuous person as a direct imitational model went in part toward answering concerns about the ability of virtue ethics to inform our actions. If you want to know what to do, follow the example of the virtuous person, in the same way that a deontologist would follow the moral rule or a consequentialist would promote good consequences.⁵ In addition, this role for the virtuous person as a model for direct imitation ties in nicely with calls by educational theorists for teachers to be models of moral behavior for their students.⁶

However, there are a number of concerns with this suggestion. The first problem is that in a climate of moral disagreement it is not clear how we can identify the virtuous person in the first place. Even if we do identify him, it is not clear that he could be of any use to us because how we should behave is always relative to the individual. If we think that morality consists of universally applicable, exception-less rules, we might be tempted to see the virtuous agent as a shortcut to these rules. However, the virtuous agent is not the operator of a moral manual.⁷ Observing what the virtuous has done in a specific situation does not necessarily tell us what *we* should do unless we find ourselves in precisely the same situation. A third problem with direct imitation is that since the student is different from the teacher, we will never find ourselves in *precisely* the same situations as our teachers. How the situation is perceived depends on who is perceiving it, and the perspective of the student will always differ from that of, not only the virtuous exemplar, but also of everyone else. If, for example, the student has behaved badly, he finds himself in a position the virtuous would never be in; there is no guidance from the virtuous on how to make amends, as the virtuous never do wrong to make amends for.⁸ Even when facing identical situations, what is required by those who are on the road to virtue may be different from the virtuous, as considerations of maturity, capabilities, and developmental issues that apply to the student are not relevant to others. It is precisely because of his virtue that the virtuous person has options that are not open to me, such as, for example, behaving courageously, or with a skill and competence the non-virtuous lack.⁹

A possible solution to these problems is to see the virtuous person as an ideal.¹⁰ However, a number of criticisms have been raised against this alternative as well. The first is to wonder what we could ever possibly learn from such an abstract ideal.¹¹ We may aspire to this ideal model, but it is not clear how *aspirations* operate to help us acquire virtue. Nor do things become clearer if we think of the ideal model as a source of advice or guidance. How does seeing how the ideally virtuous act help with the situations I am faced with? In what way can examining a model that is understood to be beyond my reach offer assistance with what *I* should do? This second criticism goes further to suggest that the virtuous person as an ideal could even cause more harm than good. Swanton points out that virtue involves inner strength, the kind of strength that makes some otherwise challenging actions possible; however, the student of virtue lacks this inner strength. Seeking to come as close to an ideal as possible when one can never succeed may prove quite ruinous. For example, altruism without inner strength becomes distorted into a resentful or self-serving action.¹² Finally, some authors are concerned

that if the virtuous are really rare ideals, programs of moral education may be entirely futile and all reflections on the cultivation of virtue may be misguided.¹³

All this seems rather negative. One could wonder whether this is the nature of criticisms and objections, but it does seem that the very conception of the virtuous agent makes it difficult to see what role he would play in education, even from a virtue ethical friendly standpoint. In a seminal article¹⁴ John McDowell conceives of the virtuous person as someone who can be relied upon to act virtuously when the situation demands so—therefore a kind person can be relied upon to behave kindly when this is what the situation requires. Possessing a virtue means having an awareness that certain situations require certain responses; it is a sensitivity to situational requirements. In addition, these situational requirements are sufficient to both motivate and explain the virtuous action, while the virtuous perspective is a perspective that cannot be understood unless it is shared. There is nothing that can be said to the vicious to persuade them to see the force of the reasons that explain the actions of the virtuous, as they simply do not see them as reasons.

Under such an understanding of virtue, the student is trying to acquire a perspective that can only be understood from the inside; without this privileged perspective there is neither understanding nor motivation to act virtuously. For the virtuous, reasons for action silence all other considerations.¹⁵ Moral struggle and failure do not apply to the virtuous, whose virtue flows smoothly into action, unlike the continent and the incontinent, who struggle to express right reason in action because of contrary desires. None of this bodes well for education, as during the developmental stage reasons that are silenced for the virtuous are very much present for the student and may derail his reasoning process. The student has to somehow identify which reasons would become silenced for the virtuous and ignore them in order to arrive at the right conclusion. And all the while he is attempting to do this, he has to fight contrary desires, the very contrary desires that the virtuous has eliminated.

Hursthouse makes a similar point with respect to what the virtuous knows.¹⁶ The virtuous person cannot articulate his knowledge, as it is not the kind of thing that can be captured in a set of rules, a collection of definitions or a guide that would help the non-virtuous work out what the virtuous knows; rather, it is something that has been acquired through training. Without going through the same experiences, there is no way of sharing what the virtuous knows; indeed, students of virtue would find it hard to even see the truth of judgments about virtue. Hursthouse concludes with a depressing claim for philosophers, or at least those philosophers who may have some ambitions to teach moral philosophy, namely, we are *qua* philosophers, no better equipped than non-philosophers to give guidance in moral matters. Our understanding of what is reasonable, or consistent or universalizable or objectively the case, or any of the other things we teach in philosophy classes doesn't help in knowing what to do when it comes to practical morality. For that, and for education, we need to be virtuous.

It seems, then, that the more we understand virtue, the more difficult it is to see how one becomes virtuous in the first place. The virtuous person cannot play the role we conceive of him and the role required for the purposes of acquiring virtue. However,

perhaps we have made a mistake in how we have conceived the educational role of the virtuous person. After all, the definition of virtue does not focus on the virtuous person as such, but on her ability to perceive the right reason, her *phronesis*. Perhaps a more fruitful avenue for accounting for the acquisition of virtue would be to consider *phronesis*.

III. THE ROLE OF *PHRONESIS*

Aristotle distinguishes between moral and intellectual virtues, and *phronesis* is one of the intellectual virtues. Translated as practical wisdom, *phronesis* is a dispositional state, involving both affective and cognitive elements, which manifests itself in having the ability to see what virtue requires. According to Aristotle, human beings are naturally rational (this is what distinguishes us from other animals); however, our nature alone does not make us *phronimoi*. Being *phronimos* is a result of acquiring certain habits of reason, and we are, by our first, rational, nature, able to acquire a second nature of practical reasoning.¹⁷ There are a number of aspects to *phronesis* as exercised by the virtuous person. *Phronesis* is an excellence, a disposition to judge rightly about human goods, which orients one's actions toward the noble and the good. In addition, *phronesis* concerns itself with action, so it also involves how to appreciate the situation one finds oneself in correctly, and it involves knowing how to act accordingly, not in terms of general principles but as applied to concrete situations. Because *phronetic* judgments lie in perception—rather than abstract reasoning or rule application—*phronesis* only comes with experience, as one has to be exposed to many different situations to become *phronetic*. *Phronesis* also includes cleverness, which is the ability to successfully execute a plan into action and helps the virtuous man recognize the right time to act, in the right place, using the right approach, and so on.¹⁸ Philosophers have tried to shed further light on the concept of *phronesis* by comparing it to that of *techne* (i.e., “skill”). In what follows, we shall look at a number of discussions of *phronesis* as a skill, some from a theoretical standpoint and some that take their inspiration from empirical analyses of other skilled activities.

The discussion that follows owes much to Dunne's exceptionally nuanced analysis of the comparison between *phronesis* and skill, or *techne*.¹⁹ *Techne* is a skill offering expert practical knowledge in a particular area; for example, a skilled builder is expert at building, and a skilled doctor is expert at healing. Similarly, *phronesis* is expert knowledge in the living of one's life well. Aristotle draws some important parallels between the two:

- (1) Both *phronesis* and *techne* have a function, they aim toward achieving a goal, and what counts as excellence for each is to perform this function well.²⁰
- (2) Both make use of the circumstances they find themselves in to make the best of things. The good builder will make the best of even poor materials if that is all he

has available, and indeed you may only know how good a builder he is when you see him work in such constrained circumstances.²¹

- (3) Both are acquired through exercise and practice.²² One cannot become an expert builder without building walls and then rooms and then houses.
- (4) The doctrine of the mean applies to both, for good craftsmanship cannot be improved by either adding or taking anything away; it is just right.²³

However, at the same time there are important differences between *phronesis* and *techne*. First, there is a contrast between different types of *technai*, some of which are closer to *phronesis* than others. Some *technai* are governed by a determinate body of knowledge, as is the case, for example, with a skill in grammar; while others cannot be understood in terms of general rules, such that there is no need for interpretive judgment of what is required in each situation. Medicine, for example, is a skill of the second kind, for an expert doctor cannot capture everything that is relevant to making a good diagnosis in the form of a manual, but needs to exercise her judgment in relation to the particulars of each different case she comes across. *Phronesis* clearly resembles medical rather than grammatical skill.

Second, there seems to be an element of voluntariness in *techne* that is not present in *phronesis*. This has several implications; *techne* can be forgotten as well as learned if one's interest in it, for example, declines; *techne* can be possessed but not applied, as in the case of the retired builder; and one can make voluntary mistakes in the exercise of *techne*, and this shows one's control over the exercise of the skill. *Phronesis* is different; it cannot be forgotten, as it presents the demands of the noble and the good. Nor can it be possessed but not applied, because it is a form of practical knowledge that is expressed in action; to fail to act is to fail to be *phronimos*. Similarly, intentional mistakes are not possible in the sphere of *phronesis*, as we don't have discretionary powers over its exercise. One can choose to give up building, not build this particular house, or expressly build it poorly, but one cannot choose to give up on kindness, not bother with courage on this occasion, or be unfair on another and still be considered virtuous.

This is because *phronesis* is fundamentally connected to the noble and the good, which is the third difference. There can be excellence in *techne* but not excellence in *phronesis*, as *phronesis* is excellence; one can determine the direction of *techne*—a doctor who heals, as opposed to a doctor who uses his skills to extract information under torture—but one cannot determine the direction of *phronesis* as it is already oriented to the good; and while *techne* may be used instrumentally, *phronesis* is an expression of ourselves.

As a type of knowledge, *phronesis* is not concerned with knowledge “that,” or with ethical facts and ideas. Rather, it is a skill, a capacity to be resourceful, to exercise one's judgment in response to what the situation requires. Knowing what is just is easy, but knowing how to act in order to be just is the great achievement of the *phronimos*.²⁴ Similarly, pointing at a healthy specimen does not make you a medic. The knowledge of the *phronimos* is not detached from its content, nor is it separate from the state of character of its possessor. So, on the one hand, *phronesis* involves insight, not mere

perception; it is not merely general knowledge, but knowledge that explains the action in terms of the particulars of the situation. On the other hand, it is dynamic knowledge that relates to the person's character. It is not merely an accumulation of knowledge, but a learning from experience that brings to bear previous insights to future actions and shapes who the person becomes. As such, it is self-correcting and self-reflective, and it is not knowledge that merely directs action, but knowledge that develops and is protected and maintained by good character.

Phronesis is a rational/affective disposition (for Aristotle does not see reason and desires as opposites) that takes the general but indeterminate subject matter of the virtues and judges how it is to be applied in the particular case. The challenge is the particularity of the individual cases, and *phronetic* knowledge is the type of knowledge that makes sense of the Aristotelian *apeiron*—"the uncircumscribable range of potentially noticeable features and the consequently unlimited possibilities of action that inhere in each situation."²⁵

What we have, then, is an ability, a knowledge how, a skilled understanding of moral matters. How does one come to develop this ability? The first step in the process is the requirement for a good upbringing. The student of virtue must begin his journey developing good habits, in surroundings that encourage virtue. Famously, the student must act virtuously before he comes to understand the requirements of virtue.²⁶ There are different interpretations of this move from mindless, mechanical habituation to reasoning, understanding, and the internalization of the virtues. Some authors focus on habituation as a purely mechanical process;²⁷ others understand the process as a two-way development from non-rational conditioning of "the that" to rational understanding of "the because."²⁸ I tend to agree with authors who see a gradual, cohesive process of development of both emotions and reason, such that one illuminates, guides, and supports the other and neither reason nor habit dominates.²⁹ "The that" which develops through habituation is a particular way of seeing the world (i.e., as requiring a just, kind, or temperate response). The student of virtue must begin his education in an environment that sensitizes him to seeing the world in this way.

The analogy with perception is often used to account for this first step. The non-virtuous are "morally blind"; they do not perceive the relevant features of the situation that stand out in the "vision" of the virtuous. This analogy is helpful in that it captures the sense of revelation that is inaccessible to those who are "blind," but misleading in that it suggests an instantaneous and clear moment of awareness, akin to opening one's eyes. Hursthouse³⁰ points out that a situation that requires me to act may not be something that faces me (i.e., something whose importance I have to passively perceive), but something whose details I have to actively work out. For example, working out what the situation is really about may require detailed understanding of the motives and feelings of others. "She tends to exaggerate the intent of personal slights because she has low self-esteem" would allow a more insightful interpretation of her resultant actions and is a piece of knowledge that can only be arrived at if we know her, understand her motives, engage our empathy, are able to read her body language as well as listen to what she says, and so on. The student of virtue needs to develop certain technical skills in

order to understand when people are hurt, embarrassed, uncertain, and so forth, and how these feelings impact on what they say and do. Kupperman³¹ makes the same point when he criticizes the use of narrow philosophical examples like the trolley problem. Real life requires the understanding of complex situations—situations that are colored, for example, by a variety of commitments and projects one is engaged with, or situations that are affected, for example, by involving specific family members or friends, and so on. This kind of understanding of the complexity of the faculty of perception leads some authors to recommend the use of literature in teaching virtue, as poetry and fiction allow not only scope for the development of complex characters, but also engage our emotions in a way that facilitates our understanding of the detailed situations others find themselves in.³² Coming to see morality, then, is not akin to opening our eyes and seeing, but rather to developing vision over time; that is, having a functioning optic nerve is not sufficient, we need to develop the ability to focus, gradually become able to see across greater distances, coordinate the use of two eyes, develop the neural connections associated with what we are seeing, and so on.

Does this focus on literature as a source of inspiration and understanding of the process bring us back to the importance of the role model? In a sense, yes; in another, no. The discussions of exemplars in virtue ethics make two mistakes: they focus on the importance of persons rather than qualities, and they fail to understand the Aristotelian concept of emulation.³³ If the discussion focuses on the person, it is easy to lose touch with why this person is admirable in the first place. If we are not able to specify the qualities that bring this example to our attention, we cannot be of use to the student of virtue. Consider this example of virtue: Jadav “Molai” Payeng has spent over thirty years planting a 1,360-acre wildlife refuge forest.³⁴ If I want to follow his example, I don’t need to plant trees, or plant so *many* trees; what I should copy is his concern for animals and for the environment, which can be instantiated in an immeasurable number of ways that fit in with my life, my circumstances, and the context of my actions. He is not a moral exemplar because we should all be planting forests, but rather because we should all develop the quality that led him, in his particular context, to plant forests.

Modeling the qualities of others requires judgment, and this is evident in Aristotle’s understanding of emulation. Emulation requires that one feels distress at the absence in oneself of the desired goods in the exemplar. Already this means that emulation requires self-understanding, appreciation of one’s strengths and weaknesses, as well as the ability to identify the good in others. In addition, one needs to be attuned to react to this observation about one’s relative weakness with distress. This is a specific type of distress: it is not pain because others possess something worthwhile that we do not; rather, it is pain that *we* do not possess this quality. While envy is base and its object is to prevent others from having something, emulation is the characteristic of the student of virtue, as its object is to acquire for oneself a good evident in others.³⁵ Furthermore, emulation requires the effort to change oneself in order to acquire these goods. This is not a blind copying of a role model, but a targeted approach toward a specific goal, an approach that is informed by self-understanding and by the exercise of one’s judgment with respect to which qualities count as virtues.

Annas³⁶ develops an account of educating for virtue as a skill, according to which the student needs to, first, understand what qualities in the role model he should follow; second, exercise the skill in a self-directed way; and, third, strive to improve. The acquisition of virtue as a skill requires that the expert role model is able to articulate his reasons for action so that the student can use this explanation to truly understand what is being modelled. None of this process is mechanical or direct copying; the student is not expected to merely repeat actions, but to come to understand why what is being done is important, which may mean that the way he instantiates the same quality in other circumstances is entirely different from the model's actions. Virtue is not just a disposition to act reliably in certain ways that can be directly copied by others, but a disposition to act for certain reasons, and the student needs to come to see the force of these reasons and judge how they may operate in other circumstances. Bakhurst³⁷ makes the same point when he argues that the student of virtue has to join a culture of evaluation, joining a tradition of thinking, justifying, and reasoning. However, the student does this in a particular manner; that is, he embraces a set of attitudes that he has chosen by himself and for which he can be held accountable. Therefore, the process of emulation involves choice and responsibility for one's choices. Crucially, since emulation involves qualities of persons, we don't need a fully virtuous role model to learn from. We need not rely on the perfectly or ideally virtuous as examples; all we need are instances of virtue, for which the continent will do well enough.³⁸

Another approach in this area of research that tries to understand *phronesis* seeks inspiration in empirical research. Daniel Russell³⁹ draws a distinction between expertise in *phronesis* and expertise in other areas and looks at what we can learn from empirical studies of experts in other areas. Expert chess players play better not because they have better memorization skills or computational skills such that they can recall and eliminate a larger number of possible moves, but rather because they seem to have an ability to narrow their focus on moves that are of strategic relevance. Similarly, expert radiologists are quicker at identifying disease-relevant features in X-rays and ignoring irrelevant details. Russell draws a parallel from work in social-cognitive models of psychology about expertise in areas like chess playing and radiology to suggest that *phronesis* is a similar type of expert skill in morality. The moral expert is better at focusing on what is salient in the first place and is better able to draw on background information to process what he has seen in light of his goals. Like Dunne, noted earlier, Russell sees moral development as a two-way process; "... becoming generous involves learning both what helps based on the feedback one received and the very criteria for interpreting that feedback in the first place. If feedback worked that way with driving, we would have to learn how to stop a car while also having to learn what counts as 'stopping.'"⁴⁰

Russell⁴¹ also finds empirical evidence from the study of expertise to support the idea that skilled practitioners have access to the reasons why they do what they do, which as we saw earlier is crucial in many accounts of the acquisition of *phronesis*. Social-cognitive theory understands personality as a "mediating process," again a two-way process that involves both interpreting one's surroundings and adjusting one's behavior in response to them—experts are particularly good at doing this in their specialist field.

Experts not only have larger stores of knowledge, but are better able to access salient information. Their actions are goal directed; they do not rely on memorization, but learn strategically relevant groupings of information. They are also more skilled at distinctive strategies, such as defining problems and matching them to solutions, employing complex rules, and so on. Finally, they do all this with control. They don't act mindlessly, but their attention is attracted, employed, and concentrated exactly where it should be. Skill, like virtue, is oriented toward not just any standard, but toward the right standard, and what is perceived, how it is perceived, how it relates to existing information, how it is processed, and how it is applied are all informed by this standard specific to each skill.

Phronesis, then, is a type of know-how that is supported by a variety of abilities, from emotional maturity, to self-reflection, to an empathic understanding of what moves others, to an ability to see beyond the surface and understand the complexities of human behavior. These abilities develop gradually, over time, subject to favorable circumstances, but one by one they eventually form an impenetrable barrier, in Aristotle's words "[i]t is like a rout in battle stopped by first one man making a stand then another, until the original formation has been restored; the soul is so constituted as to be capable of this process."⁴² In the final section of this chapter I want to consider discussions of how we come to acquire such abilities.

IV. EDUCATION AND THE EMPIRICAL SCIENCES

In this final section, I bring together a number of authors who work on diverse ideas. What unites their work is an attempt to understand *phronetic* "know-how" in all the assorted contexts in which it manifests itself. I will concentrate on work that tries to bridge the gap between theoretical understandings of virtue ethics and practical pedagogy or psychology. I have chosen to focus on research on education because of its central importance to Aristotle—for Aristotle, in ethics "education is the main thing—indeed, it is the only thing."⁴³ I will also bring in a number of diverse authors engaging with empirical research, as this has been an extremely fruitful area of recent research. In both cases (i.e., education and the interplay between philosophy and psychology), I think that what unites the following authors is their interest in understanding not just wanting to be good, but how we actually become skilled at being good in particular contexts.

There have been some practical examples of attempts to bring Aristotelian theory to educational practice. One type of program introduces the idea of a school ethos through rules and principles that govern everyone's behavior and attitudes qua members of the school. The aim here is for students to internalize particular values in coming to see themselves as part of this institution and to then display these values in their behavior—if they come to see themselves as kind people, they will become kind people. Another

has tried to introduce the practical syllogism in the classroom as a way of forming more robust moral beliefs. It seems to me that discussing ethical concepts, engaging in philosophical debate, and forming arguments and objections are all useful skills. Hursthouse suggests that discussing concepts such as informed consent may make the relevant virtues easier to teach, and that coining terms such as “racism” and “sexism” or using catchy phrases like “don’t drink and drive” may help sensitize us to moral demands.⁴⁴ There has been one limited study suggesting that teaching in accordance with the Socratic *elenchus* may promote moral behavior,⁴⁵ but overall the impact of teaching ethics on ethical behavior has not been widely studied.⁴⁶ Neither approach—the school ethos or the teaching of the *elenchus*—has seen much success, and while there is a lot of interest in developing good characters, and a lot of rhetoric surrounding the social evils that will be avoided through doing so, there is little understanding of how to go about doing this. One project that conceivably has Aristotelian routes is the Philosophy 4 Children initiative, which uses collaborative philosophical inquiry methods to develop problem-solving skills based on an evaluation of evidence, an analysis of concepts, and generally an ability to construct persuasive arguments. It is a good example of how one can take the work of philosophers such as John Dewey and Matthew Lipman and make it practically relevant in the educational curricula of thousands of children. Early reports from this initiative are optimistic, suggesting that students exposed to philosophical thinking have better critical thinking skills, an improved ability to express themselves orally, greater emotional and social maturity, and the ability to endorse and express their own values.⁴⁷ It seems to me that elements in the work of other philosophers could also be appropriated for practical pedagogy recommendations, for example, the work of Karen Stohr on manners.

Karen Stohr writes persuasively on the importance of good manners as an aid to expressing one’s moral beliefs.⁴⁸ In an argument that should be familiar by now, Stohr points out that *wanting* to defuse an embarrassing situation, or comfort someone in pain, does not produce the knowledge of *how* to do this successfully. Manners are an essential part of the skill of *phronesis*, of knowing how to bring about what you want to achieve in the moral sphere. Stohr argues that it is possible to fail in either direction here; one can have perfect manners (i.e., powers of moral imagination that allow one to understand the nuances of interactions with others), but may not be interested in directing them toward the noble and the good. Or one can have the best intentions but be entirely unskilled in how to bring them about. She illustrates this point using two types of failure from literature, that of Mr. Wickham, the suave but vicious gentleman, and Mrs. Jennings, the well-meaning but embarrassing lady, both from *Pride and Prejudice*. Mr. Wickham appears successful on the surface; he understands other people’s emotions, he perceives their state of mind, he sees how to influence them in particular directions. However, his skills are employed toward the wrong aims; he is self-serving and vicious, so he uses his social graces to further this own ends. Mrs. Jennings’s aim, on the other hand, is good; she wants to help others, but she is incompetent in bringing this aim about. Her attempts to aid result in confusion and embarrassment for the subjects of her concern. Acquiring virtue requires both the right aim and competence in the skill of

bringing it about, although, as these two examples show, there are many interesting ways to fail.

Other philosophers take inspiration from the conclusions of studies in psychology to explain how we succeed in being moral and to help us understand factors that promote or hinder this goal. For example, if we look at how we learn other skills and under what conditions we are successful in that, we can understand under what conditions we are most likely to succeed in acquiring virtue. Empirical studies indicate that we learn skills better when the target area has sufficiently regular patterns and when we receive prompt and clear feedback on our actions. However, we learn about virtue in a “messy” environment, an environment that lacks regular patterns and may not provide feedback, so we need to employ techniques to mitigate this. Ideas for dealing with messy environments are suggested in a number of psychology experiments. Our behavior seems to be influenced by sometimes trivial situational factors. This, at first, appears concerning; however, other experiments show how the influence of situational factors can be negated if we become aware of it.⁴⁹ So if we want to withstand the pressure of authority in urging us to behave unethically, we should become aware of its very influence. If we become aware of how easily we can be manipulated by tiny, trivial features of a situation, such as the color of the experimenter’s coat, we become more able to withstand the influence of these features and better able to identify similarly trivial but influential features in other situations.

Another approach considers moral failures, so if an examination of expertise can help us understand what the virtuous does when he acts, an examination of the conditions under which we fail can help us avoid them or respond to them more successfully next time. Psychology can help us identify situations favorable to learning. In novel, formal and public contexts, with detailed and complete instructions, offering little or no choice, contexts of brief duration and with narrowly defined responses, manipulations are more influential on behavior. This means that if we want to manage learning, in such situations we should manage manipulations (i.e., we should make sure the student of virtue is exposed to positive manipulations and is aware of the influence of negative ones). On the other hand, in familiar, informal, and private contexts, with general or no instructions, offering considerable choice, of extensive duration and broadly defined responses, traits are more influential, so we should use these contexts to encourage the expression of virtuous traits.⁵⁰ Being reminded of morality also seems to be a crucial factor in influencing behavior; subjects tend to copy the actions of those around them who belong to their group, they tend to act morally when morality has just been made salient to them, and they tend to act morally when they identify themselves with their actions.⁵¹

Yet another approach is to examine the circumstances of failure. Lorraine Besser-Jones identifies three elements of moral character:

- (1) The moral beliefs to which one is evaluatively committed,
- (2) one’s dispositions, and
- (3) the nature and degree to which one’s moral commitments influence one’s behavioral dispositions.

She interprets some of the empirical evidence of surprising vicious behavior as indicating a gap between one's moral beliefs and one's dispositions to act. While many moral philosophers focus on how to correct the wrong moral beliefs, for Besser-Jones a more useful task would be to question why those who have the right beliefs fail to act on them. The process of closing the gap between beliefs and dispositions is a complex one, and much can go wrong between thought and action. By refocusing attention on how we fail, we may learn something useful about the type of "know-how" involved in *phronesis*; Besser-Jones discusses inter-goal conflict and goal imprecision, but I suspect there are many more phenomena that should be considered, perhaps with the help of evidence from the empirical sciences, to shed light on the instances where the continent fall into incontinence. Doing so might shed light on what the virtuous can do which the continent fail at.

I think that the interplay between philosophy and psychology is a very promising area of research for virtue ethics. It is already helping us understand the concept of expertise and highlighting the many different ways we can go wrong in turning our beliefs into action, but this is just the tip of the iceberg, and much more can be gained by further research in this area. In this section I have given a very brief overview of philosophers working on a variety of different topics. What unites them is an attempt to elucidate *phronetic* "know-how." What the *phronimos* knows is detailed, context-sensitive, relative to the agent, and subject to change as appropriate—as a result, we cannot have a comprehensive account of this knowledge. What we can investigate, which these authors are doing, is separate, smaller aspects of *phronetic* knowledge. Thus our discussion has veered from the importance of learning good manners as an expression of our moral beliefs to the significance of learning environments, whether this concerns conditions that are favorable to beginners or how expertise emerges from complexity, to the value of managed failure and how to manage these experiences of failure, to the general concern with how continent agents fall into incontinence, which may, by contrast, illuminate what the virtuous do. If the discussion has spread over a wide variety of phenomena we should not be surprised, as our subject matter is "know-how" concerning the *apeiron*.

V. CONCLUSION

This chapter has taken the question of how we acquire virtue and has reinterpreted it by asking how we acquire *phronesis*. We saw how a direct appeal to the virtuous agent is not particularly illuminating when we want to know how to act in complex, variable, and agent-relative situations. Instead of looking at the person, we should look at what he does (i.e., he judges wisely). The virtuous person is able to judge wisely because she possesses the intellectual virtue of *phronesis*. Key to acquiring virtue, then, is to understand *phronesis*. We considered a number of approaches to this task. We saw how philosophers analyze the concept of "skill" and compare it to *phronesis*, so that practical wisdom becomes a kind of applied expertise in morality. We also saw how work from the

empirical sciences, such as analyzing other skills, sheds light on *how* the virtuous person does what she does. Finally, we considered the diverse work of a number of philosophers who try to enrich the content of *phronetic* knowledge as a “know-how” ability by appeal to experiments in practical pedagogy and evidence from the empirical sciences.⁵²

NOTES

1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1103b28–30.
2. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1106b35–1107a3, my translation.
3. I have in mind here Rosalind Hursthouse, “Virtue Theory and Abortion,” in *Virtue Ethics*, edited by R. Crisp and M. Slote (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 217–238, but see also J. Oakley, “Varieties of Virtue Ethics,” *Ratio* 9 (1996): 129, and Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), chap. 1.
4. See, for example, Robert Louden, “On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21 (1984): 227–236.
5. This influential interpretation of the three theories is developed by Hursthouse, “Virtue Theory and Abortion.”
6. See, for example, R. V. Bullough, “Ethical and Moral Matters in Teaching and Teacher Education,” *Teaching and Teacher Education* 27(1) (2011): 21–28, a review of a number of articles making this point.
7. To borrow a phrase from Julia Annas, “Being Virtuous and doing the Right Thing,” in *Ethical Theory: An Anthology*, edited by R. Shafer-Landau (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 680.
8. See Annas, “Being Virtuous and Doing the Right Thing,” 680; and Daniel C. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), chap. 2.
9. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, 106.
10. See, for example, Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 64–65.
11. Louden, “On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics,” 229.
12. Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 62ff; J. M. Doris, *Lack of Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 150, presents similar concerns and worries that such moves make virtue ethics removed from psychological reality.
13. Doris, *Lack of Character*, 121–125, and J. M. Doris and S. P. Stich, “As a Matter of Fact: Empirical Perspectives on Ethics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy*, edited by F. Jackson and M. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 121.
14. John McDowell, “Virtue and Reason,” *The Monist* 62(3) (1979): 331–350.
15. McDowell, “Virtue and Reason.”
16. Rosalind Hursthouse, “What Does the Aristotelian *Phronimos* Know?” in *Perfecting Virtue*, edited by L. Jost and J. Wuerth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 38–57.
17. Ioannis Vasilou, “The Role of Good Upbringing in Aristotle’s Ethics,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 56(4) (1996): 778–781.
18. J. O. Urmson, *Aristotle’s Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 81–83.
19. Joseph Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).
20. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097b25–30.

21. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1100b35ff.
22. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a31–b2.
23. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1106b8–16.
24. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1137a9–17.
25. Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground*, 312.
26. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103b1–3.
27. Howard J. Curzer, “Aristotle’s Painful Path to Virtue,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 40 (2002): 141–162.
28. Myles F. Burnyeat, “Aristotle on Learning to Be Good,” in Amelie O. Rorty, *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 69–92.
29. Nancy Sherman, *The Fabric of Character* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); and Vasilou, “The Role of Good Upbringing in Aristotle’s Ethics.”
30. Rosalind Hursthouse, “Practical Wisdom,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 106 (2006): 285–309.
31. J. J. Kupperman, “The Ethics of Style and Attitude,” in *Moral Cultivation*, edited by B. K. Wilburn (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 13–28.
32. David Carr, “Literature, Arts and the Education of Virtuous Emotion,” in *The Handbook of Virtue Ethics*, edited by Stan van Hooft (Durham, NC: Acumen, 2014), 451–460.
33. Both points are developed in detail in K. Kristjánsson, *Aristotle, Emotions and Education* (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2007).
34. Stephen Messenger, “Lone Indian Man Plants 1,360 Acre Forest.”
35. Aristotle discusses emulation in the *Rhetoric*; for this definition, see 1399a35–1388b1. One of the few authors to discuss the Aristotelian concept of emulation is Kristjánsson, *Aristotle, Emotions and Education*, 102–108.
36. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, chap. 3.
37. D. Bakhurst, “Particularism and Moral Education,” *Philosophical Explorations* 8(3) (2005): 265–279.
38. I also believe we can learn as much from the incontinent and the vicious, as the way others go wrong can be illuminating for our understanding of what is right, but it is not possible to develop this thought further here.
39. Daniel C. Russell, “Aristotle on Cultivating Virtue,” in *Cultivating Virtue*, edited by Nancy E. Snow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 17–48.
40. Russell, “Aristotle on Cultivating Virtue,” 39.
41. Daniel C. Russell, “From Personality to Character to Virtue,” in *Current Controversies in Virtue Theory*, edited by M. Alfano (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 82–106.
42. Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, translated by E. S. Bouchier (Oxford: Blackwell, 1901), 2.19.100a12–14.
43. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103b24.
44. Hursthouse, “What Does the Aristotelian *Phronimos* Know?”
45. A. Colby et al., “Secondary School Moral Discussion Programmes Led by Social Studies Teachers,” *Journal of Moral Education* 6(2) (1977): 90–111; see also M. Gregory, “Ethics Education as Philosophical Practice,” *Teaching Ethics* 15(1) (2015): 19–34.
46. The lack of information may be partly due to how the question is being asked. Curzer et al. are concerned with developing better assessment tests, which will allow us to better understand the impact of teaching ethics on character formation. H. J. Curzer, S. Sattler, D. G. DuPree, K. R. Smith-Genthos, “Do Ethics Classes Teach Ethics?” *Theory and Research in Education* 12(3) (2014): 366–382.

47. S. Millett and A. Tapper, "Benefits of Collaborative Philosophical Inquiry in Schools," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 44(5) (2012): 546–567.
48. K. Stohr, "Manners, Morals and Practical Wisdom," in *Values and Virtues*, edited by T. Chappell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 189–211.
49. See Christian B. Miller, "Russell on Acquiring Virtue," in *Current Controversies in Virtue Theory*, edited by M. Alfano (New York: Routledge, 2015), 106–122; and Nafsika Athanassoulis, "The Psychology of Virtue Education," in *From Psychology to Virtue*, edited by A. Masala and J. Webber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 207–228.
50. All from Athanassoulis, "The Psychology of Virtue Education."
51. More on all this in Athanassoulis, "The Psychology of Virtue Education."
52. I am very grateful to Richard Hamilton and Nancy Snow for constructive comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

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CHAPTER 22

PUTTING IDEALS IN THEIR PLACE

DANIEL C. RUSSELL

THE Onion offers the following advice on “How to Conquer a Fear of Public Speaking”:

- (1) Fill the crowd with a few familiar faces who will lie to you about how it went.
- (2) Never start a speech without tossing a few fun-size candy bars into the audience first to get them on your side.
- (3) Close your eyes and breathe deeply before each word during your speech.
- (4) Try to imagine everyone in the audience dead.
- (5) Take solace in knowing that no matter how your speech goes, it will be forgotten immediately upon its conclusion.¹

Admittedly, none of this is *good* advice, but it is advice of broadly the right *sort*—at least it doesn’t begin with the platitude that, ideally, one would not have a fear of public speaking to conquer in the first place. It begins with the problem, not with setting the problem aside. Nor does it take the anxious speaker on a detour through what the ideal speaker would do, only to arrive at what should have been recognizable already as a pretty obvious improvement. And yet when we philosophers think about improvement in character, we often do frame our thinking with ideals of good character, like Aristotle’s ideal of “the person of practical intelligence” (the *phronimos*), or more simply, “the virtuous person.” Is there any good reason for that? What use, if any, are ideals for understanding what the virtues of character are?

Two responses suggest themselves. One is that aspiration toward an ideal is beside the point. The point of understanding the virtues, as Aristotle himself observes, is to do better, so we want to know what excellences might be possible for humans, not for the sorts of creatures humans can’t be.² Furthermore, since our time, attention, and energy are scarce, wisdom works at the margin, looking for the best use of the next available block of such scarce, precious resources as, especially, one’s time, attention, and energy. To think of doing better, or anything else, as a matter of constantly striving for an ideal,

regardless of the costs at the margin—including the cost of forgone opportunities to do other things also worth doing—overlooks this basic fact about human wisdom, so that can't be what virtue is in humans. And anyway, doing better is a response to a problem, and that problem is not falling short of an ideal but dismay at one's own shortcomings. Ours is not so much a *flight to* an ideal as a *flight from* what we refuse to accept.³ So what we really need to know is how it is feasible for humans to do better, given our human limitations, our finite resources, and our inevitable shortcomings.⁴

The other response, though, is that there is no doing without ideals. If we mean to do better, then at some point we will need to know more precisely in which direction “better” lies. But this is not always obvious, and in any case philosophy contributes to our understanding of ourselves and our world through reflection even on those things we have so far uncritically taken to be obvious. For these reasons, we need a way to isolate in thought those attributes that are strengths and successes, unobscured by weaknesses and shortcomings. Of course, weaknesses and shortcomings are inevitable, but we cannot build them into our understanding of “better” without promoting them to excellences. Shortcomings have to count as shortcomings, so we need a model of “better” that is free of our shortcomings. And that's just what ideals give us.

So, which is it? The answer, I think, is both: the excellences we aim to understand must be non-ideal, and yet we cannot understand excellences without ideals. Our aim is to improve, starting where we have to start, rather than daydreaming about aspiration. The role for ideals is to illuminate what changes in character would count as real improvements, what would be truly aspirational. What we want to know is to what improvements we might aspire, from where we actually have to start and along the paths that are actually available to us.

So, in thinking about how human character improves, the first question I want to raise is whether and what kind of character development is *psychologically feasible* for us: Where do human beings have to start, and what paths of development are available to creatures like us (Part I)? And second, which of the possible directions for development that human psychology makes possible would count as genuinely *getting better*? What does it make sense for creatures like us to aspire to, given what is feasible for us (section II)? In response to these two questions, I argue that ideals play the important role of revealing what counts as getting better in character. In short, ideals do the crucial work of showing the direction in which “better” lies.

One particularly important upshot of this response, though, is that getting better involves working from two directions at once, both from the direction of what is humanly feasible and from the direction of what is genuinely aspirational. Part of being human is the aspiration to excel, and so “what is humanly feasible” cannot be understood as static, as what one is comfortably confident one is already capable of. What is humanly feasible is something dynamic, dependent in no small part on what we can find worth aspiring to (section III).

In short, the aspiration to improve in character must be bounded by psychological feasibility, understanding the mechanisms by which humans ever manage to get better at anything, beginning from where they actually have to begin, and then extending

that understanding to getting better in character more specifically. Where ideals help is in our efforts to focus thought more precisely on what genuinely counts as better. Aspiration bounded by feasibility isn't a recipe for complacency, though, because human feasibility is not entirely independent of human aspiration.

My approach throughout is to develop a number of key insights from Aristotle on the virtues, the cultivation of the virtues, and acting virtuously. In technical parlance, the approach I outline here is a neo-Aristotelian non-ideal virtue theory, so by implication I am also arguing that such a mongrel-sounding thing is actually possible. More than that, I think that a non-ideal virtue theory is *most* in the spirit of Aristotle's own thinking about the virtuous person.

I. WHAT PATHS ARE AVAILABLE?

i. A Path-Dependent Approach to the Virtues

Anything we say about how people come to do better will be invested in both a normative philosophical question about what counts as doing *better*, and a descriptive psychological question about how people develop—how they *come* to do better.⁵ There is therefore a division of labor between psychologists, who ask, “What paths are available for people to change and develop?” and philosophers, who ask, “What changes and developments count as improvements?” But besides that division of labor, there is also the crucial matter of its *sequence*. Ideal or *path-independent* theory puts philosophical labor first, constructing a determinate ideal of moral maturity and then asking, “How do we get there from here?” The problem is that since we don't yet know the available paths, the psychologist may well answer with the flat reply, “We don't get there from here.” By contrast, non-ideal theory is *path-dependent*, because it works in the opposite direction, asking “To what improvements might people aspire, *given* the paths that are actually available?”

So, what paths are available for improving? That is the question that opens Aristotle's treatise on the nature of virtue, in the second book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE*). And Aristotle begins with the disarmingly simple observation that acquiring a virtue is one instance of something people do all the time: getting better at doing things through practice and training, as when people acquire skills like building or playing an instrument.⁶

Aristotle thinks that the *nature* of virtue is something mundane—part of the everyday world, like skill. A virtue (*aretē*) in the generic sense is a long-lasting attribute by which a living being is good as the kind of being it is.⁷ Virtues of character, specifically, are long-lasting attributes of reasoning and emotion⁸ that are practical, like skills, both in being concerned with things we can change through action⁹ and in being acquired through practice.¹⁰ Now, Aristotle doesn't think that virtues *are* skills, because he thinks skills are concerned with making things,¹¹ and those artifacts, unlike actions, can be assessed

independently of the process that brings them about.¹² But the similarity with skill suits Aristotle's idea that virtue is also about doing things well—doing well at living one's life—and that attributes that people acquire in learning to do things well are among the things there are in the world.

Aristotle also thinks that the *process* of acquiring a virtue is mundane, and is again like acquiring a skill. Aristotle poses a paradox: One acquires a virtue, like fairness, by doing fair things, but how can doing such actions precede the *capacity* for doing such actions? His response is that it happens all the time, because we learn to play an instrument or write a sentence in an expert way by first playing or writing in a beginner's way.¹³ So here we see Aristotle explicitly considering a question about becoming virtuous, and answering by grouping that process with other everyday ways in which we get better at doing things by becoming more skillful at them. Good character, like skill, is the result of repeated actions that have the appropriate focus and guidance.¹⁴

Aristotle also thinks that *what one learns to do* in acquiring a virtue is mundane, and again is like what skilled people can do. Virtue and skill are alike because they are both goal-oriented attributes. For one thing, each involves reading one's surroundings and extracting information for deciding what it would be best to do toward one's goal, in one's actual situation.¹⁵ For another, each involves making the crucial move from an indeterminate goal—like helping a friend, or fixing a wall—to a determinate specification of what accomplishing that goal would actually look like, here and now.¹⁶ And each requires ordinary executive capacities for achieving that determinate goal through effective means.¹⁷ Virtue and skill are both prescriptive about what to do,¹⁸ finding the mean while avoiding both “too much” and “too little.”¹⁹

For Aristotle, the psychological paths for moral improvement are the very same paths that people exploit in acquiring skills.²⁰ His approach is path-dependent, beginning with what we observe about “getting better” in general, and extending that insight to getting better at living our lives in particular.²¹ And that suggests a line of research into moral development that explores this apparent isomorphism between virtue and skill.²² But the question is, how promising would such a line be?

ii. Is There Such a Thing as Character?

Every contention about virtue is empirically risky.²³ Personality comprises psychological attributes that account for how people behave, and when those attributes are excellences, we call them *virtues*. The risk is that our best understanding of human behavior might give us no reason to believe in virtues, character, or even personality in the first place.

In fact, at one point in the past century that risk seemed to be the reality. Whatever personality is, it must be both *stable*, generating similar behaviors in similar situations at different times, and *consistent*, generating similar behaviors across different but relevant situations. However, by the 1970s poor evidence for consistency led psychologists to question the very idea of personality,²⁴ and in the first decade of the 2000s several

philosophers declared that since personality is at best a hodgepodge and at worst a fiction, no better could be said of character.²⁵

But both reactions were hasty, because even while one conception of consistency was falling away, another was taking its place. The question unexplored in most of twentieth-century personality psychology was just what makes situations and behaviors “similar” or “different.” Suppose Corey sees a coin on a table in an empty room, and leaves it there; Trevor enters the same empty room later, but pockets the coin. Are these opposite behaviors? Are the situations the same? Personality psychologists assumed the answer to both questions was yes: Corey acts honestly in the same situation in which Trevor acts dishonestly. But that assumption ignores how Corey and Trevor classify the situation and their behaviors. Maybe Corey saw pocketing a lost coin as stealing, but Trevor saw it merely as good luck. People *construe* situations and assign meaning to them, and their patterns of construing situations and adjusting their behaviors to them are central to their personalities.²⁶ Once psychologists began looking for consistency in those patterns, the evidence for consistency put personality back in the game.²⁷

What is more, this way of thinking about personality also puts *character* back in the game²⁸—and character as Aristotle thinks of it, because Aristotle too thinks of stability and consistency not from the observer’s perspective, but in terms of how subjects construe situations and adjust their actions to them.²⁹ First of all, Aristotle believes we must understand a subject’s inner states in order to understand his actions in a way that manifests his character, since actions that all look the same to an observer can come from very different sorts of character. There may be few observable differences between two persons who each give open-handedly on many occasions; but which of them counts as generous, rather than profligate, depends on their emotions and on their practical reasoning, whether they give the right amount to the right people, for the right reasons, and at the right time.³⁰ Stereotypically “generous” actions are not *sufficient* evidence of generous character. They’re not *necessary* evidence either: the person who gives less or on fewer occasions may nonetheless be the one with the virtue of generosity, if his giving comes from the right emotions and the right practical reasoning about when it is appropriate and effective to give.³¹ And second, Aristotle also believes that we must understand how a subject construes his situation in order to understand the inner states from which he acts: his attitudes about other persons, his relation to them, and their intentions, as well as such situational features as the presence of onlookers.³²

The inner states that differentiate actions with respect to character are those by which persons construe situations and adjust their actions to those situations so construed. So for Aristotle, we must understand how someone construes his situation in order to understand his actions in a way that manifests his character. Aristotle was on the right side of the debate over the basis of consistency, long before there was a debate to be had.

A path-dependent approach to the virtues takes the improvement of character to be an available path for moral development, and the “situationist critique” of the early 2000s was an attempt to show that there is no evidence that such a path is available, contrary to “traditional” views of character. But that critique assumed that consistency across situations would have to be the consistency of behaviors from an observer’s point

of view—ironically, the very conception of consistency that not just social psychology but even Aristotle had rejected. The critique was wrong about personality, wrong about character, and wrong about the tradition.

iii. Is Character like Skill?

But although that “situationist” moment has passed, there is no guarantee that the consistency of personality and character will be the *kind* of consistency that *good* character has to have.³³ To act from virtue is to respond to good reasons for acting, and for acting at a certain time, in a certain manner, and so on.³⁴ But the experimental evidence suggests that human behavior is surprisingly susceptible to situational variables that have nothing to do with reasons at all, such as being hurried, being alone or among strangers, and even what one happens to hear or smell.³⁵ Behavior may have less to do with responding to reasons than we think it does—and perhaps less than the virtues would require.³⁶ In that case, trying to improve our character might not be a feasible path to moral improvement *even if* there is such a thing as character.

But the problem with this line of thought is that it proves too much: if the very idea of responding to reasons undermines the very idea of the virtues, then it must also undermine the very idea of skill. Skill, no less than virtue, involves responding to reasons to do some things and not others,³⁷ and yet people do acquire the skills of driving a car, building a wall, playing chess, diagnosing a patient. When it comes to skill, we know already that developing personal excellence in responsiveness to reasons to act is a path for improvement that human psychology makes available.

What’s more, the paths available for acquiring a skill are just the basic mechanisms of personality: mechanisms for construing situations, and mechanisms for adjusting behaviors to situations so construed. We construe our experiences by attaching meaning to things that happen, things people do, and their intentions in doing them, and by discerning how these situations afford opportunities to advance goals that we care about. And we adjust our behaviors through discerning both what advancing our goals would actually look like in concrete situations and what would be the most effective means for doing so.³⁸ These mechanisms account for the human capacity to be consistent by one’s own standard, for better or worse. But to learn a skill is to turn consistency with *some* standard into consistency with an *excellent* standard, the standard of the skill in question. Skill is a matter of intelligently defining a goal, extracting information from one’s surroundings that is relevant to that goal, and perceiving opportunities for advancing that goal; that is, skill makes intelligent use of the basic mechanisms for construing experience. Skill is also a matter of making effective use of mechanisms for adjusting one’s actions to those opportunities.³⁹ Skill is how creatures who act by such mechanisms become not just consistent but consistently excellent, getting better at responding to reasons.

The nature of human psychology therefore makes the development of personal excellence our greatest hope of improving when it comes to skill. And I propose that *the same*

psychological paths that we exploit in order to become more skilled are the same ones we exploit in order to become more virtuous. As Aristotle saw, this is again a very natural way to think about the virtues. In fact, Aristotle's very first observation in his treatise on the virtues is that we acquire a virtue through focused practice, in just the way that we acquire a skill.⁴⁰ To have a virtue, like having a skill, is to have a certain standing goal and to be adept at discerning what it would take to realize that goal.⁴¹ That discernment involves capacities for interpreting one's situation from multiple perspectives and adjusting one's action so as to realize one's goal in that situation.⁴² Like skill, virtue interprets what is going on around one and intelligently adapts to it, as an archer adjusts his aim at a target.⁴³

Still, that said, if virtue develops along the same paths as skill, then that same fact also reveals how great a challenge, how great an *accomplishment* a virtue really is. In order for the effort to learn a skill to be effective in producing that skill, there must be sufficiently predictable regularities to learn in the first place, and then there must be adequate feedback to learn those regularities through practice.⁴⁴ For example, when learning to drive a car, depressing the brake pedal produces highly regular results, with feedback that is both obvious and immediate. But the environment for learning to be more generous isn't "clean" in either of these ways. A cash-strapped friend turns up asking for money; there is no neat if-then regularity as to how it would be generous to respond, since generosity is an excellence and not merely a disposition to do stereotypically open-handed things, which don't always help and can even make things worse. Suppose you give the money and your friend goes away satisfied; but this isn't a clear indication that you really helped your friend, because you may not have made your friend any better off in the greater scheme of things. Even if virtue develops along the same paths as skill, its development can only be described as messy.

However, we have to remember that this messiness is really not a *contrast* between virtue and skill.⁴⁵ Messiness is normal. Learning to be a good poet, painter, builder, or philosopher involves not just learning how to make a good poem, painting, building, or argument, but also learning at the very same time what it means for a poem, painting, building, or argument to be a good one in the first place. Neat regularities are few, and unambiguous feedback rare; in fact, it is that very messiness that makes it an achievement of skill to be able to detect the relevant patterns and overlook the limitless distractions that also lie in the messy environment.

Furthermore, the case of skill *also* reveals psychological paths available for acquiring *second-order* skills by which to acquire *other, first-order* skills in messy environments: these include the capacities for taking guidance from other people, for the habit of being critical of one's initial reactions, for learning what to ignore, and for practice that allocates the scarce resource of attention where it is needed most.⁴⁶ The barriers to acquiring a virtue are not different in kind from the barriers to learning most complex skills, and with repeated and focused practice we do learn to recognize and overcome these barriers.

A path-dependent approach to the virtues sees the limitations of our psychology not as a disheartening obstacle to “getting there from here” but as an illuminating indication of just where we have to start in trying to improve along whatever paths might be available to us (subsection I.i). Despite earlier confusions, there is good reason to believe not only that humans are consistent in personality and character (subsection I.ii), but also that they possess general capacities for converting personal consistency into consistent excellence, as we see in the case of skill (subsection I.iii). So I think there is hope that a path-dependent account of the virtues will be a promising approach for research into moral development. But notice that I speak of hope, not conclusive certainty. It’s too soon to say.⁴⁷

II. WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO GET BETTER?

A path-dependent approach to the virtues is aspirational, but genuine aspiration has to be both *realistic* about what’s possible and *aspirational* within what’s realistically possible. Given the available paths for character development, what might humans who develop along those paths aspire to? What developments would count as real improvements?

It is here that ideals will have their uses for helping us grasp the nature of improvement, but it is important to understand *what kind* of ideals will be most useful for that purpose, for as Aristotle might have put it, “ideal” is said in many ways.⁴⁸ Often by “ideal” we mean a *perfect specimen*, or how something would be if it were exactly as it should be. An ideal may also be an *object of aspiration*, the sort of ideal we should strive to emulate, to whatever extent we can. But an ideal may also be an *abstract model* that helps us focus our thoughts. For example, an ideal pendulum—frictionless, and free of air resistance and other exogenous forces—is an abstract model of a pendulum that focuses thought on gravity by distinguishing its influence on the pendulum’s motion from that of other forces. The ideal pendulum is not, of course, meant to show what a pendulum would be like if it were just as a pendulum should be (“The pendulum in the clock on the mantelpiece is deficient—it’s surrounded by air!”), or what we should strive to make pendula as like as possible (“We should hermetically seal the mantelpiece and the clock along with it!”). Rather, ideal models serve the function of isolating something worth seeing on its own, apart from other phenomena from which it may never be separated in fact.

It is in this sense of an abstract model, and not in the other two senses, that I think we should understand ideals like “the virtuous person.”⁴⁹ In order to understand how people get better, we need a way to focus our thought on what genuinely counts as better, but we don’t need to know what would be “perfect” in order to know what would be “better.”⁵⁰ And while an abstract model is a guide for the aspiring, it guides not as a destination for us to strive for, but rather as a star by which we might navigate. Ideals of

virtue help us focus our thought when we need to understand more clearly the direction in which “better” lies.

Idealized models have value because real-world factors sometimes distract our thought, as friction distracts us from the influence of gravity. But of course when a real-world factor is a distraction depends on what we are trying to understand. Friction is a distraction from the mechanics of a pendulum, but it is precisely not a distraction from the mechanics of brakes. Likewise, the fact that our psychological resources have the particular constraints and limitations they do, and that we have certain inevitable shortcomings, is not a distraction when we think about how people change and develop—how they *get* better—because there our resources, shortcomings, and limitations have to be the focus, since they are where we have to start. But those limitations and shortcomings are a distraction when we think about what *counts* as “better.” In particular, three ideals will be particularly useful for focusing our thought on what it means for character to improve: an ideal of a completely fulfilled human being, an ideal of a completely wise decision-maker (subsection II.i), and an ideal of a completely virtuous person (subsection II.i).

i. Where “Better” Lies: What Attributes Are Virtues?

To ask what attributes are virtues is to ask what attributes are excellences in a human being, and Aristotle answers that question first by exploring the connection between excellence and human well-being, or what he calls *eudaimonia*.⁵¹ Famously, Aristotle says that the virtues are necessary for human well-being; in fact, virtuous activity is the activity that human well-being chiefly consists in.⁵² Now, chances are that we immediately think of virtuous activity as a distinct class of activities—“good deeds”—and then Aristotle’s view of well-being looks outrageous: if anything, virtuous activity *competes* with the activities that well-being consists in. But this is to get things backward. For Aristotle, virtuous activity is just activity done in accordance with right reason and sound emotion—that is, in accordance with the virtues.⁵³ Virtues are those attributes of practical reason and emotion, whatever they turn out to be, that humans need for the sake of the well-being that is characteristic of our kind.

So what *do* we need for the sake of human well-being? Aristotle begins by arguing both that there is some one end that we do everything for the sake of and that well-being is that one end.⁵⁴ To do something for a reason, he observes, is to do it for the sake of some end (e.g., making bridles for the sake of equipping the cavalry), and that end is connected to further ends (equipping a cavalry for the sake of defending the city). When it comes to the ends in which we invest our lives, Aristotle observes that ultimately our end is to live a good life—to live well and fare well—and that is the same thing as *eudaimonia*.⁵⁵ However, that doesn’t say very much about *just* what *eudaimonia* is, precisely because *eudaimonia* is broad enough to be what everyone agrees is the greatest good in life even though everyone *disagrees* about just what the greatest good is.⁵⁶ So, how might

we say what human well-being is, without either being platitudinous or else just adding yet another dissenting opinion to the fray?⁵⁷

Aristotle's approach is ingenious. Most people identify the good life with some walk of life, such as a life focused on wealth or prestige.⁵⁸ By contrast, Aristotle has little to say about *what* life one should live, and for good reason: by the time one reflects on one's life, it has already taken a lot of shape, through relationships with family, friends, and a broader community.⁵⁹ Instead, he focuses on well-being as *a way of living* a life that fits the one living it. In particular, that way of living is just one that makes us fully human: the characteristic human way of living is a *rational* way, rational in both our *intelligent* capacity to shape our own lives and our *affective* capacity to be shaped by our intelligent capacity.⁶⁰ Well-being is any life of one's choosing, *provided* one lives it with practical intelligence and sound emotion.⁶¹ And the personal attributes by which one lives with practical intelligence and sound emotion are what Aristotle means by *virtues*, the excellences of human character.

So, for Aristotle, it is the ideal of living well in a complete human life that casts light on what it would be for an attribute to be one of our excellences—to be a *virtue* in the sort of creature we are.⁶² In order to understand what counts as “getting better” for creatures like us, Aristotle constructs an ideal of human fulfillment in the defining human capacity for practical rationality in both deliberation and emotion.⁶³ But what we don't find in Aristotle is any suggestion that living well involves aspiring to an idealized specimen. Aristotle's question is not “How do we get there from here?” but “In what direction does ‘getting better’ lie?” For Aristotle, the ideal of well-being serves to point us in the general direction of excellence in the human capacity for practical rationality.

A second ideal points us in several more particular directions as well, toward the various excellences that humans need to live their lives well. This is the familiar ideal of acting at the right time, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right reasons, and in the right way, as the person of practical intelligence would act.⁶⁴ The second ideal, then, is an ideal of doing well in choice and emotion.⁶⁵ So, since human life is social, a life of human fulfillment requires such attributes as generosity,⁶⁶ civility,⁶⁷ friendliness,⁶⁸ honesty,⁶⁹ and even good wit,⁷⁰ as well as fairness.⁷¹ A fulfilling human life also requires a realistic appreciation of oneself, both one's achievements⁷² and one's shortcomings.⁷³ Humans have goals, so a fulfilling life also requires the ability to stand by one's goals despite fear⁷⁴ and temptation.⁷⁵ And of course, in all of these things one needs to deliberate well⁷⁶ about how to be a good friend, how to deal with successes and shortcomings, what fears and desires are worth resisting, and what counts as generous.

The virtues are those attributes that make it possible to live a rich and fulfilling life of a characteristically human sort. The ideal of human fulfillment and *eudaimonia* points us in the general direction of human excellence in reason and emotion, and the ideal of acting as the practically intelligent person acts points us in the direction of the specific attributes that are excellences in us. It is by those ideals that we know what counts as excellence and which attributes are excellences. It is by those ideals that we know in what direction “better” lies.

ii. Where “Better” Lies: What Changes Count as Improvements?

Becoming generous counts as improvement, but what counts as becoming generous?⁷⁷ “Better” lies in the direction of generosity, but we also need to know the more precise direction in which generosity lies. Here, for the third time, Aristotle relies on an ideal: to have any virtue is to have every virtue, an ideal known as the reciprocity of the virtues.⁷⁸

As startling as that ideal is, I think it helps focus our thought on an important insight about how the virtues develop. I might change so as to be more giving, but still not act with excellence: I may be giving freely when it doesn’t help, or even hurts, the people I intend to benefit; or I may be giving freely of something that actually belongs to someone else. It’s not that I’m becoming more generous but no more helpful, or more generous but less just. It’s that *I’m not becoming more generous either*. Of course, we can use the word “generous” to describe someone who acts in stereotypically open-handed ways,⁷⁹ but the issue is not the word but the *attribute* of generosity. Generosity is an excellence of human practical rationality, so no matter what we call the attribute underlying unwise or unjust forms of open-handedness, that attribute is not an excellence, so it is not the *virtue* of generosity. In order for my change to count as *improvement* in character, my open-handedness must be increasingly intelligent, as well as increasingly sensitive to considerations that bear on other virtues, like fairness, temperance, and being a good friend. The generosity that is an excellence aims not at giving a lot or on many occasions, but at giving what, when, to whom, and in the way it is excellent to give.⁸⁰

One moral of this story is that every virtue, because it is an excellence, requires practical intelligence,⁸¹ and requires it in two roles. One role for practical intelligence is to determine what would count as realizing the goals of a given virtue. For instance, to have the virtue of generosity is both to have the standing goal of helping others through giving and to be adept at determining how to advance that goal,⁸² which requires deliberation.⁸³ We deliberate about ways and means,⁸⁴ but before that we have to determine just what would *count* as helping, here and now, because so far that goal is indeterminate. It is because of virtue that one has the right goal, and it is because of practical intelligence that one makes the right choices for the sake of that goal, guided by an understanding of what really does benefit human beings.⁸⁵ So the first role for practical intelligence is *to make the goals of the virtues determinate*, specifying what would count as realizing a virtuous goal in a way that would genuinely do good. My willingness to help isn’t the virtue of generosity unless I grasp what counts as helping.

But, second, my willingness to help also doesn’t count as generosity if my open-handedness is also unjust, again because the virtue of generosity is an excellence. So in order for practical intelligence to make the goal of a virtue determinate *in a way that is fully excellent*, it must specify those goals not merely one at a time, but in concert with the various goals and constraints of the other virtues as well.⁸⁶

From all these considerations, it’s clear what follows: if a virtue that is a real excellence requires practical intelligence, and if practical intelligence makes it excellent by

connecting it with the other virtues, then a virtue that is a real excellence must be packaged with the other virtues.⁸⁷ So, to understand what is involved in getting better in *any* way, Aristotle constructs an ideal of a person who is better in *every* way. That ideal is the reciprocity of the virtues: to have any virtue is to have the other virtues too.

Now, Aristotle's ideal is *not* that in order to count as generous, I would have to be *perfectly* generous. Aristotle appreciates that some things wide of the "mean" might still be the best that imperfect people should ever try to achieve.⁸⁸ Virtue, like skill, is needed precisely because doing well is hard, and learning to do well, like learning a language or a musical instrument,⁸⁹ is lengthy and gradual. Getting better doesn't mean being perfect. The ideal is rather that in order to be generous, I must also be just, temperate, courageous, and so on.

Of course, that ideal is astonishing enough, but again I think it serves to reveal a crucial insight about virtue: generosity lies in the direction of increased practical intelligence, both with respect to the goals of generosity itself *and also* in the connections between those goals and the goals of the other virtues. This means that the development of any virtue must involve expanding one's sensitivity to a wide range of practical concerns, and so we should expect to find improvements in any virtue going with improvements in other virtues as well. Improvements anywhere within one's character cannot be understood in isolation from the rest of one's character. The ideal of the reciprocity of the virtues is a *test*, a test of when a change in character counts as an improvement in virtue, because the virtues are interconnected.⁹⁰

III. FEASIBLE ASPIRATION, ASPIRATIONAL FEASIBILITY

Ideals have their place, because they do work that we cannot do without them (section II). "Excellence" in the broad sense is an ideal that serves to identify sound cases as apart from defective ones, so ideals help us grasp what counts as real improvement. An ideal of human well-being helps us grasp that improvement lies in the direction of our excellences—our *virtues*—the attributes we need for human fulfillment. An ideal of the person who hits the mark in living a good human life helps us understand just *which attributes* of choice and emotion are the different virtues. And an ideal of the person who integrates all the virtues helps us perceive that improvements in character are *interconnected*.

But in order to put ideals in their place, we must approach moral development by observing, as Aristotle does, how people ever get better at anything, and then extending that insight to how we might get better at living our lives—being better friends, more generous givers, fairer arbiters (section I). Ideal theory imagines a destination of moral maturity, and the question of moral development is then how to get there from here. Path-dependent aspiration goes in the other direction: knowing where humans have to start, and knowing how they ever manage to progress, we then ask where humans might

aspire to go along the paths that are actually available to them. Ideals are not visions of perfection to which to aspire, but theoretical models that focus thought on what getting *better* along those paths would actually look like.

i. How Philosophy and Psychology Are Sequential, and How They Are Reciprocal

The most vivid way to depict the *path-dependence* in path-dependent aspiration, as I did at the outset, is first to divide the normative labor of philosophy (what counts as doing *better*) from the descriptive labor of psychology (how people *come* to do better), and then, crucially, to sequence the psychological labor ahead of the philosophical labor. It would be a mistake, though, to see that sequence as simpler than it really is, for a couple of reasons. For one thing, the psychological study of how people overcome weaknesses and acquire strengths must of course begin by taking as given *some* characterization of what counts as a strength or weakness in the first place—for instance, that it is generosity that is the strength and stinginess and profligacy that are the weaknesses.⁹¹ Since that is a normative question, the path-dependent approach is more precisely understood as reciprocal rather than starkly sequential, as psychologists start from philosophical observations about what counts as a strength.

But while such observations are indispensable, they are also crucially indeterminate: generosity counts as an improvement, but what counts as genuine generosity? Philosophical exploration must be bounded by the best available understanding of the psychological paths by which human improvement becomes feasible, but then it takes philosophical exploration to work toward a more detailed and determinate understanding of the strengths to which humans might aspire along those paths. It is in that respect that such exploration is path-dependent.

So the reason for taking a path-dependent approach to the virtues is not the fantasy that psychologists can start from some norm-free ground zero. The point is to understand that the very idea of human virtue must be bounded by the limits of human psychology. On a path-independent approach, the ever-present fear is that the psychological makeup of the human species might make it infeasible for humans to reach genuine virtue. The point of the path-dependent approach is that bounds of feasibility set by the human psychological makeup actually limit what gets to *count* as genuine virtue in the first place.

ii. Aspiration and Feasibility Aren't Independent of Each Other

However, the relation between feasibility and aspiration is complicated in an even deeper way as well, because what is feasible for someone is not entirely independent of

what he or she finds worth aspiring to.⁹² If our understanding of moral development must begin by taking human nature as it is, then it must begin also with the fact that humans are naturally driven to aspire, to value their own excellence for its own sake and to delight in the excellence of others.⁹³ By nature, humans exercise what we might call “alertness,” not content merely to adjust familiar means to familiar ends, but constantly remaining on the lookout both for new possibilities for excellence in achieving their ends and for as-yet unimagined forms of excellence they might adopt as their ends.⁹⁴ Put another way, this element of alertness in human action—this “drive to aspire”⁹⁵—is a drive not merely to make do with what we already *find* possible, but to discover what we might be able to *make* possible. And so it is part of human nature that *aspiration itself can alter the frontier* of moral development that might be available to each of us.

Of course, aspiration cannot bypass the pathways by which humans acquire skills and get better in other ways. That is why aspiration that counts as more than a daydream must be bounded by psychological feasibility; this is the respect in which the psychological labor must precede the philosophical labor. Even so, among the inescapable facts of the human psychological makeup is the fact that humans naturally have a drive to aspire—and that drive is one of the things that might *make* an individual human’s goals for improvement feasible. When considering how I might get better, I don’t just have to take my present degree of laziness (say) as given: feasibility is not something *static*, limiting the goals I can feasibly pursue as if my aspiration were powerless to change the frontier of what is feasible for me. Rather, feasibility must be understood as *dynamic*, because the very fact that I find overcoming my laziness something worth aspiring to is itself a factor in the feasibility of that goal. Because of the human drive to aspire, what is feasible is not merely what one already knows one is able to do, with no need for further alertness or other sorts of effort. For humans, feasibility also includes what one might discover is worth aspiring to do.

So feasibility isn’t entirely independent of aspiration. That point might be easy to miss, because the point I have been at pains to emphasize in this chapter is that *genuine aspiration is not independent of feasibility* either. There is nothing genuine about aspiring to goals that with the best will in the world one can’t really pursue, or would do better not to pursue given their costs in forgone opportunities. The frontier of feasibility depends to some extent on us. It can be altered. But it is *aspiration* that can alter the frontier, not idle daydreams and flights of fancy.

What all this means, then, is that the challenge of getting better is a challenge of successfully working from two directions at once. We must work from the direction of aspiration to do justice to the fact that feasibility is dynamic. For creatures like us, getting better must be truly *aspirational*, and it is for this reason that ideals play an *indispensable* role in our understanding of what the virtues of character are. But we must also work from the direction of feasibility to do justice to the fact that aspiration must be *genuine*, bounded by the pathways of human psychology we all must take as given, as well as by the tough choices at the margins that each person must learn to make with serenity. It is for this reason that ideals play such a *limited* role in our understanding of what excellences of character might be possible for us.

IV. CONCLUSION

Getting better is path-dependent. In order to improve in character, we must begin with the paths for development that are actually available to us, and then try to understand what sorts of developments that are possible along those paths would count as genuine improvements. That is the work that ideals help us perform, and we cannot do it without them. But if the role of ideals is very important, it is *also* very modest. Getting better is gradual and piecemeal; it is uneven; it will never be perfect; aspiring to get better often means aspiring to get a *little* better. The point of ideals is to increasingly clarify the direction in which getting better lies, within what's feasible. Ideals do no less. And I think they also do no more.⁹⁶

NOTES

1. *The Onion*, Facebook post, October 14, 2015. Madison, WI
2. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II.2.
3. See H. Fossheim, "Virtue Ethics and Everyday Strategies," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 267 (2014): 65–82. I owe this way of putting the point to David Schmidtz.
4. My focus is primarily on the constraints on moral development for humans as a kind, and only occasionally on how a given individual might improve given the constraints of his or her unique circumstances.
5. D. C. Russell, "Aristotle on Cultivating Virtue," in *Cultivating Virtue: Perspectives from Philosophy, Theology, and Psychology*, edited by N. Snow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015a), 17–48.
6. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.1.
7. Aristotle, *Categories*, 8, 8b25–36, 9a10–13; Aristotle, *Physics*, VII.3, 246a10–b3; Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, V.16, 1021b20–23; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, V.20, 1022b10–12; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.5. See D. S. Hutchinson, *The Virtues of Aristotle* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986); R. Parry, "Episteme and Techne," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2014), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/episteme-techne/>.
8. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.13, 1102b13–1103a7.
9. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.1, 1138b35–1139a17.
10. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.4, 1105a17–26.
11. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.4.
12. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.4, 1105a26–b5. Against Aristotle, the Stoics maintained that the virtues literally were skills, and they rejected Aristotle's focus on productive skills to the exclusion of skills of excellent performance. I think the Stoics were right about this, but I won't pursue the issue here.
13. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.4, 1105a17–26; See J. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 16–32.
14. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.1, 1103a18–b25, II.2, 1104a10–27.
15. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.10–11.
16. This, I think, is the best reconstruction of Aristotle's highly compressed remarks at Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.12, 1144a6–9. See J. McDowell, "Some Issues in

- Aristotle's Moral Psychology," in *Companions to Ancient Thought, 4: Ethics*, edited by S. Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 110; D. C. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6–11.
17. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.12, 1144a20–b1.
18. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.4–5.
19. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.1, 1138b18–34.
20. "Moral," here and throughout this chapter, is used in the weak sense of pertaining to character and action, as is often the sense of the Latin noun *mores*, from which the English adjective "moral" is derived.
21. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.2, 1103b26–31, VI.5, 1140a24–31.
22. See D. K. Lapsley, and D. Narvaez, "A Social-Cognitive Approach to the Moral Personality," in *Moral Development: Self and Identity*, edited by D. Lapsley and D. Narvaez (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 189–212; D. K. Lapsley, and D. Narvaez, "Moral Psychology at the Crossroads," in *Character Psychology and Character Education*, edited by D. K. Lapsley and F. C. Power (University of Notre Dame, 2005), 18–35; D. Narvaez, and D. K. Lapsley, "The Psychological Foundations of Everyday Morality and Moral Expertise," in *Character Psychology and Character Education*, edited by D. K. Lapsley and F. C. Power (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2005), 140–165.
23. D. C. Russell, "Aristotelian Virtue Theory: After the Person-Situation Debate," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 267 (2014a): 37–63.
24. See W. Mischel, *Personality and Assessment* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1968); L. Ross and R. E. Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation: Perspectives of Social Psychology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); D. Cervone and Y. Shoda, "Social-Cognitive Theories and the Coherence of Personality," in *The Coherence of Personality: Social-Cognitive Bases of Consistency, Variability and Organization*, edited by D. Cervone and Y. Shoda (Guilford Press, 1999), 3–4, 9.
25. See esp. G. Harman, "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 99 (1999): 315–331; and J. Doris, *Lack of Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
26. Mischel, *Personality and Assessment*, chap. 3; W. Mischel, "Toward a Cognitive Social Learning Reconceptualization of Personality," *Psychological Review* 80 (1973): 265; Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation: Perspectives of Social Psychology*, 13.
27. See Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation: Perspectives of Social Psychology*, 164–167.
28. G. Sreenivasan, "Errors about Errors: Virtue Theory and Trait Attribution," *Mind* 111 (2002): 47–68; N. Badhwar, "The Milgram Experiments, Learned Helplessness, and Character Traits," *Journal of Ethics* 13 (2009): 257–289; O. Flanagan, "Moral Science? Still Metaphysical after All These Years," in *Personality, Identity, and Character: Explorations in Moral Psychology*, edited by D. Narvaez and D. Lapsley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 52–78; Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, chap. 8–10; N. Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence* (London: Routledge, 2010).
29. Cf. K. Kristjánsson, "An Aristotelian Critique of Situationism," *Philosophy* 83 (2008): 55–76.
30. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.6, 1106b36–1107a2, IV.1, 1120a23–b11, VI.1, 1138b18–34, VI.12, 1144a6–9.
31. See Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, 348–355.
32. See Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, II.2–3; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV.5.
33. D. C. Russell, "From Personality to Character to Virtue," in *Current Controversies in Virtue Theory*, edited by M. Alfano (London: Routledge, 2015b), 92–106.

34. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.4, 6, VI.1.
35. Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation: Perspectives of Social Psychology*, chap. 1 and 2.
36. M. Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); see also D. Jacobson, "Seeing by Feeling: Virtues, Skills, and Moral Perception," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 8 (2005): 391, 400.
37. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.1, VI.1.
38. See N. Cantor, "From Thought to Behavior: 'Having' and 'Doing' in the Study of Personality and Cognition." *American Psychologist* 45 (1990): 735–750, for an overview of these basic mechanisms in social-cognitive theory.
39. See esp. Lapsley and Narvaez, "A Social-Cognitive Approach to the Moral Personality"; Narvaez and Lapsley, "Moral Psychology at the Crossroads"; K. J. Vicente, and J. H. Wang, "An Ecological Theory of Expertise Effects in Memory Recall," *Psychological Review* 105 (1998): 33–57.
40. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.1.
41. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.1, 12.
42. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.10–11.
43. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.1, 1138b21–34; R. Hursthouse, "Practical Wisdom: A Mundane Account." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 106 (2006): 283–307; Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, 20–25.
44. R. M. Hogarth, *Educating Intuition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); D. Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (London: Penguin, 2011), chap. 22.
45. Cf. Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 240–242.
46. J. A. Bargh, "Conditional Automaticity: Varieties of Automatic Influence in Social Perception and Cognition," in *Unintended Thought*, edited by J. S. Uleman and J. A. Bargh (Guilford Press, 1989), 3–51; G. D. Logan, "Automaticity and Cognitive Control," in *Unintended Thought*, edited by J. S. Uleman and J. A. Bargh (New York: Guilford Press, 1989), 52–65; Hogarth, *Educating Intuition*; Narvaez and Lapsley, "Moral Psychology at the Crossroads," 150–151; J. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, 13–18; M. H. Bazerman, and A. E. Tenbrunsel, *Blind Spots: Why We Fail to Do What's Right and What to Do about It* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 78–79; discussing U. Neisser, "The Concept of Intelligence," *Intelligence* 3 (1979): 217–227.
47. Lapsley and Narvaez, "A Social-Cognitive Approach to the Moral Personality," 207, call it "a strategic bet."
48. In the rest of this paragraph I draw upon Jenann Ismael's excellent paper, "A Philosopher of Science Looks at Idealization in Political Theory." *Social Philosophy and Policy* 33 (2016): 11–31.
49. See also J. L. Ackrill, *Aristotle the Philosopher* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 137; Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, chap. 4, 11.
50. See M. Huemer, "Confessions of a Utopophobe." *Social Philosophy and Policy* 33 (2016): 214–234.
51. D. C. Russell, "Virtue Ethics, Happiness, and the Good Life," in *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, edited by D. C. Russell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 7–28; D. C. Russell, *Happiness for Humans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), chap. 3.
52. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.7, 1098a7–20, I.10, 1101a14–21. As Aristotle rather cryptically puts it, virtuous activity is what "controls" well-being. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.10, 1100b8–11. See Russell, *Happiness for Humans*, chap. 5.

53. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.13, II.5.
54. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.1–2, I.4–5.
55. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.4, 1095a14–20.
56. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.4, 1095a20–22.
57. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.7, 1097b22–24.
58. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.4–5, I.7, 1097b1–5.
59. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.7, 1097b6–13.
60. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.7, 1097b13–1098a20, I.13, 1102a26–1103a3, II.5; See esp. C. Korsgaard, “Aristotle on Function and Virtue,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 3 (1986): 259–279; and R. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 222.
61. Of course, that proviso does rule out ways of life that are vicious on their face. Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.6, 1107a8–27.
62. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.7, 1097b22–1098a18.
63. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.7, 1097b13–1098a20, I.13, II.5.
64. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.6, 1106b16–28, 1106b36–1107a3.
65. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1107a3–6.
66. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV.1–2.
67. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV.5.
68. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV.6.
69. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV.7.
70. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV.8.
71. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, V.
72. Pride, Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV.3–4.
73. Shame, Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV.9.
74. Courage, Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III.6–9.
75. Temperance, Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III.10–12.
76. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.1–2, 5, 8–13.
77. D. C. Russell, “Phronesis and the Virtues: *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.12–13,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, edited by R. Polansky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014b), 203–220.
78. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.12–13. Distinguish this thesis from the thesis that all the virtues are the same (which Aristotle rejects; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.13, 1144b17–30). Scholars of ancient virtue theory typically call the latter thesis the “unity of virtue” thesis, but in modern philosophical psychology that label is usually given to the much weaker thesis that having any virtue entails having the other virtues too.
79. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.13, 1144b1–9.
80. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.6, 1106b16–1107a3, IV.1; VI.1, 1138b18–34.
81. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.13, 1144b14–17, 20–8, 30–2.
82. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.12.
83. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III.3, 1112b11–12, 33–34.
84. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.12, 1144a23–6.
85. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1144a7–9, VI.5, 1140a24–31.
86. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.12, 1144a29–b1.
87. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.13, VI.12, VI.13, 1144b30–1145a2.
88. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.9; see also Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, chap. 4.
89. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.6, II.4.

90. See also Ackrill, *Aristotle the Philosopher*, 137; Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, chap. 11.
91. Here I have benefited from discussions with Christopher Gill and Rachana Kamtekar.
92. Here I have learned a great deal from G. Brennan and G. Sayre-McCord, "Do Normative Facts Matter . . . To What is Feasible?" *Social Philosophy and Policy* 33 (2016): 434–456, and from discussion with Julia Annas, Jeremy Reid, and Nancy Sherman.
93. J. A. Rawls, *Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), \$65, astutely observed these two human impulses, and appropriately enough he labeled them the "Aristotelian principle" and its "companion effect," respectively.
94. On the faculty of alertness in human action, see I. Kirzner, *Competition and Entrepreneurship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), chap. 2, developing insights from L. Von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics*. (Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 1998), chap. 14.
95. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, chap. 3.
96. For their useful comments on earlier versions of this chapter, I thank the participants in the conference on Virtue and Moral Cognition (October 2015), University of Gdansk, especially Nafsika Athanassoulis, Robert Audi, David Carr, Gopal Sreenivasan, and the conference organizers Artur Szutta and Natasza Szutta; the Department of Philosophy at Ryerson University (November 2015), especially Jo Kornegay for her gracious invitation; participants in a workshop at the University of Arizona (November 2015), especially Julia Annas, Adam Gjesdal, Rachana Kamtekar, Guido Pincione, Jeremy Reid, Greg Robson, and Santiago Sanchez; and participants in the conference on Cultivating Virtues (January 2016), sponsored by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, especially Randall Curren, Howard Curzer, Christopher Gill, Nancy Sherman, Nancy Snow, and the conference organizer Kristján Kristjánsson.

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CHAPTER 23

VIRTUOUS MOTIVATION

KAREN STOHR

IMAGINE four wealthy people who write a check to a worthy charity for the same, substantial amount of money. Minerva writes the check because she cares about the people served by the charity and wants to make their lives better. Albus writes the check because he believes it's the generous thing to do and he wants to do what is generous. Gilderoy writes the check because he wants his name to appear on the charity's annual published list of benefactors. Petunia writes the check because she wants to spite her sister, who gave her the money for the purposes of paying off her credit card debt.

There is some sense in which all four of them have done the same action, an action that seems morally good or right.¹ And yet it's also obvious that their varying motivations make a moral difference, if not to our evaluation of their actions, then certainly to our evaluation of them as agents. We tend to think that it matters not just that people do the right thing, but that they do the right thing for the right reasons. Minerva's motivational structure seems morally admirable. So does Albus's, although we might hesitate over his focus on the virtuousness of the action. Gilderoy's motivations, being self-centered and narcissistic, seem morally deficient. As for Petunia, we might describe her motives for giving money as downright vicious, despite the beneficial effects of the action itself. It's clear that these agents differ considerably in their motivational structure and, moreover, differ in a way that calls for articulation in moral terms.

Evidently we need a way of drawing moral distinctions among different motivations that agents might have in performing a particular action. Figuring out what makes certain motivations morally admirable is, however, only part of the philosophical puzzle about motivation. There is also the question of whether and how moral judgments motivate people to act at all. Imagine a fifth agent, Cornelius, who judges that he ought to write the check to the charity but who nevertheless fails to write it. How do we explain Cornelius's motivational failure? Did he not really judge that he should write the check? Is it possible for him to be utterly unmoved by that judgment? Or might he have been motivated, but insufficiently so? Suppose that Cornelius does end up writing the check because it's the right thing to do, but only grumpily because he'd rather spend the money on his vacation. What do we say about his motivational structure?

The topic of moral motivation in general is obviously a large one. In this chapter, I will focus on the narrower issue of what specifically virtuous motivation looks like, where “virtuous” is not simply a stand-in for “moral.” I will use the phrase “virtuous motivation” to describe the motivational state of a virtuous person acting virtuously. On the picture I will present, it is possible to be motivated by moral concerns without succeeding in being virtuously motivated. The motivational structure of a virtuous agent is shaped in distinctive ways by the fact that she is virtuous. In what follows, I articulate and defend this robust notion of virtuous motivation.

Lurking in the background of any discussion of moral motivation are meta-ethical disputes about moral psychology and the nature of moral reasoning. A Humean will think differently about virtuous motivation than a non-Humean; a motivational internalist will think differently about it than an externalist.² In this chapter, I will take for granted a largely Aristotelian approach to these background meta-ethical issues, though acknowledging that there are many ways of interpreting Aristotle on these points. My starting point will be Aristotle’s well-known account of virtuous action in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. There Aristotle says that in order for an action to be done virtuously, the agent must (a) know the action is virtuous, (b) choose the action, (c) choose it for its own sake, and (d) perform it from a firm and settled state of character.³ Although it is criterion (c) that is most obviously relevant to virtuous motivation, the other conditions help illuminate the motivational structure of a fully virtuous agent. I will thus discuss them as well.

First, however, it will help to state more formally some of the different questions about moral motivation posed by the opening example. When we ask what it means to say that an action is virtuously motivated, or that an agent is virtuously motivated in acting, we might be inquiring about any of the following:

- (1) Whether correct moral judgment, as exemplified in the virtuous person, implies that the person making the judgment takes herself to have a (motivating) reason to act in accordance with that judgment;⁴
- (2) Whether a person who judges that an action is the correct action will be sufficiently motivated to act in accordance with that judgment (i.e., not weak-willed);
- (3) Whether in order for an action to count as virtuously motivated, it must be done with a certain aim in view or done because it is right or noble or virtuous;
- (4) Whether in order for an action to count as virtuously motivated, the performance of the action must be accompanied by a particular feeling or affective state.

These questions are interrelated, but they raise separate issues. In this chapter I will be focusing primarily on the issues raised by (3) and (4), although I will first briefly address (1) and (2).

The issue raised by (1) is fundamentally about the nature of moral judgment. If we are presupposing what is normally called the Humean view of moral psychology, then we will distinguish between judgments of reasons and motivating desires.⁵ Hume believes that reason alone cannot move us to action. Insofar as an agent’s judgment that an action

is right or virtuous is a judgment of reason, it cannot be motivating for her in the absence of an accompanying desire. (Of course, many Humeans, including Hume himself, reject the idea that moral judgments are judgments of reason at all.) What would such a picture of moral psychology suggest about virtuous motivation?

On this picture, when we say that an agent is virtuously motivated in acting, we are primarily making a claim about the presence, nature, and direction of certain virtuous desires. An agent who desires to help people will be motivated to act when she judges that they are in need of help, but an agent who lacks that desire, or who desires instead to see them suffer, will not be so motivated. Because this picture locates the source of moral motivation in the agent's desires, then that agent's virtue is a reflection of the moral quality of her desires. An agent with virtuous desires will be virtuously motivated; an agent with vicious desires will be viciously motivated.

Consider Michael Slote's broadly Humean way of approaching virtue ethics, which puts virtuous motivation at the center of the account.⁶ A virtuously motivated agent, on Slote's account, is motivated by care or empathy for others, motives that are fundamentally sentiments (which is why Slote calls his theory a version of moral sentimentalism). Importantly, Slote builds quite a lot into his conception of virtuous care, such as that a virtuously caring person will be attentive to considerations about how to direct her care appropriately. This thick, richly described conception of a virtuously caring motive is foundational to Slote's account of right action, which is defined in terms of what a person with this kind of virtuous motive would do. A crucial implication of Slote's view is that it is not possible for a virtuously motivated person to do something that is in fact morally wrong. The picture I will eventually defend resembles Slote's view in that it will build a great deal into the conception of virtuous motivation. It differs, however, in that it allows for the possibility that a virtuously motivated person might nevertheless perform a wrong action.⁷

Slote's approach does not presuppose Humean moral psychology, although it seems more compatible with it than other versions of virtue ethics.⁸ But many virtue ethicists reject this underlying picture of moral psychology, arguing instead that the correct judgments of a virtuous person are necessarily motivating.⁹ An agent who fails to be moved by his judgment that an action is required of him thereby shows himself to be failing to judge properly. On this view, we do not need to postulate an accompanying desire in order to explain the pull of the moral judgment. The motivation is built into the judgment.

The question posed by (1) is largely a question about internalism. Is it possible to make a sincere moral judgment without being motivated to act in accordance with that judgment? Or does the lack of motivation imply that the moral judgment has not been made or has been made insincerely? How we answer this depends on what we think a moral judgment is. Internalists can be cognitivists or non-cognitivists about moral judgments, and needless to say, there are many variations on each theme. The Aristotelian account presented here is probably best described as a kind of cognitivist internalist view.¹⁰ On this view, moral judgments can be correct or incorrect, and correct moral judgments are motivating for a virtuous agent.

Now this leaves open many possibilities about what it means for something to be a correct moral judgment. Consider Minerva's judgment that people are in need of help. Is that a moral judgment by itself? Or would the judgment need to include something about it being good, right, or virtuous to help people in need? If we take an internalist view and hold that virtuous agents are motivated by their moral judgments, it is necessary to set out the content of the judgment in such a way that it explains what motivates a virtuous agent to act in accordance with it. An internalist about virtuous motivation is committed to saying this much: it is not possible for an agent to judge that she should do an action and be entirely unmoved by that judgment. Of course, to be moved by a judgment is not necessarily to be sufficiently moved to act on that judgment. This takes us to the second of the four questions.

Question (2) raises a puzzle about the possibility of weakness of will (*akrasia*). This puzzle has ancient origins, dating back to the Socratic claim that all wrongdoing is a result of ignorance.¹¹ To know the good is to do the good; someone who fails to do the good necessarily acts in ignorance.¹² This Socratic claim makes weakness of will impossible, at least if that is defined as knowing what is good to do, but failing to do it. Aristotle famously disputed the claim, although his own account of the phenomenon is hardly perspicuous. Like question (1), question (2) raises questions about the nature of moral judgment. Anyone who denies that weakness of will is possible must explain not only how correct moral judgment can be motivating, but also how it can be sufficiently motivating. This is a tall order, and one that I doubt can be filled adequately, but I will set this issue aside. It is evident that the weak-willed person lacks virtuous motivation, since he fails to do what is right. A more interesting question is whether the continent (*enkratic*) person counts as being virtuously motivated, an issue we will consider later.

Let us turn to question (3), which is about the aims or ends of virtuous action. This question has been the focus of much contention at the level of normative theory. The contentiousness arises over whether virtuous agents should be motivated by the virtuous quality of the action itself or by the features of the action that make it virtuous. Who exhibits virtuous motivation—Albus, who writes the check because it is a generous act, or Minerva, who writes the check because it will help people? Although Albus is clearly focused on the moral value of the action, we might wonder whether that focus reflects an egoistic preoccupation with his own virtuous character.¹³ Alternatively, we may think him a moral fetishist, caring more about the virtuousness of the action than the actual people in need of his help.¹⁴ Furthermore, there are potential theoretical problems about the relationship between the moral justification for an action and what seems like the morally admirable motives for those same actions.

This last point has been famously illustrated by Michael Stocker, in the form of his example of a person who visits his friend in the hospital out of duty.¹⁵ Taking for granted that it is better for such actions to be motivated by friendship, love, or care, Stocker argues that utilitarianism and Kantianism are faced with what he calls a form of schizophrenia.¹⁶ What justifies the action does not seem to be what should motivate it, leading to what Stocker takes to be a theoretically and practically unpalatable split within the theory. For utilitarianism, what justifies the action is the fact that it maximizes

happiness; for Kantianism, the justification lies in the fact that the action fulfills a moral duty.¹⁷ But these seem to be inappropriate motives for visiting a sick friend, and certainly inferior to motives of love and care. This produces, according to Stocker, a troubling lack of harmony between justification and motive: “not to be moved by what one values . . . bespeaks a malady of the spirit. Not to value what moves one also bespeaks a malady of the spirit.”¹⁸

Stocker’s hospital visitor has spurred much debate in the literature, much of it on the question of whether virtue ethics is faced with a similar problem.¹⁹ It would seem that according to virtue ethics, what justifies an action like visiting one’s friend in the hospital is that it is virtuous or that it is what a virtuous person would do. But this is no more appealing as a motive for acting than considerations of what would maximize happiness or fulfill a duty. If we think that the morally best motive for visiting one’s friend in a hospital is something like love or care, then virtue ethics is just as “schizophrenic” as other moral theories.

This problem, which is now usually characterized in terms of whether a theory is self-effacing, is a multilayered one.²⁰ I will take for granted that insofar as Kantianism and utilitarianism are self-effacing, so is virtue ethics. It too is faced with a potential split between the justification for an action in terms of its virtuousness and the kinds of moral concerns we think should be motivating a virtuous agent. The question is whether this is a problem.

Stocker claims that this split between one’s reasons (or justifications or values) and one’s motivations (or desires) is a bad thing. But what exactly is supposed to be bad about it? Is it a generally negative feature of a theory if it ends up giving different accounts of what a virtuous person values and what motivates her to act? Or perhaps the concern is not so much with the structure of the theory itself, but with the picture it presents of ideal moral agency. Stocker assumes, not implausibly, that a virtuous agent would be motivated to visit by her care and concern for her friend. He further assumes that on a two-level theory, care and concern for her friend is not what would justify her in acting. If the agent is aware that her action is justified by other considerations, as it seems a virtuous person would be, then she will find herself with a mismatch or disharmony between her justifying moral reasons and her motives. She could get rid of the disharmony either by discarding the justifying moral reasons or by incorporating those reasons into her motivation. Those solutions, however, come with their own problems. The first solution would jettison moral considerations entirely, but the second risks turning virtuous agents into unfeeling prigs.

So what *should* be going on in a virtuous agent’s head as she writes a check to charity or visits her stricken friend in the hospital? What would have to be true of her in order for it to be true that she is engaging in a virtuously motivated hospital visit? Would a virtuous agent be motivated to visit her friend in the hospital on the grounds that it’s virtuous? Or would she be more virtuous if she were to visit just because she cares about him?

It is worth noting that the problem shows up most compellingly in the case of beneficent or generous actions, where we do expect virtuous agents to have some sort of concern for the well-being of those they are helping. It is much less obvious that there is

some equivalently admirable motive in acting, say, justly. Suppose that rather than writing checks, Minerva and Albus are returning dropped wallets to their owners. Minerva does it because she is concerned about the person and the hardships he would endure without his wallet. Albus does it because it is what justice requires. In this case, our intuitions about what would motivate a virtuous person are likely much less clear. So we should be careful not to draw unwarranted general conclusions about virtuous motivation from the single case of the hospital visitor. Perhaps it isn't always a bad thing to be motivated by an action's rightness or virtuousness. Moreover, even where we think that other motives should play a role, we shouldn't be too quick to dismiss the moral motive as insignificant to the question of whether an agent is virtuous. We can imagine a person who, while acting from genuine care and concern, nevertheless fails to be adequately concerned with the rightness of what he does. Indeed, Immanuel Kant presents us with just such a person—the sympathetic philanthropist of the *Groundwork*.²¹

Kant claims that in order for an action to have what he calls moral worth, it must be done from the motive of duty, meaning a commitment to doing what is right. A shopkeeper who charges fair prices so as not to lose customers acts in accordance with duty, but his action lacks moral worth because it is motivated by self-interest, not moral concerns. This seems uncontroversial, but Kant goes on to claim that the actions of a sympathetic philanthropist, who helps people from care and concern, also lack moral worth. Kant's picture is of someone whose temperament is naturally kind and sympathetic and whose inclinations direct him toward helping. Why would Kant deny that such helping actions fail to have moral worth? Unlike the shopkeeper, the sympathetic philanthropist is motivated by what seem like moral concerns about the well-being of other people. Just as we are inclined to ascribe virtue to Stocker's caring hospital visitor, so we may also want to ascribe it to the sympathetic philanthropist, and declare that his helping actions are virtuously motivated.

And yet perhaps we should not be too quick to ascribe virtuous motivation to the sympathetic philanthropist, at least as Kant describes him. After all, sympathetic inclinations come and go. Would an agent motivated by sympathy alone help if he's in a bad mood or dislikes the people who need help? Sympathetic feelings can lead us to help on occasions when we should refrain, or to help badly, or in ways that undermine our own self-respect. All this points to what, on Barbara Herman's view, is the real problem with the sympathetic philanthropist, which is that his sympathetic feelings essentially float free of morality.²² He would help regardless of the moral ramifications of helping, and this, for Kant, is where the problem lies. However pleasing and praiseworthy his inclinations are, they cannot serve as the basis for ascriptions of virtue. For that, we need something more.

Kant, of course, took the something more to be a commitment to morality. In the end, the sympathetic philanthropist proves to have that commitment, although it is not evident until his sympathetic inclinations are driven away by sorrow and he continues to help. It is the sorrowing philanthropist who most evidently demonstrates Kant's idea of moral motivation, since he is motivated to help without the aid of either self-interest or immediate inclination to do the action.

Rosalind Hursthouse has argued that Aristotelian virtue ethicists should agree with Kant about the sympathetic philanthropist, as he is described in the *Groundwork*.²³ Insofar as he is simply following his inclinations, he demonstrates a lack of practical wisdom, that all-important Aristotelian virtue. In Aristotelian terms, he has at best natural virtue. I will say more about practical wisdom shortly, but it is worth noting that the sympathetic philanthropist fails to express Aristotelian virtue in his motives just as much as he fails to exhibit a Kantian good will. It might seem as though the sympathetic philanthropist is genuinely virtuously motivated on those occasions when the inclinations are present, even if not otherwise. But this fails to do justice to the intuition, shared by both Aristotle and Kant, that there is something enduring about a truly virtuous person's motivation to help, something tied to features of her character or will. Moreover, as we will soon see, the sympathetic philanthropist's lack of practical wisdom undermines the virtuousness of his motives even when he does manage to act rightly.

Where does this leave us with respect to question (3) and Stocker's criticism? Ideally, it seems, a hospital visitor would visit out of concern for his friend, and his act of visiting would reflect his commitment to the underlying moral considerations. Morality directs us to be concerned about people; insofar as our helping actions are motivated by that concern, they are morally motivated. The dutiful hospital visitor need not be a moral fetishist in order to count as morally motivated.²⁴ But there's more to Stocker's worry than fetishism; it's also about the feelings that go along with virtuous actions. We may think that the hospital visitor should be experiencing feelings of love and concern for his friend, in addition to whatever moral motivation we think he should have. This takes us to question (4): Must virtuous action, in order to be virtuously motivated, include certain feelings or affective states?

Kant's answer to this question is a qualified "no." It is a "no" because of his example of the cold-hearted benefactor, who helps from duty alone but whose action still, on Kant's view, has moral worth. It is qualified because Kant thinks that we do have a duty to cultivate our sympathetic feelings, since they support us in the identification and reliable performance of virtuous actions.²⁵ Moreover, we are to fulfill moral requirements cheerfully; a grumpy hospital visitor may not even be succeeding in acting beneficently. Still, many people, especially virtue ethicists, would want to go beyond this and say that in order for a helping action to count as virtuously motivated (as opposed to simply morally motivated), it should be accompanied by the kinds of attractive feelings that Kant attributed to the sympathetic philanthropist.²⁶

Indeed, an affirmative answer to (4) is generally taken to be one of the hallmarks of Aristotelian accounts of virtuous action. Aristotle himself describes virtues as being about both acting and feeling properly. On the standard Aristotelian picture, virtuously motivated actions have a characteristic affective state, a state that is not simply reducible to a pro-attitude toward the action, which even Kant's cold-hearted benefactor would have.

This idea is sometimes expressed in terms of Aristotle's distinction between virtue and continence. According to this distinction, the virtuous person takes pleasure in virtuous action and acts with ease. The continent person, by contrast, has to struggle with

competing inclinations, and although he also does what he should, he finds it challenging. I have argued elsewhere that the moral distinction between virtue and continence is not nearly as straightforward as is often supposed.²⁷ To see why, consider again the sorrowing philanthropist, the man who once enjoyed helping people, but who now helps from duty alone. This is clearly a morally motivated action. Should we say, though, that his action fails to be virtuously motivated because he lacks sympathetic feelings at the time of action? I think that it does not fail, that it can still be virtuously motivated even if it lacks affects that otherwise seem appropriate to helping actions. Suppose the man's sorrows stem from the fact that his child has just been diagnosed with a terminal illness. Surely we do not think he would be a better person from a moral standpoint if he simply set those sorrows aside. For the philanthropist whose life is going well, happy feelings may well be the appropriate accompaniment to his helping actions. But the sorrowing philanthropist is not just in a psychologically different place; he is in a morally different place. If his mind is overclouded by sorrows that, from a moral standpoint, demand a suitably sorrowful affective stance, then there would be something morally deficient about him if he were not sorrowing. Sometimes, it's morally appropriate to have the affects of the sorrowing philanthropist. Virtuous people are not always happy about helping; they are happy only insofar as the circumstances warrant those feelings.²⁸ As Hursthouse points out, a virtuous person will return a wallet to a scoundrel, but there's no reason to think that she will be glad about it.²⁹

I have taken a long path through those four initial questions. Before I set out my own view about what virtuously motivated agents are like, let me summarize where things stand. Questions (1) and (2) raise primarily meta-ethical issues about the very possibility of moral motivation. Answering question (1), about whether moral judgments are motivating, requires an account of what moral judgments are. Answering question (2), about whether weakness of will is possible, requires an account of whether moral judgments must be sufficient to move us to act accordingly. Questions (3) and (4) take us deeper into the virtuous agent's motivational structure, particularly the affective stance that is characteristic of virtue. I have said that I think a person can be morally motivated without being virtuously motivated, that virtuous motivation requires something beyond moral motivation. Virtuous motivation includes both an appreciation of the action's choiceworthiness and also an affective stance appropriate to the action in question. The appropriate affective stance will vary according to the circumstances in which the action is performed, but it matters. All this suggests that a virtuous agent's motivational structure expresses her virtue in a way that cannot be simply copied by agents who lack virtue. To see why this is so, let us now turn to Aristotle and his four criteria for an action to be fully virtuous.

The four criteria, recall, are that the agent must (a) know that the action is virtuous, (b) choose the action, (c) choose it for its own sake, and (d) perform it from a firm and settled state of character. It may seem as though the issue of appropriate motivation is contained entirely within (c); however, this is not the case. It is not possible to understand what it means to choose an action for its own sake without understanding what a

virtuous person takes herself to be doing when she acts and how her virtue is contributing to her motivational structure when acting.

Let's begin with (a), which has both a thin reading and a thick reading. On the thin reading, (a) is merely stating that an agent must not be mistaken about what she is doing. If she does something virtuous by accident or under a misconception about the nature of her action, then she won't count as knowing that the action is virtuous. On the thicker reading, knowing that an action is virtuous amounts to making a correct judgment that the action is virtuous. This by itself needn't imply that she is choosing it as a virtuous action, or that there is nothing else about the action that she finds compelling. But it does suggest that in order for an action to meet this criterion, the agent must possess a considerable degree of moral knowledge. I want to defend this thicker reading, so let us consider what is involved with making a correct judgment about an action's virtuousness.

There are two parts to this thicker reading of (a). The first part is the claim that the agent must be capable of recognizing the action as a virtuous one. We might think it's enough to be able to attach the correct label to the action, as a small child might do. Children, of course, can be taught to call certain actions virtuous before they are capable of understanding what it means to call them that. A young child may know that when he shares his cookies with his friend, this is properly described as a generous action. But in order to really know what he is saying when he calls it generous, he must be able to recognize what it is about the act of sharing that makes it worth doing.

A rather different concern about a thick reading of (a) is that virtuous people sometimes reject the labels employing virtue terms when those labels are attached to particular actions.³⁰ Generous people do not, as a rule, go about thinking about their actions *as* acts of generosity. If a generous person declines to call her generous action by that label, does she fail to meet the criterion for (a)? Hursthouse addresses this concern by arguing that virtuous people act for what she, following Bernard Williams, describes as "X reasons." X reasons refer to features of the situation, such as the fact that someone needed help, or that the agent is driving, or that the other person is one's friend.³¹ We might think of X reasons as pointing to the features of the circumstances that make it choiceworthy, features that the virtuous person is attending to when she chooses her action. On this view, to say that an agent must know that an action is virtuous is to say that she must know that these are features of the action and see those features as being what makes the action choiceworthy in those circumstances. Of course, to say that she sees the action as choiceworthy suggests that she is motivated to choose it, and so we will return to this in the discussion of criterion (c).

The second part of (a) is that the judgment must be correct. If the agent knows that the action is virtuous, it must be true that it is virtuous. This would rule out actions done under the mistaken belief that they are virtuous. We might ask whether incorrect actions might nevertheless be virtuously motivated. After all, couldn't I make a mistake about what's right to do, and yet still choose the action, choose it for the right reasons, and choose it from a firm and unchanging character? Wouldn't such an action be virtuously motivated?

I would want to say that it cannot. But in order to say that, we need to distinguish between two different types of mistake. Suppose I hear that the local homeless shelter is in dire need of immediate financial assistance. I wish to help and so immediately send money, only to find out that I am wrong about the need. In fact, the shelter has just received a substantial gift and is in excellent financial shape. I have not judged correctly about what I should do, but it seems odd to say that I am not virtuously motivated. Now in this case, what I am wrong about is an empirical matter. It would be different if I were making a mistake about the moral significance of the cause. Suppose that there is an organization in town devoted to the preservation of a particular style of roof shingle on historic buildings. The shingle is quite expensive and difficult to procure. I get wrapped up in the shingle crusade and send the already well-funded organization all my spare cash. Meanwhile, the local homeless shelter, housed in a historic building, cannot afford to replace its roof with the designated shingles, forcing the residents to live in a leaky, moldy environment.

It seems clear that if I know about the situation at the homeless shelter and yet continue to send money to the preservation society, I am judging incorrectly. Not only am I not doing what is virtuous, but my ignorance is of a sort that seems to impugn my moral character. I am excessively caught up in the aesthetics of historical buildings and I am overlooking crucial moral considerations about the needs of the shelter residents. In this case, it is more plausible to say that I am not virtuously motivated. My inability to judge correctly here, unlike in the other case, is a strike against my claim to be virtuous.

This fits nicely with Aristotle's discussion in *Nicomachean Ethics* III.1 about the relationship between ignorance and voluntariness. In that chapter, Aristotle employs his conception of a practical syllogism as containing a universal premise, a particular premise, and a conclusion that takes the form of an action.³² For instance, I may know that it is wrong to kill one's father (universal premise), recognize that the man at the crossroads is my father (particular premise), and then conclude that I should refrain from killing the man at the crossroads. Aristotle claims that ignorance of a particular, when accompanied by regret, can render an action non-voluntary. We might make a parallel point about virtuous motivation. When an agent's ability to know whether the action is virtuous results from non-culpable ignorance of a particular, then we may still be able to consider the action virtuously motivated. But ignorance of universals, for Aristotle, is another story. Ignorance of a universal is ignorance of a general moral consideration or principle, and this kind of ignorance blocks correct judgment in a different way.

How does it block judgment in a way that might give us reason to deny that the action is virtuously motivated? For that, we need to see what Aristotle thinks it takes to judge correctly. Aristotle famously (or infamously, depending on one's perspective) claimed that there is a reciprocal relationship between practical wisdom and the moral virtues, such that in order to have practical wisdom, it's necessary to have all the moral virtues, and vice versa. If the reciprocity thesis is true, then we have a way of explaining why a failure with respect to knowledge of the universal undermines the agent's claim to be virtuously motivated in ways that failure to know a particular does not. This is because the failure to appreciate a universal, such as the fact that the basic comfort of the shelter

residents is far more important than the aesthetics of the building in which they are living, displays an absence of, or at least a serious deficiency with respect to, one of the moral virtues (presumably, compassion or empathy in this case.) So incorrect judgments, understood in this way, are not all of a piece. Some of them are a result of the agent's lack of virtue; others are not. Where the agent's incorrect judgment is a result of the agent's deficiencies with respect to the moral virtues, then we should withhold the claim that the action was virtuously motivated.

I have interpreted (a) in such a way that it does quite a lot of work in the account of what is happening when a virtuous person acts. To say that she knows that the act is virtuous is to say that she has a correct understanding of the features of the circumstances that make the action the virtuous thing to do in those circumstances. It isn't necessary that she have the thought, "this is the virtuous thing to do here," but she must be picking up on those features that make the action virtuous. If she does not have hold of those features, she lacks practical wisdom and hence cannot be fully virtuously motivated.

As we saw in the discussion of question (3), the problem with the sympathetic philanthropist is the action's moral status does not enter into his deliberations. He helps because he finds it pleasing to help, and it is pure serendipity that his inclinations tend in this direction. Importantly, the sympathetic philanthropist need not be acting in total ignorance. Presumably he is correct in his judgment that people are in need of his help. He may even be judging that it is good for him to help them, as opposed to merely pleasant for him. If he is genuinely focused on their needs, then he is picking up on the features of the action that make it virtuous. But there is more to correct moral judgment than that. The judgment of the practically wise person is an all-things-considered judgment about the appropriateness of helping here, taking into account other moral considerations. We may not see a difference between the naturally sympathetic person and the practically wise person in cases where the latter would judge that helping is appropriate. (This may explain the standard reaction to Kant's sympathetic philanthropist.) The difference is most apparent in cases where there are competing moral considerations in play, considerations that the merely sympathetic person does not recognize or cannot identify.

A related case is posed by the person that Julia Annas describes as the learner in virtue.³³ The learner is someone who is trying to become virtuous, but who does not yet know which actions are virtuous. Because of this, he must depend on the judgment of a moral expert. Assuming that he has succeeded in identifying such an expert, then when he judges that he should do the action recommended by that expert, he will be making a correct moral judgment. It will not be pure serendipity that he gets it right, and presumably if he follows the expert's judgment across the board, he will judge correctly across situations. This is a kind of moral knowledge, though it still falls short of the moral knowledge characteristic of the fully virtuous person. I will return to the learner in virtue when we discuss (c), but first let me briefly say something about (b), the claim that the action must be chosen or decided upon.

This second criterion is sometimes tied to the third (that the action must be chosen for its own sake), but they are distinct. Most obviously, (b) suggests that virtuously

motivated actions are done consciously, with a particular aim or end in view. That would seem to rule out unreflective actions as virtuously motivated. This is a complicated issue, since we may be inclined to think that an agent's character is often revealed by what she does when she doesn't have time to deliberate. Much, of course, depends on what is required for an action to count as having been chosen.³⁴ Aristotle's own criteria are somewhat restrictive; I am inclined to use more expansive ones. Probably most of us would agree that a purely reflexive response isn't an action, although it might nevertheless be indicative of something about an agent's moral character. But if we say that an action can count as having been chosen if it can reasonably be said to have been done with some end in view, then this criterion allows that, say, a virtuous agent's sudden leap in front of a bus to save a child could count as having been chosen.

Let me now turn to criterion (c), which is both central to this Aristotelian account of virtuous motivation and also controversial. As we have seen, the idea that a virtuous agent would choose an action because it is virtuous (and presumably also because it is *kalon*) runs the risk of making the virtuous person seem either self-centered or fetishistic, neither of which seems virtuous. We have also seen that a lack of concern with whether an action is right or virtuous can be problematic, given that it may lead agents to act badly. So how should we interpret (c)?

I said in the discussion of (a), that the agent must know that the action is virtuous, that this amounts to seeing the action as choiceworthy, and choiceworthy in virtue of the features that make it so. All four of the characters in my opening example see the act of writing the check as choiceworthy, but they do not all see it as choiceworthy in virtue of the same features. This is why Gilderoy and Petunia would fail to meet criterion (a) on the thicker reading; they are not picking up on the features of the action that make it choiceworthy. And if they do not know what it is that makes the action choiceworthy, then they cannot choose it for its own sake.

What about Minerva and Albus? Minerva sees the action as choiceworthy in virtue of the fact that it helps people. Albus sees it as choiceworthy in virtue of the fact that it is generous. Which of them is choosing the action for its own sake in Aristotle's sense? In order to answer that question, we must delve further into their motivational structures. Let's start with Minerva. In order to count as being virtuously motivated, Minerva must know that on this particular occasion, helping people is the virtuous action. This requires that she employ practical wisdom to get to that judgment, which serves to filter the various moral considerations in play. As we know from the sympathetic philanthropist case, helping people is not always the right thing to do. If she is virtuous, Minerva will not go directly from the fact that people are in need to the judgment that she should write the check. She needs to make an all-things-considered judgment that writing the check would be virtuous in these circumstances. So she needs to be cognizant of the action's overall virtuousness in order to count as virtuously motivated.³⁵

As for Albus, what we need to know is whether he is already fully virtuous or whether he is what Annas calls a learner in virtue. If he is a learner (and say, is just following Minerva's lead because he knows her to be a moral expert), then he will not count as virtuously motivated because he will not be able to make the judgment on his own that this

action is the virtuous thing to do here. He may be morally motivated insofar as he wants to do what is generous. But in order to count as virtuously motivated, he must understand in virtue of what the action counts as generous, and moreover, he must see those features of the circumstances as what makes the action choiceworthy.

I propose that a virtuously motivated action combines features of the actions of Minerva and Albus, as I originally described them. In order for the act of writing the check to count as being virtuously motivated, the agent must know that the action is virtuous (else she turn into the sympathetic philanthropist), but she must also know what features of circumstances make this action virtuous, and moreover, she must see those features as making the action choiceworthy. This means that she is motivated to act by her recognition that people are in need, but she does not go directly from that recognition to the judgment that she should help. She must also know that helping is the virtuous thing to do here, and it must be true of her that she would refrain from acting if it weren't.

This takes us to criterion (d), which is that the virtuous action must be done from a firm and unchanging character. Why would this be important to virtuously motivated action? Recall that one of the concerns about the sympathetic philanthropist is that his ability to act correctly is tied to a particular set of circumstances, and even there, it is serendipitous. If he is acting on sympathy alone, his ability to judge and act correctly is limited to those situations in which acting on those sympathetic inclinations is in fact the right thing to do. He will not, however, be able to weigh sympathy against fairness, respect, or any other moral consideration. Moreover, his sympathetic inclinations may not persist over time or win out in the face of competing inclinations.

Here again, we see the importance of the reciprocal relationship between practical wisdom and the moral virtues. The moral virtues, on Aristotle's view, are enduring dispositions to feel and react well to particular moral considerations. If I am courageous, I react to threatening circumstances with the appropriate degree of fear; if I am generous, I react to the needs of others with the appropriate compassion and concern. These feelings, of course, serve to motivate me to act well, but on this Aristotelian picture, they do more than this. The moral virtues shape the judgments of practical wisdom by making those features salient in the moral landscapes we see. The reason that the practically wise person is capable of judging correctly about when and how to help people is that her perception of her circumstances has been shaped by the moral virtues she possesses. They lead her to see certain things as mattering, and mattering in varying ways. A virtuous agent may value historical preservation, but she will value the health and well-being of vulnerable people more. She will thus judge that virtue requires her to prioritize the needs of her homeless neighbors over the historical features of the building that shelters them. Her motivational structure will reflect the complexities of her judgment. She will not be torn over what to do, but she may well regret that the shingles are prohibitively expensive. The virtuously motivated person will judge correctly and will also exhibit the affects appropriate to the full moral landscape she faces.

Practical wisdom also helps the agent sustain her commitments in ways that reinforce the moral virtues. Returning once more to Kant's philanthropist, we can see that what

enables him to continue his beneficence in the face of his sorrows is his deep commitment to the underlying moral values and his ability to rouse himself to act in accordance with that commitment. For Kant, virtue just is this strength of will. Aristotle's account of virtue is rather different, but the motivational aspect is similar. A virtuous person will be able to act as practical wisdom directs her to act, regardless of what trials and tribulations she is facing. The moral virtues help her live up to the commitments expressed in her moral judgments. This means that the practically wise person not only judges well, but acts well, and indeed, can be counted on to act well regardless of her circumstances.

I will conclude with a brief summary. I began by canvassing the various questions that might be asked under the guise of asking about virtuous motivation. I claimed that virtuous motivation goes beyond moral motivation insofar as it requires the motivational structure characteristic of a fully virtuous person. A person may be motivated to do what she should for moral reasons without being fully virtuous. She may fail to appreciate the reasons that the action is choiceworthy, even though she knows that it is. Or she may lack the appropriate affective state, the state that matches her judgments of the moral features of the situation. Insofar as virtuous motivation requires full virtue, it is obviously a difficult standard for ordinary mortals to meet. It does nevertheless express a moral ideal toward which we have reason to aim.

NOTES

1. I am not here concerned with drawing a distinction between good actions and right actions.
2. The terms "internalist" and "externalist" lend themselves to many different definitions. Here I just mean by "internalism" the view that an agent's moral judgment is necessarily motivating, and by "externalism" the view that it is not.
3. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Terence Irwin, 2nd edition (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1999) 1105a1–1105b10. The translation of these terms is fraught, and since I am not engaged in textual exegesis, I am not going to worry too much about the implications of using, say, "choice" instead of "decision" for *prohairesis* or "for its own sake" as an interpretation of *to kalon*.
4. I am, of course, glossing over a number of important distinctions among types of reasons.
5. Bernard Williams notes that this is better described as a "sub-Humean" account of motivation, on the grounds that Hume's own view is considerably more complex than this. I am sympathetic to this position. See "Internal and External Reasons" in Williams, *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), chap. 8.
6. Slote's view has evolved considerably since the publication of his first full account of virtue ethics in *From Morality to Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). In explaining his view here, I am drawing primarily on *Morals from Motives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) and to a lesser extent, *Moral Sentimentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
7. In Slote's terminology, this means that my account is not agent-based.
8. I should note that Slote does not call himself a Humean and indeed, in chapter 7 of *Morals from Motives*, he explicitly distances himself from Hume on the matter of practical reasoning.

9. See especially John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62 (1979): 331–350, and "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 52 (1978): 13–29.
10. For a useful examination of whether Aristotelians should be motivational internalists or externalists, see Kristjan Kristjánsson, "Aristotelian Motivational Externalism," *Philosophical Studies* 164 (2013): 419–442.
11. See especially Plato, *Protagoras*, translated by Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1992).
12. It is worth noting that it does not follow from this Socratic view that the ignorance is non-culpable.
13. For an argument to this effect, see Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
14. See, for instance, Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).
15. Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories," *The Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976): 453–466.
16. For good reason, this way of describing the problem has fallen out of use. I will thus use it only in scare quotes and only in reference to Stocker's depiction of the issue.
17. Strictly speaking, the hospital visit would be fulfilling a Kantian imperfect duty, which makes a difference to its motivational structure.
18. Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories," 453–454.
19. See especially Christine Swanton, "Virtue Ethics and the Problem of Indirection," *Utilitas* 9 (1997): 167–181; Simon Keller, "Virtue Ethics is Self-Effacing," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 85 (2007): 221–237; Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics and the Charge of Egoism," in *Morality and Self-Interest*, edited by Paul Bloomfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Glen Pettigrove, "Is Virtue Ethics Self-Effacing?" *Journal of Ethics* 15 (2011): 191–207.
20. The term is Derek Parfit's (*Reasons and Persons*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), but there are a number of different objections that go under the self-effacing umbrella. See Pettigrove, "Is Virtue Ethics Self-Effacing?" for a nice articulation of the various possible versions of a self-effacingness objection to virtue ethics.
21. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by Thomas Hill and Arnulf Zweig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
22. Herman, "On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty," in *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), chap. 1.
23. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 98–102. See also Philippa Foot, "Virtues and Vices," in Foot, *Virtues and Vices* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), chap. 1.
24. Christine Korsgaard has an account of how this could go in Kantianism. See her "From Duty and for the Sake of the Noble," in *Aristotle, Kant, and the Stoics: Rethinking Happiness and Duty*, edited by Stephen Engstrom and Jennifer Whiting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 206–207.
25. For an extensive argument supporting the importance of emotion in Kant, see Nancy Sherman, *Making a Necessity of Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) chap. 4.
26. I have argued that the cold-hearted benefactor presents a substantial divide between Kantianism and Aristotelian virtue ethics. See Stohr, "Virtue Ethics and Kant's Cold-Hearted Benefactor," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 36 (2002): 187–204.

27. Stohr, "Moral Cacophony: When Continence Is a Virtue," *Journal of Ethics* 7 (2003): 339–363. See also Susan Stark, "Virtue and Emotion," *Noûs* 35 (2001): 440–455; and Jeffrey Seidman, "Two Sides of Silencing," *Philosophical Quarterly* 55 (2005): 68–77.
28. Lorraine Besser-Jones has argued that it is psychologically implausible to suppose that virtuous people will always find virtuous actions pleasant. See "The Motivational State of the Virtuous Agent," *Philosophical Psychology* 25 (2012): 93–108.
29. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 97.
30. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 127.
31. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 128.
32. This is, of course, an oversimplification of what Aristotle means by a practical syllogism.
33. Annas, "Virtue Ethics and the Charge of Egoism."
34. On the subject of habitual virtuous actions, see Nancy Snow, "Habitual Virtuous Actions and Automaticity," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 9 (2006): 546–561.
35. I am here employing Christine Swanton's useful description of overall virtuousness. See *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 239–244.

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CHAPTER 24

EUDAIMONISM

MARK LEBAR

WHAT is a chapter on *eudaimonism* doing in a book on virtue? *Eudaimonia* is the Greek word often translated as “happiness,” or “flourishing,” and nobody thinks that is a virtue. Nevertheless, a discussion of it belongs here because of the role it plays in understanding virtue on some quite influential virtue ethical theories. It played a crucial role in the ethical theories of the ancient Greeks and Romans, from Socrates to Marcus Aurelius. It was inextricably involved with the conceptions of virtue held by Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Stoic philosophers, and others. And it has received renewed attention as philosophers have once again begun to realize that thinking about virtue could allow for significant advances in moral philosophy. So a discussion of *eudaimonia* belongs here because of the functional role of the concept—its work in giving shape and point to conceptions of virtue—and it is that role which it is the task of this chapter to explicate.

It is worthwhile to start with the virtues and vices of translating *eudaimonia* as “happiness.”¹ Probably the best reason for understanding *eudaimonia* as happiness is that, just as we often think of happiness as a goal for people, those who used the term *eudaimonia* did the same. That is, among the philosophers in whose work *eudaimonia* figures most prominently (for economy, let us refer to them as the classical eudaimonists), we find the shared belief that people want to be *eudaimon*. Plato founds arguments on this idea.² Aristotle even makes the stronger claim that it is for the sake of *eudaimonia* that we do all that we do.³ In other words, *eudaimonia* plays the general role in practical thought for classical eudaimonism that happiness does for us. In this they seem to be terms for the same concept.

Yet there are important differences between them. As Richard Kraut observed in a paper well deserving the wide attention it has garnered, there are two conceptions of happiness at work here, not one.⁴ The classical eudaimonists think of happiness differently than we do, and that difference matters for understanding *eudaimonia*. A major difference is that we often think of happiness as a property of states of mind. (I was happy yesterday, but today I’m not.) Or perhaps it reflects some property of the world just now that establishes some state of mind, along the lines of Kant’s thought that happiness is the “complete satisfaction of inclinations.”⁵ But in classical eudaimonism, *eudaimonia* is, properly speaking, a property of lives. One’s life is *eudaimon*, or it’s not. But as such a property it has neither the vicissitudes nor the degree of subjectivity of a property

of mental states. As Kraut observed, however, the classical eudaimonist notion is not completely foreign to us: when we wish happiness for a newborn baby, for example, or a newly married couple, we are not wishing for states of mind for them.⁶ We are wishing for them lives that go well. People living such lives will quite often and to a great extent experience the mental states we also call happiness, but we are wishing for them the lives, not the states.

When we mark that difference, we have an *entré* into understanding the role that *eudaimonia* plays in virtue ethical theories. Its functional role is connected with its being a property of lives. Its tie to virtue is via the effects of virtues, as character traits, on the quality of lives they shape and determine.

For classical eudaimonism, the key to this line of thought is that lives are lived, in more than the trivial sense in which someone has to be alive to have a life. Living, in this sense, isn't something that happens to us—an effect of nature, as it were. Living is something we do. It is something in which we are characteristically agents, not patients.⁷ Since it is something we do, it is something we do well or badly. In this sense, what *eudaimonia* picks out is as much adverbial as it is adjectival: it is a property of what we are doing in living. Once we see that, we see that there is an essentially normative question surrounding our project of living: What is it to carry out this project well? What is it to live well? For classical eudaimonism, that question is the focal question in thinking about how to live and act. The answer to it is what happiness (construed as a property of lives) consists in. It is what life and agency are and ought to be focused upon.

It is, moreover, the focus of virtue. If we think of virtue as being and acting excellently, we need standards for what will count as excellence. For the classical eudaimonists, those standards come from the enterprise of living well. And that is the functional role that *eudaimonia* plays for virtue.

That is an overview. Crucial parts of this overview bear elaboration. Here are the questions we must take up to flesh out this functional role for *eudaimonia*:

- (1) What, beyond merely not dying, does living consist in?
- (2) What counts as living well?
- (3) How does *eudaimonia* give point or focus to virtue?
- (4) Who is living a good life good for?
- (5) Can eudaimonism get us beyond narcissism?

We'll take these up in order.

I. A STANDARD FOR LIVING

As indicated earlier, the classical eudaimonists thought there was more to living than just being alive. It's something we do, not just something that happens to us. So what is this thing we do?

The major schools of classical eudaimonism, from Socrates through the Stoics, thought that living was an enterprise of practical rationality. Aristotle has perhaps the best-known formulation of this line of thought. He claims that it is characteristic of us to live via a “rational principle” (*logos*).⁸ This conclusion he arrives at in part by reflecting on the fact that we are by nature end-setters and end-pursuers.⁹ We are sensitive to reasons, and that fact about us shapes what we identify as ends. What living amounts to for us humans, in other words, is using our capacities for practical rationality to set and pursue ends. Living well, then, amounts to doing well in guiding our actions and selves (including our passions and appetites) in line with the ends apprehended through reason.¹⁰ And that is exactly what Aristotle takes virtue to consist in.¹¹

John McDowell has framed this Aristotelian thought in terms of “second nature.”¹² Whereas the modes of living well and doing well for other living beings are specified by their biology and environment—by (first) nature—ours are not. Instead, nature has bestowed on us the tools (reason and speech) to shape and remake the attributes, practices, and forms of life available to us by first nature. That is our “second nature,” and that is where *eudaimonia* and virtue meet.

This line of thought (one which on these points differs only in detail, not in broad outline, in other classical eudaimonists) gives us a grip on *eudaimonia*’s functional role. While we have seen that one difference between *eudaimonia* as a concept and at least some ways we think about happiness is that the former is a property of lives, and the latter a property of states of mind, that difference may be a reflection of the deeper difference we see here, that *eudaimonia* is something that is proper to agents and agency, not to beings merely capable of sensing what is going on around them but incapable of directing their own lives through reason. That we are normatively sensitive creatures is the pivotal fact in understanding *eudaimonia*, as something that has responsiveness to reasons built into it conceptually, in a way that many conceptions of happiness do not. One upshot of this feature of *eudaimonia* and its functional role is that it is by its very nature reason-giving in a way that happiness of other stripes need not necessarily be. It is open to us to ask why or how we have reason to seek happiness, understood as any of a variety of properties of mental states. But the question of why we should be responsive to reasons is itself an exercise of that very capacity for responsiveness. Any skeptical response tends to be self-undermining.

II. A STANDARD FOR LIVING WELL

Once we’ve recognized that it is in our nature to live by reasoning, the natural follow-up question is how to decide what doing so well consists in. And here the ancients all deployed a version of a strategy that Plato introduces and Aristotle develops, one that is closely connected to *eudaimonia*’s functional role.¹³ The idea is that this strategy is to capture the point of excellence, of doing well. And this involves two things.

First, it involves getting to the point of why we do things. We have ends of different sorts. We do some things just for the sake of other things (getting root canals done, for

example). Some things we do for their own sake as well as for the sake of other things (swimming, say, for the sake of fitness, and for its own sake). But if there is something we seek for its own sake, not for the sake of anything further, the classical eudaimonists would call this goal complete or final (*teleion*), and say that this quality of that goal is a quality that should be characteristic of a standard of excellence in living.¹⁴

Second, this standard is to pick out a life that we can see as a life worth living. The “we” here is us, as the rational social animals we are. Such a life must answer to our full nature, so it must not only hold up to rational scrutiny, but also answer to our natures as passionate and desiring creatures. Of course, this is a tricky demand, as the classical eudaimonists were also keenly aware of how moldable and volatile our passions and desires are. The way this thought comes to bear on thinking about *eudaimonia* is in the idea that the *eudaimon* life must be “sufficient” (Plato: *hikanon*), or self-sufficient (Aristotle: *autarkes*), or that the person whose life it is must be self-sufficient (Epicurus). The common thread through all these variations is that nothing one could wish for is missing from an excellent life. It must, that is, answer to our deepest wants, needs, and passions.

Though he does not set it alongside completeness and self-sufficiency as a “formal condition” on our highest end, Aristotle also emphasizes a point that later eudaimonists insist upon even more clearly. Aristotle says that this most-good thing must be “one’s own and not easily taken from one.”¹⁵ The classical eudaimonists were keenly aware of the vulnerability of our lives to the vicissitudes of nature, of other people, of fate—of life! But this demand answers to the centrality of agency. Thinking that we are living, that living is something that we do, not that happens to us, changes the way we think about success in doing so. The vicissitudes of life are not up to us; easy come, easy go. What we do with our lives in those vicissitudes is, and that’s where we should look for a standard for living.

All of these standards point unequivocally to virtuous life and action in classical eudaimonism. Acting virtuously as the virtuous person does so involves seeing virtue as worth undertaking for its own sake, so it satisfies the completeness requirement. The practice of virtue disciplines and shapes our passions and desires so as to act out of a unified, rather than a divided, self, so that the self-sufficiency requirement is satisfied.¹⁶ And while nature or other people can deprive us of any other element of our lives (even including our own bodies), they cannot get to what we choose to make of ourselves as agents. So the life of virtuous agency is what is picked out as the *eudaimon* life by reflection on what kinds of standard we could use to assess what is the best kind of life.

III. THE POINT AND FOCUS OF VIRTUE

There are lots of theories of virtue, and lots of ways of identifying virtues—picking out which character traits are to count as virtues, and which not. In the classical eudaimonist tradition, the central conceptual tool for doing so is *eudaimonia*; as observed earlier, this is really the functional role that *eudaimonia* plays in this virtue ethical tradition. There

are two dimensions to the relation between *eudaimonia* and virtue as a result of this function. First, *eudaimonia* plays a “specificatory” role for character traits: it identifies which traits are to count as virtues. Second, virtue helps flesh out the substantive nature of *eudaimonia*. Let’s take up each of these points individually.

First, *eudaimonia* plays a clear specificatory role for virtue. This is easiest to see in Aristotle, though other eudaimonist views reflect a similar structure.¹⁷ Aristotle maintains, first, that one cannot have any one of the genuine virtues without having them all.¹⁸ Moreover, there is a reciprocal relationship between the virtues of character (justice, courage, and so on) and the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom (*phronesis*). One cannot have a genuine virtue of character without the guidance of *phronesis*. *Phronesis* is in part excellence in determining the mean between excess and deficiency that is characteristic of virtues of character.¹⁹ Since that mean cannot be specified or identified without practical wisdom, the exercise of these virtues is conceptually linked.²⁰

But, to complete the thought, the link to *eudaimonia* is complete because practical wisdom has as its focus *eudaimonia*.²¹ That is, practical wisdom requires and involves a grasp of what the good life is. That good life is, in effect, the measure of the mean in action. Of course, that is not necessarily the way the virtuous person deliberates. Virtuous action aims at the fine and noble (*to kalon*), the fitting (*to prepon*).²² We might do better at characterizing the aim of the virtuous person in acting, thus, as the fine and noble. But what the fine and noble is fitting for is the good life for the virtuous person.

The doctrine of the reciprocity of the virtues is controversial among virtue ethicists today. Many do not accept it. But it was not very controversial among the classical eudaimonists. Plato seemed to hold it or something even stronger—the doctrine that all the virtues are one.²³ And the Stoics explicitly endorsed both the reciprocity of the virtues and the claim that practical wisdom is aimed at the good life (or “advantage”) of the agent as well.²⁴ That suggests that there is something about eudaimonism that makes this tight knit among virtues and between virtues and *eudaimonia* especially strong.²⁵

The tie between virtue and *eudaimonia* works both ways. There is no understanding of what the good life is independent of virtue. It’s not the case, on the classical eudaimonist conception of this relation, that we begin with an idea of what living well is, conceived independently of and prior to our understanding of virtue, and then peg our conceptions of (or exercise of) the virtues to that understanding. For the exercise of virtue is part of the conception of what it is to live well, to be *eudaimon*, on most of the classical eudaimonist theories.²⁶ Because the exercise of practical reason is so central to the very nature of human life, exercising practical rationality well—being practically wise—is central to having a human life that is good. The classical eudaimonists think there is no story to tell about a good life that doesn’t start with the kind of being we are, and no way to look at what we are and see anything other than the crucial fact of our responsiveness to reasons. That feature of our nature transforms our thinking about every aspect of our lives. In thinking about the good life, our “second nature” swamps our first in salience and importance. And that means that virtue must be “baked in” to the very foundations of our understanding of *eudaimonia*.

IV. BEING ALL YOU CAN BE

What I have called the “tight knit” of *eudaimonia* and virtue has given rise to a concern about eudaimonism, or perhaps an objection to how it is often understood, that goes something like this. It is a mistake to think of *eudaimonia* as happiness, as we have from the outset. What the centrality of virtue to *eudaimonia* points us to is not so much being happy, but being good. Virtue is excellence—that’s what the Greek (*arete*) means. So when we are thinking about *eudaimonia*, we should not be distracted by the thought that it is a matter of happiness, but instead that it is a matter of making ourselves good, of being the best people we can be.

This is a line of argument that has been taken up both by eudaimonism’s detractors and by some of its would-be defenders. Wayne Sumner uses this line of thought to argue that the Aristotle’s eudaimonist project is fundamentally misguided.²⁷ This is because (Sumner argues) Aristotle is guilty of a basic conflation of the notions of well-being or welfare and perfection, beginning by asking what happiness consists in and ending up answering a very different question. What has value as a kind of perfection of a capacity or function is simply not the same as what has welfare value, and these two categories of value must not be confused, for at least two reasons.

First, Sumner maintains, there is an important subjective component to welfare or well-being that is not necessarily any part of a perfectionist value. We can think of lots of examples of perfection that involve no subjective attitudes at all. I could have perfect pitch, or pitch a perfect game, without necessarily having any particular subjective attitude toward those forms of perfection. But happiness touches deeply and characteristically on how I experience my life, as a subject of it.²⁸ So that is one reason to resist this conflation as an important kind of confusion.

Moreover, Sumner argues, a deeper problem is that there are limitless varieties of perfectionist values.²⁹ What counts as an excellence for a thing depends on how we sort it—what kind of thing we take it to be. And there is in principle no limit to the sorting into kinds that we can do for something as complex as a human being. We could be excellent (or of course lousy) in any number of dimensions, and an account on which we are to be “excellent” must offer a rationale for privileging one or some small number of these dimensions to fix ethical value on. Of course, Aristotle does offer such a rationale: we have an *ergon* (or “function”), and that settles what kind we belong to for the crucial purpose of understanding the dimension in which we must excel. We belong to the kind, “living being with a rational principle,” and that’s the basis for fixing on virtues of intellect and character as the target for living.³⁰ But (Sumner maintains) Aristotle’s rationale depends on an outdated and discredited teleological biology, and should have no grip on our thinking about happiness today. Modern biology has purged us of the notion that we have any “function.” Thus, the project should be jettisoned.

Christopher Toner, on the other hand, turns this point on its head. The focus on happiness, he claims, lays eudaimonism open to the objection that it is tainted with

egoism—a charge we will consider later.³¹ His proposed remedy, however, seizes on the distinction Sumner is pressing here, between conceptions of *eudaimonia* that construe it as focusing in the first instance on our happiness or welfare, and conceptions that focus on our perfection. Anne Baril helpfully identifies this distinction as one between “welfare-prior” and “excellence-prior” versions of eudaimonism.³² Toner’s recommendation, then, is that we reject welfare-prior conceptions in favor of understanding *eudaimonia* as a conception of excellence or perfection, as a way of defending eudaimonism.

Now, Sumner’s line of objection brings out something important about the way of thinking about happiness that eudaimonism urges upon us. It is intrinsically normative. In inviting us to think about our good lives as something we do, rather than something that happens to us, it opens the question of whether we do so better or poorly. As soon as the normative dimension of better and worse is introduced, something like perfectionism comes on the scene as well, because if what matters to us is something that it is up to us to do, then naturally we will want to be at the better end of the spectrum, as opposed to the poorer end.

We can think of that as a form of perfectionism if we like. But the charge that perfectionism so construed is a problem for eudaimonism is stillborn, because the standard for better or worse here just is happiness, construed as our ultimate end. That is, the standard is a conception of happiness that answers to the constraints that our ultimate end must answer to: it must be something we can understand as worth pursuing for its own sake, and indeed not for the sake of anything further; it must be a life that is self-sufficient, in the sense that it lacks nothing. A life in the pursuit of pitching a perfect game, or most forms of perfection, could not satisfy these constraints. But a life of virtuous activity with some complement of external goods (as Aristotle conceives of the good life) can. We need not depend on an objectionable notion of natural function to get to this point; we can think of how it is that human beings go about the task of living lives.³³ Unlike other animals, we use our capacities of practical rationality to negotiate our way about the world. Seeing our “second nature” as having this kind of centrality takes us to precisely the point we need.

So construed, the perfectionist strain in eudaimonism comes down to this: do a good job of using practical reason to navigate your way through life. Now we have circled back to the significance of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) in living a good life, and thus in being happy. Practical wisdom has its point in the things that are good for us, as Aristotle insists.³⁴ And since (as we’ve seen) on the classical eudaimonist views practical wisdom cannot be prized apart from the other virtues, including virtues of character, all the perfection that eudaimonism leans on is focused on our living well. While we could, following Baril, distinguish between welfare-priority and excellence-priority, classical eudaimonism insists on no priority. We cannot, on that outlook, get an adequate grasp of human perfection without a cogent conception of welfare or happiness; such an ideal requires an understanding of what we can see as lives that are good for us to live, as lives that can be our final end, lacking in nothing. Nor can we understand happiness without grasping moral ideals to which we should aspire in shaping our lives; we need an understanding of how virtue matters for us to get right what it is for us to have good lives.³⁵

This line of thought may simply drive us back to Toner's question, however. Why not think we should redirect our attention from *eudaimonia* as happiness (or well-being) to virtue and moral perfection, given the central role of virtue in classical eudaimonism? The answer is that if we do so, *eudaimonia* cannot play the functional role that we, like the ancients, have supposed it to play all along. To do so, in effect, we would have to wrench it out of its place in moral philosophy and in the history of classical eudaimonism.

Recall where we began, with *eudaimonia* giving shape and point to virtue. If *eudaimonia* is simply moral perfection, then it is hard to see how it can perform this task. For example, consider Aristotle's conception of the role of the mean in determining the virtues. That mean is, as Aristotle insists, "relative to us."³⁶ We can get some sense of how it is relative to us, if we take the point of virtue to be happiness in the sense available to eudaimonism. As Aristotle makes the point, Milo, as a wrestler, needs a lot more food than do the rest of us. What sets the right level, for Milo and for us in turn, is the level of health afforded by our respective levels of consumption. But that level is a contributor to happiness, not to some form of moral perfection. We don't eat to be excellent; we eat to be healthy, and health is among the most important of the "external goods" that contribute to happiness.³⁷ There are virtues with respect to eating: self-control is an obvious one. But the standard that the self-controlled person hits here is determined, not by a conception of moral perfection—that would lead to a useless vacuity—but by what contributes to his or her *eudaimonia*, and the sense *eudaimonia* requires for this idea to be intelligible is happiness, not perfection.

Perhaps more important, however tempting it is to try to read moral perfection into *eudaimonia* in Aristotle (or perhaps the Stoics), there is no doing so without losing the continuity of thought they share with other classical eudaimonists: with Plato (and presumably Socrates), and with Epicurus.³⁸ The history of the deployment of the concept of *eudaimonia* cannot naturally be construed in any way other than the welfarist sense Toner would like us to eschew. For the notion of *eudaimonia* figures not just in normative ethical theory—as the point and determinant of virtue—but also descriptively, as a matter of human psychology. Not just Aristotle but Plato and the Hellenistic eudaimonists believe that we do, in fact, all want *eudaimonia*,³⁹ and however difficult it may be to defend that claim if we take *eudaimonia* to be happiness,⁴⁰ it is even harder to imagine how one might defend it as a matter of moral perfection.

As far as its normative work goes, only more torture can make out the use of *eudaimonia* as a form of perfection. Consider, for example, this passage from *Euthydemus*:

... the other results which a person might attribute to the statesman's art ... all these appeared to be neither good nor evil; but this art had to make them wise (*sophous*) and to provide them with a share of knowledge if it was to be the one that benefited them and made them happy. (292b)

"Happy" is the only translation for *eudaimon* that makes sense here, as the natural consequence of the benefit of wisdom and knowledge. Toner's proposal also does not fit well with Aristotle's claim that

[b]oth the general run of men and people of superior refinement say that [the highest of goods achievable by action] is [*eudaimonia*], and identify living well and faring well with being [*eudaimon*]; but with regard to what [*eudaimonia*] is they differ . . .⁴¹

Aristotle's claim makes perfect sense here if we understand the topic to be happiness: two millennia later, we still differ over what happiness consists in, but it makes much less sense if we think he is talking about moral excellence.

A somewhat different way of bringing out this historical point is to consider the relation between *eudaimonia* and pleasure. Plato's argument against Calicles in *Gorgias* is intended to disabuse the audience of the notion that pleasure (understood as the satisfaction of desire) is happiness.⁴² Pleasure, might, plausibly, lure us into supposing it is the nature of a happy life, but there is no similar temptation to think it constitutes the excellent life. Epicurus is also a party to this debate, and when he makes the case that our highest end (our *eudaimonia*) lies in pleasure, understood as freedom from disturbance (*ataraxia*),⁴³ we have to see him as supplying a conception of happiness, not excellence. Otherwise he would simply have been changing the subject.

In short, to reinterpret *eudaimonia* as picking out excellence or perfection instead of happiness, we would have to do great violence to the use of the term throughout classical eudaimonism. But the very force of that point thrusts us on to the other hoary worry about eudaimonism: Is it unacceptably egoistic? We turn in conclusion to that concern.

V. THE DEAR SELF

The concern that grounding a virtue ethic in *eudaimonia* is unacceptably egoistic has been persistent. Sometimes this concern is misdirected, in simply misunderstanding the target. We'll first consider a number of these sources of misunderstanding. But some objections persist despite clearing up the misunderstandings. So we'll conclude by engaging those objections.

i. Modern Conceptions of Happiness

Much or most moral theory is done under the sway of what we can think of as a "modern" conception of the relation between virtue and happiness, one in which virtue (or more generally morality) is construed as a matter of pro-social constraint on the interests in being happy each of us has, which, if pursued without constraint, would be socially ruinous. This structure of thought is clearest in Hobbes, where the social contract is explicitly modeled as a solution to the problem of untrammelled pursuit of individual interests, understood as the satisfaction of desire. But we see the same structure in someone as unHobbesian as Kant, where morality stands against happiness understood,

again, as the “sum of satisfaction of inclinations.”⁴⁴ And of course mainstream consequentialist views, understanding happiness either (similarly) as desire-satisfaction, or as pleasure, fit right into this mold as well. It is very hard to find modern conceptions of happiness that reflect, as classical eudaimonism does, the “building in” of virtuous agency into what it is to be happy. That, of course, is just the feature of classical eudaimonism that induces concern over conflation of happiness with perfection, as we’ve just seen. But while the classical eudaimonists are not guilty of this conflation, they do insist that no adequate conception of happiness can be grasped prior to understanding what virtue does for the person who lives by it.

This point matters greatly for the objection that eudaimonism is egoistic. To the extent we think “egoism” is a problem of seeking one’s own good at the expense of the goods of others, that concern is largely simply misplaced, because there is no good of one’s own except as a matter of virtuous action, prominently including one’s treatment of those around one. Many of the core virtues in classical eudaimonism (notably including, but not limited to, the virtue of justice) limit our hogging of things in the world we share with others. So to the extent that a concern about egoism emanates from a failure to recognize this difference in conceptions of happiness, it is simply stillborn.

ii. Receptacle versus Agent

A closely related mistake fails to recognize the agential dimension of *eudaimonia*. On modern conceptions of happiness, at the end of the day happiness is something that happens to us. We are affected in such a way as to feel pleasure, or as to have our desires satisfied. We are receptacles in which happiness occurs, or is instantiated, and theories of prudence tell us how to make such instantiations most likely.

Again, the contrast with classical eudaimonism is stark. The focus on virtue as the key to living a happy life is a focus on agency. Eudaimonism is a story about how to live one’s life, not about what one should aspire to get out of it. Happiness isn’t something that happens to us; it is a way we live our lives.

Especially in contrast with modern conceptions of happiness, this point is important. On the classical eudaimonist outlook there is an important asymmetry between my relation to my own happiness and to the happiness of anyone else. I can make myself happy by living my life in a certain way, but I am quite unable to do this for others. I can of course aid and abet others in living good (or bad) lives, but the essential ingredient in happiness—virtue—is something that is only up to each in living his or her own life. My life really is the only one I can live well.⁴⁵ But if happiness is pleasure or desire-satisfaction, my causal relation to my own happiness and the happiness of others is much more symmetrical. While I am subject to epistemic limits (it’s a lot easier for me to know what will give me pleasure or satisfy my desires than it is to know what will give you pleasure or satisfy your desires), I can choose between attempting to produce happiness for myself and attempting to produce it for you. In that context, an emphasis on my own happiness does seem selfish or egoistic. But that sort of trade-off structure simply

does not exist when my happiness is the only one I can realize. There are lots of things I can do to contribute to your happiness, and—depending on our relationship—virtue may require many of them of me. But that does not come as a cost to my happiness, precisely because my own happiness is to such a great degree constituted by my virtuous activity.⁴⁶

iii. Others as Mere Means

A particularly ill-grounded objection is that on classical eudaimonism the value of others is reduced merely to being instruments in the pursuit of our own happiness. While any sensible view acknowledges that others do have instrumental value in this way (lots of people I don't know are even at this moment working to produce the food I will eat), the classical views concur that others are to be valued for their own sake. We see them as reason-giving in their own right, not (just) because they serve our own ends. Of course, the reason we do so is that it is good for us to be the kind of person who sees others in this way. There is thus a two-level structure to our reasons, but the thinking about why I should be a person who sees others in this way is not the same as the thinking I engage in to the effect that, because this action will benefit my friend, I should undertake it. One is a thought about what ends I should have (what things—including people—I should see as worthy of valuing or seeking or preserving for their own sake), and the other is a thought about what I must do in light of those ends. When I act for the sake of my friend, there is nothing egoistic about my doing so.⁴⁷

iv. Limited Concern

There is, however, a legitimate point of concern in this vicinity, which is triggered by the condition mentioned earlier: “depending on our relationship,” virtue may require me to work for your benefit.⁴⁸ Notoriously, the classical eudaimonists were weak on this point. In the extreme case, Aristotle sees the bounds of virtuous action as lying at the extent of the *polis*. So if you are alien to me, I may owe you nothing by way of virtuous treatment. The Stoics were far better on this score, emphasizing as they did the idea that we are citizens of the cosmos, and owe virtuous treatment to all of humanity as co-recipients of the very same *logos* (reason) that guides the cosmos.⁴⁹

However, there is a further, narrower objection that applies even to the Stoic position. As John Hare puts the concern, it is that on eudaimonism one “does not recognize the claims of the ‘other.’”⁵⁰ Recognizing the standing of others to make moral claims upon us may well be a feature of our moral requirements that the classical accounts are not adequate in meeting. However, this is not due to their eudaimonism per se: many consequentialist theories have precisely the same difficulty, and even Kant's own theory struggles to make sense of that point.⁵¹ Neither is it endemic to eudaimonism, as (arguably)

a proper account of the virtues and of the reasons others give us by their natures can recognize such claims.⁵² So while there is a concern here, it is not one that tallies with general worries about egoism.⁵³

v. Enduring Issues

Still, even once all these sources of potential confusion have been reckoned with, some may still object. Hare, for example, recognizes that eudaimonism is not committed to the thought that others matter only instrumentally for happiness, but he does (correctly) take the point that the justification for seeing others as reason-giving must (if eudaimonism be true) be rooted in the agent's own happiness, and this is precisely where he locates his objection:

... if another person's welfare is constitutive of my happiness, but my happiness is central, the commitment I have to that person's welfare is always conditional on its constituting my happiness. This conditionality is built into the structure of eudaimonism, and it is this conditionality that is unacceptably self-regarding.⁵⁴

This conditionality is indeed built into the reasons eudaimonism recognizes for acting virtuously. What is unclear is precisely why this is unacceptable.⁵⁵ Presumably there is thought to be something untoward in the relation of selves and others, but the nature of what exactly the problem is supposed to be remains largely mysterious. But we can reply on behalf of eudaimonism that, without the kind of concern for one's own good life that eudaimonism insists upon, we have trouble understanding what it is for us to have proper concern for others. There are two facets to this line of argument.

The first is to understand just what it is I am supposed to value in others whom I love or cherish. I want to benefit them, to contribute to their living well. But what, exactly, does that consist in? What reasons do I have, exactly? Apparently they do not connect very tightly with what they value and with their reasons, because their own good life is (on this line of objection) not supposed to provide significant reasons for them. There is thus a sort of dislocation or disjunction between the object of my love or concern for my friends and the way my friends conceive of the value of their own lives. What, exactly, does it mean for me to value them, when they do not value themselves in any distinctive way?

The second is this same point seen from the first-person perspective of wanting to grasp the value of my own life. I know I matter to you, as my friend. You love me, you see me and my life as of great value, perhaps infinite value. Do I think you are right? In my own eyes, my life is, literally, nothing special. Suppose I desire to "stand in the right relation to the good"⁵⁶: How does that shape the value I place on my own life? Am I "self-emptying"—prepared to destroy my own life for the sake of others, as Hare reads St. Paul?⁵⁷ If that is the right valuation to place on my life, what does that say about the value

those who love me place on it? They apparently are to see my welfare as being worth sacrificing their own for. Are they confused? Can they be right that it is worth that sacrifice while I cannot share those priorities? Can we make sense of the melange of attitudes this would commit us to?⁵⁸

I think we cannot, unless we see the prospect of good lives as the foundation for the reasons we have for living our lives as we ought, as the classical eudaimonists urge us to do. Just because I see my living well as having this special sort of reason-giving force for me, I can understand the value of living your life for you. If I am your friend, I can aid and abet your project as best I am able. You and I can share ends as part of the structure of ends each of us develops and pursues as part of the project of living well as the rational social animals we are.⁵⁹ In that way, once again, virtue and *eudaimonia* are inseparable.

VI. CONCLUSION

These objections—especially those that correctly apprehend the nature and structure of the reasons eudaimonism supposes we have—are not trivial. They go to the heart of what it is to be the rational social animals we know ourselves to be, and are of paramount importance to our understanding of ourselves and our relations with others. While I have suggested responses to the worries some critics have pressed, I do not mean to suggest that there is not more to say. Indeed, I think this is likely to be the area in which eudaimonism holds out the greatest promise of ethical illumination going forward. People taking seriously what it means to value ourselves and our lives correctly as agents and as social beings are doing arguably the most important work there is in ethical theory. They are also doing exactly the work eudaimonism challenges us to do.

Classical eudaimonism has nothing to be embarrassed about in the way it instructs us to regard our own interest and the interests of others. On the contrary, the picture it yields of the value of selves is as sources of ultimate value, realizing that value in living lives that are enmeshed with the valuable lives of others in a way that is recognizably the form of life of the beings that we are. *Eudaimonia* gives point to virtue and is simultaneously dependent on it by nature. Helping us see that this is so is the distinctive contribution of eudaimonist virtue theories.⁶⁰

NOTES

1. Some object to this practice. We take up their concerns in section IV.
2. See *Euthydemus* 278e, in *Collected Works*, edited by John Cooper. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997. Here Plato actually uses the term *eu prattein*, which is better translated as “do well.” But, just as an English speaker would take someone who said they were “doing well” to be generally happy, so would the Greeks.
3. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE) I.12, 1102a4, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, edited by Jonathan Barnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

4. Richard Kraut, "Two Conceptions of Happiness," *Philosophical Review* 88 (1979): 167–197. The concept/conception distinction is adapted from John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).
5. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1785), 399, 405, in *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, edited by Mary Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
6. Kraut, "Two Conceptions of Happiness," 187.
7. For discussion of this point, see Micah Lott, "Constructing a Good Life," *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 13 (2016): 363–375; Micah Lott, "Agency, Patience, and Happiness," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 19 (2016): 773–786.
8. NE I.7, 1098a8.
9. NE I.1–2. In Stoic thought, the line of argument is different. One way the Stoics reach this thought is by beginning with the idea there are two "principles" to the cosmos: matter, and the *logos* active in it. Our nature as rational, then, is to share in this cosmic principle (Diogenes Laertius 7:134, at Brad Inwood and L. Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997), 132.
10. NE I.13.
11. NE II.6, 1107a1.
12. John McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," in *Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory*, edited by Hursthouse, Lawrence, and Quinn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 149–179.
13. LeBar, Mark, "Prichard vs. Plato: Intuition vs. Reflection," in *Reasons to be Moral Revisited*, edited by Black and Tiffany (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2010), 1–32.
14. This idea is found in Plato at Philebus 20d, in Plato 1997, and in Aristotle at NE I.7, 1097a34, though the gloss on this condition is slightly different in each of the two theories. I emphasize the Aristotelian reading here. See LeBar, "Prichard vs. Plato: Intuition vs. Reflection," for more discussion.
15. NE I.5, 1095, b25.
16. No better instance of this thought can be found than Plato's discussion in Republic IV, but it is at least implicit in all the ancient eudaimonists.
17. For example, Epicurus's case for justice depends in part on his thought that injustice exposes us to risk of discovery and punishment, which frustrates the realization of *ataraxia*—his conception of *eudaimonia* (Principal Doctrines XXXIII and XXXIV, Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 35).
18. NE VI.13. Calling some virtues "genuine" is a way of picking out one side of Aristotle's distinction between virtues properly so-called and "natural virtues"—traits of character we may stumble into one way or another that lack the constraint of other virtues and guidance of practical wisdom.
19. NE II.2.
20. NE VI.1.
21. NE VI.12.
22. EE VII.15, 1249a5–15.
23. Gorgias 507a–c, Republic II 441e–444e.
24. Diogenes Laertius 10:125, Stobaeus 5b2, 5b5, at Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 202–205.
25. For exploration of this thought, see Daniel Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

26. The “most of” qualifier here reflects the more obscure relation between virtue and eudaimonia on Epicurus’s theory.
27. L. W. Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 69ff, esp. 78. In many theories (including Sumner’s) there are important differences between happiness and welfare or well-being. Those differences are insignificant for the issues in play here, and I will treat them as interchangeable notions.
28. Dan Haybron, making a similar point, says that “Perfection . . . bears no necessary connection to anything that can plausibly be viewed as an organism’s goals.” Daniel Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 169.
29. Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics*, 212.
30. NE I.7, 1098a3.
31. Christopher Toner. “Virtue Ethics and the Nature and Forms of Egoism.” *Journal of Philosophical Research* 35 (2010): 275–303.
32. Anne Baril. “The Role of Welfare in Eudaimonism.” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 51 (2013): 512.
33. As on more plausible readings of what Aristotle is up to in NE I.7, cf. Korsgaard, Christine. “Aristotle on Function and Virtue,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 3 (1986): 259–279.
34. NE VI.5.
35. Compare Julia Annas: “virtue ethics does not begin from any specification of flourishing that is substantive and independent of the virtues” Julia Annas, “Virtue Ethics,” in *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, edited by Copp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 522. Kathleen Wilkes, arriving at a similar point by a somewhat different route, asks to what extent “the notion of ‘the life of a good man’ and ‘the life good for a man’ can be successfully united in a single concept of eudaimonia,” and her conclusion is that “[i]n this, surely, Aristotle is wholly successful.” Kathleen Wilkes, “The Good Man and the Good for Man,” in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, edited by A. O. Rorty Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 354. Toner calls such a proposal the “welfare in perfection thesis,” and suggests that it must be rejected due to its egoist overtones. Toner, “Virtue Ethics and the Nature and Forms of Egoism,” 295. We take up the egoism objection in the next section.
36. NE II.5.
37. NE 1.10.
38. In fact, as Christopher Bobonich observes, the earliest recorded sense of *eudaimon*, in Hesiod, Pindar, and other poets, was in its welfarist sense. Christopher Bobonich, “Socrates and Eudaimonia,” in *Cambridge Companion to Socrates*, edited by Morrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 294. The torture of language necessary to understand *eudaimonia* as perfection must start very early.
39. See for example, Plato, *Euthydemus* 278e3–5; Aristotle, NE I.12, 1102a3; Cicero, On Ends I. 30, in Cicero, *On Ends*, edited by H. Rackham. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914. the Stoic doctrine of “personal *oikeiosis*” as a foundation for their developmental moral psychology is also a version of the descriptive form of eudaimonism; see Cicero, De Finibus III.16.
40. For an attempt to defend this claim, see Mark LeBar, “Prichard vs. Plato: Intuition vs. Reflection,” in *Reasons to be Moral Revisited*, edited by Black and Tiffany (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2010), 1–32.
41. NE I.4, 1095a18.
42. *Gorgias* 491e, 497d, in Plato 1997.
43. See, for example, Cicero I.29.

44. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 399, 405.
45. If we are thinking about reasons for action, it is hard to see how there is any alternative to a certain form of “self-centeredness” at this point. When I contemplate doing something, it is inevitable that there be some sort of “orientation” to me and what I do to the objects of my action. And if we are to understand reasons to act as ends (as I believe we should—cf. Mark LeBar, *The Value of Living Well* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, Part I), then it follows that all practical importance of anything at all will register as self-centered as being an end for me. That is a formal feature of an ends conception of practical rationality, independent of a substantive commitment to one’s own *eudaimonia* as one’s ultimate end.
46. David Solomon remarks that “this asymmetry between my attitude toward my own character and my attitude toward the character of others is, it seems to me, ineliminable within virtue ethics.” David Solomon, “Internal Objections to Virtue Ethics,” in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, edited by French, Uehling, and Wettstein, 13 (1988): 435. Both that asymmetry and the asymmetrical relation to happiness result from the fundamental asymmetry between one’s own agency and the agency of others.
47. Annas makes the point that, without the availability of the second-order thought (“why should I be the kind of person who sees things and people this way”), the first-order thought (“I must help my friend”) is at risk of collapsing into a kind of routine habit, quite the opposite of what we think the full-throated valuation of others should consist in. Julia Annas, “Virtue Ethics and the Charge of Egoism,” in *Morality and Self-Interest*, edited by Bloomfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 212.
48. The point that the value of something may be conditional without thereby being merely instrumental is crucial, and frequently overlooked. Cf. Christopher Toner, “The Self-Centeredness Objection to Virtue Ethics,” *Philosophy* 81 (2006): 605. It is important that these two “distinctions in goodness” be maintained as distinct. Cf. Christine Korsgaard, “Two Distinctions in Goodness,” *Philosophical Review* 92 (1983): 169–195. Eudaimonism is committed only to the first of these, and explicitly denies the second. Nor is being the condition of something further necessarily part of the explanation of that something further (Lott, “Agency, Patience, and Happiness,” *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 19 (2016): 371). A match will light conditional upon there being oxygen available to it, but the presence of the oxygen need not be part of the explanation of the lighting.
49. See, for example, Cicero, *On Ends* III.73.
50. John Hare, “Scotus on Morality and Nature,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 9 (2000): 37. Hare conflates the point about claims, which is a genuine concern, but one that is not endemic to eudaimonism per se, with Aristotle’s confinement of virtuous action to those I in some sense embrace in *philia*—those Hare refers to as belonging to the “we-self.”
51. See Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), chap. IX.
52. See LeBar, *The Value of Living Well*, chap. 12.
53. It is perhaps worth noting that a view which places “God centeredness” at its core (as Toner and perhaps Hare wish to endorse) will have precisely the same problem with the conditionality of the reason-giving and claims-recognizing aspect of our relations with other persons. The condition will no longer be one’s own happiness, but conditional these commitments remain nonetheless.
54. Hare, “Scotus on Morality and Nature,” 38.
55. Much of Hare’s discussion is rooted in theological considerations, which for present purposes must be set aside.

56. As recommended by Toner, "The Self-Centeredness Objection to Virtue Ethics," 611.
57. Hare, "Scotus on Morality and Nature," 36.
58. No one is better on the significance of these considerations than Jean Hampton, "Selflessness and Loss of Self," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 10 (1993): 135–165.
59. Cf. Mark LeBar, "My Welfare and Yours," in *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics*, edited by Mark Timmons. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 64–85.
60. I thank Micah Lott for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

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PART V

CRITICAL
EXAMINATIONS OF
VIRTUE ETHICS

CHAPTER 25

OBJECTIONS TO VIRTUE ETHICS

JENS JOHANSSON AND FRANS SVENSSON

I. INTRODUCTION

OVER the last few decades, virtue ethics has established itself as a third general approach in substantive ethical philosophy, next to consequentialism and deontology. Ever since its arrival on the modern scene of substantive ethics, however, virtue ethics has been subject to various persistent objections. Our primary aim in this chapter is to present and discuss some of these. Pursuing this aim will lead us to engage also with the important question of how the general ambitions of the virtue ethical approach in substantive ethics should reasonably be conceived.

II. VIRTUE ETHICS AND THE AIMS OF ETHICAL THEORY

It is commonly assumed that a substantive ethical theory should fulfill the following two aims: the *theoretical* aim of providing a *criterion of rightness*—a specification of the property or properties that *make* right conduct right; and the *practical* aim of discovering some form of *procedure of decision-making* that could be used for guidance to successful practical reasoning about what to do.¹ While these are not the only aims of ethical theorizing, it is fair to say that they are the ones with which consequentialists and deontologists have been primarily occupied and in relation to which their various theories are usually distinguished from one another. Because of this, it is not surprising

that many of the objections leveled against virtue ethics in modern moral philosophy concern the ability, or inability, of virtue ethics to accomplish one or both of these aims in a distinctive way.

To illustrate the distinction between the two aims, consider act utilitarianism. Act utilitarianism (AU) is often associated primarily with a certain criterion of rightness:

(AU) An action is right if and only if, and because, it maximizes well-being.

This principle constitutes the act utilitarian attempt to fulfill the theoretical aim. It may be tempting to think that if this attempt is successful, then we have thereby also fulfilled—or at least very little remains to also fulfill—the practical aim. For it may seem that, from the standpoint of act utilitarianism, we should be guided in our practical reasoning by the question, “Which action or actions available to me in the situation maximize well-being?” As many writers—including many act utilitarians—have pointed out, however, it is highly doubtful whether that would be a particularly reliable or efficient procedure of decision-making, from the act-utilitarian perspective: plausibly, in many cases we would not maximize well-being by using this method of decision-making. Presumably, we would often do better, from the act-utilitarian perspective, to stick to some set of commonsensical rules in our practical reasoning—such as “don’t lie,” “don’t steal,” “don’t harm other sentient beings,” “help others in distress,” and so on.

Let us stipulate that a *complete* ethical theory is one that fulfills both the theoretical and the practical aim. We might then say that (AU) constitutes an attempt to provide one crucial component of a complete ethical theory, and that something would have to be added to it before a complete ethical theory would be in place. (Of course, this is not a *criticism* of (AU).)

In the light of the distinction between two main aims of ethical theorizing, we can now distinguish between three possibilities with respect to how the general ambition of virtue ethics might be conceived: (i) it aspires to provide only a distinctive criterion of rightness; (ii) it aspires to provide only a distinctive procedure of decision-making that could be used to guide successful practical reasoning about what to do; or (iii) it aspires to provide both a distinctive criterion of rightness and a distinctive procedure of decision-making.²

Although we will often not reach any firm conclusions about the arguments to be discussed in the following—we will largely focus on pointing out aspects whose relevance has not been sufficiently appreciated in the literature—we are inclined to believe that virtue ethics should disown the aspiration to provide a distinctive criterion of rightness (sections III–V). If this is right, then both (i) and (iii) should be set aside. We are, however, less inclined to believe that (ii) should be set aside. In any case, we will briefly suggest some possible replies to two common objections to the notion that virtue ethics can provide proper practical guidance (section VI).

III. A VIRTUE ETHICAL CRITERION OF RIGHTNESS

Various virtue ethical criteria of rightness have been proposed in the literature. The most influential one—and the one we shall focus on in this chapter—is provided by Rosalind Hursthouse:

(H) An action is right iff it is what a virtuous person would characteristically (i.e., acting in character) do in the circumstances.³

This formulation is in need of some clarification and improvement.

First and most obviously, (H) lacks a “because” clause. Although Hursthouse and others apparently regard (H) as an attempt to fulfill the theoretical aim mentioned in section II, (H) merely provides a necessary and sufficient condition for an action’s being right; it does not tell us what *makes* an action right. As a result, (H) is not in the same competition as consequentialist and deontological theories, which do purport to fulfill this theoretical aim. Indeed, (H) is not even in any direct conflict with either of these theories, or at least not obviously so. Perhaps any action that is right according to some suitable version of consequentialism or deontology is also such that a virtuous person, acting in character, would perform it in the circumstances, and vice versa (more on this in section V).

Second, the reason for the “characteristically” qualification in (H) is that even a virtuous person might occasionally act non-virtuously. In some cases, that is precisely what a virtuous person would have done, had she been in the situation. Surely the relevant act—the one that she would have performed, had she been in the situation—is not thereby right. While such a qualification is thus needed, perhaps (H) does not express it in a maximally clear way. For (H) can be read as saying that an action is right if and only if, were a virtuous person in the circumstances, then she would have characteristically performed it. That subjunctive conditional can hardly be the relevant factor: everyone should agree that an act can be right even if, were a virtuous person in the circumstances, then she would have acted out of character. The “characteristically” clause should be part of the *antecedent*, not the consequent, of the relevant subjunctive conditional.

Third, a further clarification about the same clause might be in order. Perhaps, if someone who is in fact virtuous were in a certain situation, then she would not have been virtuous. So if she were to act in line with the character she has *in that situation*, then she would not act in line with a virtuous character. Surely the “characteristically” clause in (H) should not be taken to be satisfied here; the relevant subjunctive conditional must be taken to be about a situation in which the virtuous person acts in line with her *virtuous* character.

Fourth, the phrase “a virtuous person” in (H) can be read in different ways. In particular, it can be interpreted as “any virtuous person” or as “some virtuous person.”

Assuming that “right” in (H) means the same as “permissible” (rather than “obligatory”), the latter reading seems preferable. For suppose that some virtuous agent faces a choice between two alternative actions, which are intuitively equally choiceworthy—say, between giving a certain aspirin (pill 1) to a person with a headache and giving this person another, qualitatively identical aspirin (pill 2). She gives him pill 1; she could just as well have given him pill 2, but simply had to choose one of them, and it turned out to be the former. Moreover, she is acting characteristically: no morally dubious influences are affecting her. As a result, her actual action is what some virtuous person, acting in character, *does* in the circumstances—and therefore, her actual action is also what some virtuous person, acting in character, *would* do in the circumstances. This rules out that the alternative action—giving the other person pill 2—is what *any* virtuous person, acting in character, would do in the circumstances. Hence, on the “any virtuous person” interpretation of (H) (again, understood as a principle of permissibility), (H) yields, implausibly, that giving the other person pill 2 is not permissible. The “some virtuous person” interpretation avoids this result, since it is plausible that some other virtuous person, acting in character, would have given the person pill 2. On the other hand, if “right” in (H) is synonymous with “obligatory” rather than “permissible,” then the “any virtuous person” reading seems preferable. For instance, because, in the case at hand, each of the two alternatives—giving the person pill 1 and giving him pill 2—is what some virtuous person, acting in character, would do in the circumstances, the “some virtuous person” interpretation of (H) now yields, absurdly, that each of them is obligatory. The “any virtuous person” interpretation, of course, avoids this consequence.

Putting these various points together, we arrive at the following principles:

(VEa) An action is obligatory if and only if, and because, it is something that any virtuous person, acting in character, would do in the circumstances (that is, for any virtuous person, if she were in the circumstances and acted in line with her virtuous character, then she would have performed the action).

(VEb) An action is permissible if and only if, and because, it is something that some virtuous person, acting in character, would do in the circumstances (that is, for some virtuous person, if she were in the circumstances and acted in line with her virtuous character, then she would have performed the action).

What should an advocate of these principles say about wrongness? The most natural option is the following:

(VEc) An action is wrong (i.e., impermissible) if and only if, and because, it is not something that some virtuous person, acting in character, would do in the circumstances (that is, it is not the case that, for some virtuous person, if she were in the circumstances and acted in line with her virtuous character, then she would have performed the action).

In the remainder of the discussion, the differences between (VEa), (VEb), and (VEc) are not going to matter much; for convenience we shall use “(VE)” to refer to their conjunction. (Also, we are going to use the term “right” as synonymous with “permissible,” not with “obligatory.”)

IV. CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH NO VIRTUOUS PERSON COULD EVER FIND HERSELF

A prominent objection to (VE) is that an agent might find himself in circumstances such that it is not metaphysically possible that a virtuous person finds himself in them (not even as a result of acting out of character).⁴

For example, suppose that Jones has hurt Smith's feelings in such a serious way that no virtuous person could ever have done so. Or, to use an example from Rosalind Hursthouse, imagine a man who has induced two women, A and B, “to bear a child of his by promising marriage,” but who “can only marry one.”⁵ His present circumstances, it seems, are the result of behavior during an extended period of time of a sort that no virtuous person could ever have engaged in.

Intuitively, Jones ought to apologize and repair the harm or damage that he has caused Smith. And also, assuming with Hursthouse that there is a clear sense in which it would be “worse [for the man] to abandon A than B”⁶—perhaps the man “does not . . . have to break his promise to B nor condemn her child to illegitimacy because she is glad to release him from it and marry a former lover who is delighted to adopt the child,” whereas A remains “compliant and loving”⁷—it seems intuitively clear that the man ought to marry A rather than B.⁸

Although this objection to (VE) has received considerable attention in recent years, participants in the debate have unfortunately not specified more precisely what the problem is supposed to be. But let us consider two possible interpretations.

On the first interpretation, the idea is that, because no virtuous person could ever be in the relevant circumstances, the obligatory action in a case of this sort is, contrary to (VE), not such that every virtuous person, acting in character, would perform it in the circumstances. (An advocate of this argument would probably want to add that, because no virtuous person could ever be in the relevant circumstances, it is not even true that *some* virtuous person, acting in character, would perform that action in the circumstances. So (VE) even implies that the action is *wrong*.) However, this does not seem to be a promising argument. Recall (VE)'s criterion of obligatoriness: for any virtuous person, if she were in the circumstances and acted in character, then she would have performed the action in question. If no virtuous person could be in the relevant circumstances, then this subjunctive conditional has an impossible antecedent; in other words,

it is a so-called “counterpossible.” But this can hardly prevent the conditional from being true. Indeed, the standard view of counterpossibles is that all of them are vacuously true. Given the standard view, then, if Jones apologizes and repairs the harm or damage that he has caused Smith, then he actually does perform an action that any virtuous person, acting in character, would perform in the circumstances; and so does the man in Hursthouse’s example, if he marries A rather than B.

This leads us to the second interpretation. Maybe the objection to (VE) is instead that precisely because all counterpossibles are vacuously true, in this sort of case *any* of the agent’s alternatives is such that any virtuous person, acting in character, would perform it in the circumstances. So, for example, if one of Jones’s alternatives is to hurt Smith’s feelings even more, then (VE) implies that that action, too, is obligatory; and analogously with marrying B rather than A, in Hursthouse’s example. Clearly, these results are not acceptable. (Even the weaker result that in this sort of case every alternative is *right* is unacceptable.)

As we see it, however, it is not obvious that advocates of (VE) cannot avoid these results. First, it is not clear that the standard view of counterpossibles—that all of them are vacuously true—is correct. Like many others, we find it rather attractive to say that some counterpossibles are non-vacuously true, and some false. Suppose, for instance, that God necessarily fails to exist. Intuitively, it still seems true that *if* God *had* existed, then there would be less meaningless evil in the world—and non-vacuously so, since intuitively it is *not* true that if God had existed, then there would *not* be less meaningless evil in the world. Similarly, defenders of (VE) might say that even if no virtuous person could have been in Jones’s circumstances, it is still true that any virtuous person is such that *if* she *were* in Jones’s circumstances and acted in character, then she would have apologized and repaired the damage and harm that she had caused Smith—and non-vacuously so, since it is *not* true that if she were in Jones’s circumstances and acted in character, then she would *not* have apologized and repaired the damage and harm that she had caused Smith. After all, apologizing and repairing the damage and harm done to Smith appears to be the virtuous thing to do in this sort of case. Similar remarks apply to Hursthouse’s example: marrying A rather than B, defenders of (VE) might say, seems to be what any virtuous person would do, if (*per impossibile* or not) she had been in the circumstances and acted in character—and, again, non-vacuously so. (Note that, since on this approach, the relevant subjunctive conditionals are true, it does not undercut our criticism of the former version of the objection to (VE). That is, our criticism did not presuppose the standard view of counterpossibles.) It must be admitted, though, that this approach is far from unproblematic. In particular, even if some counterpossibles are non-vacuously true, and some false, it may still be that all counterpossibles whose antecedents (in contrast, perhaps, to those in our earlier theological examples) are *conceptually* impossible are vacuously true. And critics of (VE) might argue that it is indeed conceptually impossible that someone who is virtuous behaves as Jones, or as Hursthouse’s man: such behavior, they might contend, is contrary to the very concept of virtue. This is a complex and difficult issue—and so, of course, is the

more general issue of how to deal with counterpossibles. We cannot in this chapter go further into these matters, but we do want to emphasize that, despite their striking absence from the relevant literature, they seem crucial to an adequate treatment of the present objection to (VE).

Second, a proponent of (VE) might question the claim that no virtuous person could ever be in the relevant circumstances. One way to do so would be to argue that the circumstances should not be taken to include the kind of bad behavior exhibited by the agents in our examples. However, while (VE)'s appeal to the "circumstances" certainly could use some clarification, if this much should be excluded from the agent's circumstances, then we seem to be left in the dark as to what they are to include. Depriving a principle of content is not to defend it against criticism. Moreover, if the bad behavior is excluded from the circumstances, it is unclear why a virtuous person, acting in character, would, for example, apologize for what has been done to Smith. Perhaps there is a plausible way to specify what is, and what is not, supposed to be part of the relevant circumstances, in a way that makes the present strategy work. But that remains to be seen.

There is, however, another way of questioning the claim that no virtuous person could ever have been in the relevant circumstances. Maybe it is indeed possible for someone to act in a manner so reprehensible, or otherwise flawed, that no one could do so, *while* virtuous. That is compatible, however, with the possibility of a virtuous person being in a situation where she has done so earlier, *before* she became virtuous. For instance, even if no virtuous person, while virtuous, could have hurt someone's feelings to the extent that Jones has, or behaved as the man in Hursthouse's example, this does not seem to rule out that a virtuous person, while non-virtuous, could have done so.

But perhaps this is too facile a reply. Suppose, for instance, that Jones hurt Smith's feelings just a moment ago, and that it is possible for him to repair the damage now—immediately after his harmful action. Then, it seems, he ought to do so. This may create a problem for the present reply. For is it really metaphysically possible for a virtuous person to be in this kind of situation—to have turned from non-virtuous to virtuous so quickly? It may seem to be part of the very nature of virtue that it is something that the person has developed over time, by moral training and improvement. More generally, it may seem that whether a person is virtuous at a given time is determined in part by her "historical" properties. We are not convinced that this is so, however. Suppose that we create an atom-for-atom duplicate of an uncontroversially virtuous person. Unlike the "original," the duplicate does not have the historical properties allegedly required for virtue; but isn't she virtuous as well? After all, she will be disposed to behave and think and feel in an equally generous, brave, and just way as the "original." If the duplicate is indeed virtuous, then it does seem metaphysically possible to turn from non-virtuous to virtuous in a brief moment—if nothing else, by having the particles in one's brain suitably rearranged.

Even if this response fails, and being virtuous at a given time is after all determined in part by one's "historical" properties, it is worth noting that those who find (VE) attractive could still accept a similar principle. They could revise (VE)'s criterion of

obligatoriness slightly and appeal, not to what any virtuous person, acting in character, would do in the circumstances, but to what any person, acting in character, and *exactly similar in non-historical respects* to a virtuous person (a person whose present qualitative properties, excluding those that are determined by what has happened to her earlier, are those of a virtuous person's) would do in the circumstances. Presumably, any such person would apologize and repair the harm done to Smith, and would marry A rather than B.

On the other hand, it is easy to feel that the appeal to such exotic factors is an indication that something has gone wrong: How can they be in any way involved in accounting for the moral status of the relevant actions? This suspicion is similar to the one behind another common criticism of (VE), to which we now turn.

V. THE WRONG RIGHT-MAKER

A commonly voiced criticism of (VE) is that it provides the wrong right-maker, wrong-maker, and obligatory-maker.⁹ For instance, whether or not it is true that an action is obligatory if and only if it has the property of being what any virtuous person, acting in character, would do in the circumstances, it seems implausible to say that the action is obligatory *because* it has the latter property—that that property *makes* the action obligatory. Rather, it seems, the action has to be obligatory because of some more “concrete” features in the situation. Suppose that you encounter someone suffering from a bad headache and that you give him an aspirin. Arguably, provided that the details of the case are specified in some suitable way—for instance, this time (unlike in the example in section III) we can suppose that there is no qualitatively identical aspirin around—your action is what any virtuous person, acting in character, would do in your circumstances. But intuitively, it seems that this cannot be what *makes* the action obligatory (even supposing that it *is* obligatory). Rather, what makes your act obligatory has to do with the fact that by giving the other person an aspirin you are helping to relieve his headache.

This is perhaps more an expression of a suspicion that (VE) cannot be right than an objection to it—or at least more of a sketch of an objection than a full-fledged objection. However, let us try to distinguish some possible ways of sharpening the criticism.

- (a) According to a first argument, (VE) puts the cart before the horse. Take any obligatory action—such as, again, giving an aspirin to someone suffering from a bad headache—and consider the following question: If a virtuous person were to characteristically perform the action in the circumstances, because of what would she do so? It may be suggested that the answer must be that she would do so because of the action's obligatoriness. (Obligatoriness, it may be suggested, is precisely what a virtuous agent is looking for in an action, and what drives her to perform it.) But then, it may be held, it cannot also be the case that, as (VE) says,

the action is obligatory because it is what any virtuous person, acting in character, would do in the circumstances.

As we shall see in (b) in the following, it is not clear that the objector's answer to the question—the claim that if a virtuous person were to characteristically perform the action in the circumstances, then she would do so because of its obligatoriness—is correct. Here, however, we want to highlight another problem with this argument. It is in fact not clear that the objector's answer to the question is incompatible with (VE). What the objector's answer to the question does not sit well with, it seems to us, is the claim that, if a virtuous person were to characteristically perform the action in the circumstances, then the action would be obligatory because she characteristically performs it (in that possible scenario). But the latter claim does not follow from (VE). Rather, according to (VE), in that scenario the action is obligatory because (as always) it is what any virtuous person, acting in character, *would* do in the circumstances. And plausibly, in that scenario, the action has the latter property independently of her characteristically performing it (and is therefore, on (VE), obligatory independently of her characteristically performing it). For arguably, it is true in that scenario that, even if she had not characteristically performed the action, the action would still be what any virtuous person, acting in character, would have done in the circumstances. For instance, it seems to be true in that scenario that, even if she had not characteristically performed the action, but had instead performed one of its alternatives—such as refusing to give the other person an aspirin, in spite of his headache—then she would have been acting out of character.

- (b) According to a second version of the criticism, too, (VE) puts the cart before the horse. But this time let us focus, not on the question, “If a virtuous person, acting in character, were to perform the action in the circumstances, because of what would she do so?” (as in the previous argument), but on the question, “Because of what is the action such that any virtuous person, acting in character, would perform it in the circumstances?” The answer to the latter question, it may be argued, must be that the action is obligatory. And this time, the objector might continue, it really does follow that (VE) is false; for according to (VE), the explanation goes exactly the other way around. (Compare: Because of what am I such that any virtuous person, acting in character, would comfort me in the circumstances? The answer, it may be argued, is that I am sad. Then it is not also the case that I am sad because I am such that any virtuous person, acting in character, would comfort me in the circumstances.)

However, the objector's answer to the question is not obviously correct; perhaps we can answer it without invoking the action's obligatoriness. In particular, we might appeal instead to some *non-moral* feature F of the action—for instance, relieving another person's headache, or bringing about more well-being than any alternative, or expressing more respect than any alternative, and so forth. (These features are non-moral in the

sense that ascribing them to an action is not to make a moral judgment. They are still, of course, potentially *morally relevant*: indeed, that is why they are invoked here.) It is because the action has property F, it may be argued, that it is what any virtuous person, acting in character, would do in the circumstances. (As we indicated earlier, this kind of reply, if successful, seems to have force against the argument in (a) as well.) In this way, (VE) might escape this second “cart before the horse” charge, too. After all, putting something (such as property F) before the horse (the property of being such that any virtuous person, acting in character, would perform it in the circumstances), which in its turn is before the cart (the property of being obligatory), is not a way of putting the cart before the horse.

- (c) This reply on behalf of (VE), however, invites another version of the objection. For when advocates of (VE) reason in this way, what they are holding is the following: the action is obligatory because it is what any virtuous person, acting in character, would do in the circumstances; and the action is what any virtuous person, acting in character, would do in the circumstances because it has non-moral feature F. Given this, it is hard to avoid the consequence that the action is obligatory because it has F—a feature that makes no reference to what any virtuous person, acting in character, would do in the circumstances. Of course, this does not entail that advocates of (VE) are wrong in asserting that the action is obligatory because it is what any virtuous person, acting in character, would do in the circumstances. For in general, that A is the case because C is the case certainly does not rule out that A is the case because B is the case (even if B is distinct from C)—and especially not if B is the case because C is the case. The worry is rather that it now appears doubtful whether (VE) really provides a *distinctive* criterion of obligatoriness that brings (VE) into *competition* with consequentialist and deontological theories. For as our preceding candidates for being property F illustrate—relieving someone’s headache, bringing about more well-being than any alternative, and expressing more respect than any alternative—it seems plausible to suppose that precisely the sort of thing that advocates of these theories would take an action to be obligatory because of, is also something because of which the action is what any virtuous person, acting in character, would do in the circumstances. And of course, that A is the case because B is the case does not rule out that A is the case because C is the case (even if C is distinct from B)—and especially not if B is the case because C is the case (indeed, this is equivalent to our similar formulation in the preceding). Thus (VE), *even if true*, does not establish the falsity of its supposed rivals.

But perhaps this is too quick. It may be argued that some obligatory-makers are, in some important sense, more *primary* than others—more directly morally significant, or more morally central, than others. To illustrate, an act utilitarian might say that although an action is obligatory because it brings about more well-being than any alternative, and brings about more well-being than any alternative because it has a

certain microphysical property M, and is, therefore, obligatory because it has M, it is still the property of bringing about more well-being than any alternative, not M, that is the primary obligatory-maker. It is not easy to say more precisely what this idea amounts to, but maybe it could be put in the following way: even if it is true that an action is obligatory because it has M, this is wholly due to the fact that the action brings about more well-being than any alternative because it has M; M is an obligatory-maker only because it makes an action have the property of bringing about more well-being than any alternative. Alternatively, maybe the idea could be put in the following way: if (*per impossibile*, perhaps) an action were to bring about more well-being than any alternative without having M, it would still be obligatory; whereas if (*per impossibile*, perhaps) an action were to have M without bringing about more well-being than any alternative, it would not be obligatory.¹⁰ Now, it may even be suggested that the term “because” as used in (VE) and its rivals should be restricted in accordance with this consideration—so that an action is obligatory because it has a certain property, in the relevant sense, only if that property is a primary obligatory-maker. (Similarly, it may be suggested that the term “obligatory-maker” should be reserved for primary obligatory-makers.) This might be a way of challenging what we said earlier: that (VE), even if true, does not establish the falsity of its supposed rivals. For maybe the property appealed to in (VE) (being what any virtuous person, acting in character, would do in the circumstances) is a primary obligatory-maker, whereas property F (again, the non-moral property such that it is because an action has it that the action has the property appealed to in (VE)) is not.

This may not be an indefensible position. However, it remains the case that property F behaves suspiciously like a primary obligatory-maker. For one thing, it seems somewhat unattractive all by itself to hold that, although, in a sense of “because” not restricted in the way proposed earlier, an action is obligatory because it has, say, the property of bringing about more well-being than any alternative, that property nonetheless fails to be a primary obligatory-maker. One would have thought that the property either is a primary obligatory-maker or fails to be even a “non-primary” obligatory-maker. Furthermore, there is also the following, more specific consideration. Suppose that a virtuous agent characteristically performs an obligatory action—such as, again, giving an aspirin to someone suffering from a bad headache. Plausibly, among the action’s many non-moral features, the one that she is mainly focusing on in her deliberation, and the one that she is mainly motivated by when she performs this action, is a primary obligatory-maker of the action (though she is not necessarily focusing on it, or motivated by it, *qua* primary obligatory-maker). Plausibly, moreover, what she is primarily focusing on in her deliberation, and what she is primarily motivated by when she performs this action, is the action’s property F (for instance, relieving another person’s headache, bringing about more well-being than any alternative, or expressing more respect than any alternative)—and not the action’s property of being what any virtuous person, acting in character, would do in the circumstances. The latter property seems rather to be something that a non-virtuous person might be focusing on, when trying to find some guidance in a morally difficult situation.

VI. PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

This leads us to the next part of our discussion. As we have seen, (VE) faces various important difficulties. Moreover, any virtue ethical criterion of obligatoriness, rightness, and wrongness is likely to face some version of the general problem discussed in the previous section. For this reason, it seems reasonable to hold that virtue ethics should dissociate itself from the aspiration to satisfy the *theoretical* aim of providing a criterion of obligatoriness, rightness, and wrongness. However, it might still be able to satisfy the *practical* aim of providing some sort of procedure of decision-making that could be used for guidance to successful practical reasoning.

On the face of it, it may certainly seem as if virtue ethics should do quite well in this respect. For does it not offer us an ideal, in the form of the virtuous person, that we can aspire to emulate in our conduct, an ideal endowed with the virtues—courage, generosity, justice, moderation, etc.—that we could appeal to in our practical thinking in order to determine what to do? And is not this, furthermore, an ideal that is obviously *worth* emulating? After all, whatever else might be distinctive of the virtuous person, one distinctive feature of her is plausibly that she is someone who characteristically gets things right in her conduct.

Of course, in order to support this suggestion, much more would have to be said. In particular, its fate will presumably depend largely on which criterion of obligatoriness, rightness, and wrongness it is combined with—alternatively put, which *complete* ethical theory, as this notion was defined in section II, of which it is supposed to be a component. Here, however, we shall not discuss this complex issue, but instead concentrate on two common objections to the idea that virtue ethics is able to offer adequate practical guidance, which are largely independent of the “combination” issue.

- (a) *Uncodifiability*. The most common such objection runs as follows. Virtue ethics—considered, again, as an attempt to fulfill the practical aim of ethical theorizing—tells us to emulate the characteristic conduct of a virtuous person when responding to our circumstances. But virtue ethics does not offer any key or blueprint that we could use to determine what such conduct would more specifically amount to in particular situations. Of course, defenders of virtue ethics will reply that, assuming that the virtues include, for example, courage, generosity, justice, and moderation, the recommendation is that we respond in ways that are courageous, generous, just, and moderate, and so on. If we do that, then we will respond in ways that correspond to what a virtuous person would do.¹¹ But the critic will reply that this is not very helpful. For in order to determine reliably whether it would really be courageous (rather than reckless, say) to face *this* particular danger, or generous (rather than wasteful) to help *these* particular people, and so forth, one would have to be a virtuous person oneself, and in that case one would not need any guidance.

This is an important criticism, to which virtue ethicists would need to give a detailed and comprehensive response. Here we can only sketch the outlines of some components that such a response should plausibly contain.

First, we must keep in mind that there are limits to just how much codification it is sensible to expect.¹² Admittedly, virtue ethics is unlikely to be able to provide anything like a manual or an instruction book—of the kind that comes along when, for instance, buying a new TV—containing a few easy steps that any normally developed adult could always turn to in order to determine what to do in the circumstances. But the request for such a simple manual seems unreasonable; after all, acting morally *is* very difficult.

Second, whereas hopelessly non-virtuous agents might well be unable to discern what virtuous behavior would involve, those who possess some reasonable amount of virtue should generally be able to do so—just as many moderately skilled scientists are generally able to identify scientific excellence, even if they themselves fall short of it, and even if hopelessly unskilled scientists are not able to do so. And arguably, most of us do possess some reasonable amount of virtue. As has been stressed especially by Julia Annas, at the point in life when we start thinking seriously about matters of practical concern we are far from blank slates: we have been raised and formed in various ways by our parents or caregivers, by teachers in school, by friends, as well as by different groups and associations that we are or have been part of, and we have characteristically acquired or developed some considerable amount of virtue from this; we have learned to respond in ways that are courageous, generous, honest, just, moderate, and so forth, in at least many everyday situations.¹³

Third, virtue ethicists might also offer the following kind of more concrete guideline. When finding oneself in a context where one is unsure about how it would be virtuous to act, the first thing to do is to try to make clear to oneself what it is, more specifically, that one is unsure about: Is it, for example, about whether a particular course of action would count as an instance of cowardice or, rather, as an instance of showing due concern for avoiding danger? Then the next step is to try to become clear about those factors in the situation that seem to suggest that the relevant course of action would indeed count as an instance of cowardice, and those factors that rather seem to tell in favor of the action being one of showing proper concern for avoiding danger. Once that is done, one might proceed to think about other cases where the same or sufficiently similar factors are present, but where it is clear what is the virtuous thing to do. In light of these other cases, one can then consider what differences, if any, there may be between them and one's actual circumstances that could explain why the action would, say, clearly be an instance of cowardice in the former cases but not in the latter one. If one cannot find any relevant differences, then it seems one may reasonably conclude that the course of action would really be an instance of cowardice also in one's own actual situation. On the other hand, if one does find one or more relevant differences, then one might try to think of yet other cases where it is instead clear that the course of action would not be an instance of cowardice and consider whether one's actual situation is relevantly similar to them. And so on and so forth.

- (b) *Virtue conflicts*. Another objection that is sometimes raised to the notion that virtue ethics could provide adequate practical guidance is that different virtues can—and often do—give rise to conflicting demands in particular situations. For instance, benevolence might require one to tell Grandma that her new hat is wonderful, although it is in fact hideous, whereas honesty instead requires one not to lie. Similarly, courage might in some cases require the agent to do something that involves a great risk of injuring herself so seriously that she will afterward be unable to ever work again, while the virtue of parenting (if we may call it that) rather requires her to avoid acting in that way, since it is likely to lead to exposing her spouse and children to circumstances where she is unable to take part in providing for the household. In light of such conflicts, some critics argue, thinking about the virtues will in many cases not be especially helpful when trying to determine what to do.

To this objection, defenders of virtue ethics can respond that it rests on an overly simplistic conception of the nature of the virtues.¹⁴ The objection apparently presupposes that for each virtue there are certain types of behavior that are characteristic of them: for example, that benevolence involves doing everything one can to make others happy, whereas honesty instead is in part a matter of never telling lies; and that courage is a matter of taking on great dangers or risks, while parenting instead involves doing whatever one can for one's children. Given such a conception, it is hardly surprising that conflicts between different virtues will arise. However, in at least the basically Aristotelian tradition of virtue theory, to which most contemporary defenders of virtue ethics belong, this is not a correct picture of what the practice of the virtues involves. In that tradition, the possession and exercise of the virtues are conceived as necessarily involving practical intelligence or wisdom, in virtue of which the different virtues—courage, friendship, generosity, justice, moderation, parenting, and so on—are all *unified*.¹⁵ Courage, for example, is, among other things, a matter of standing firm in the face of danger *at the appropriate times*, and whether a certain time is indeed an appropriate time may plausibly depend on considerations such as the effects on one's children of taking on a particular danger or risk. If, in a particular context, the negative effects for one's children that would result from one's performing a certain dangerous action are more salient than the importance or value of what could be gained through performing the relevant action, then in that situation it would simply not be truly courageous to expose oneself to the danger. Analogously, whether *this* is an appropriate time to tell Grandma that I love her new hat can depend on considerations concerning my truthfulness in saying so. If this is not an appropriate occasion, then my telling Grandma that I love her new hat would not qualify as an act of benevolence, even though in slightly different circumstances they might well qualify as such.

Some critics might respond by asking *how* those of us who are not ideally virtuous can reliably determine what the virtuous course of action would be in the circumstances. But this, it seems, takes us back to the objection in (a), which we have already discussed.

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter, we have discussed some common objections to virtue ethics. While there seem to be strong reasons—given, primarily, in section V (and especially in (c))—to doubt that virtue ethics will be able to fulfill the theoretical aim of providing a criterion of obligatoriness, rightness, and wrongness, virtue ethics might still be able to fulfill the practical aim of offering a helpful procedure of decision-making. We have not argued for the idea that it can, but we have considered two of the most common objections against it, and have indicated that they are at least not obviously damaging. To some extent, this may actually further strengthen the case against the idea that virtue ethics is able to satisfy the theoretical aim. For critics of that idea might argue that, insofar as it appears to someone that virtue ethics does indeed provide an attractive criterion of obligatoriness, rightness, and wrongness, this appearance can be explained away by the hypothesis that he is conflating the theoretical and practical aims. Similarly, of course, insofar as it appears to someone that virtue ethics cannot satisfy the practical aim, perhaps the same conflation can help explain away this appearance, too.¹⁶

NOTES

1. For a useful discussion of the main aims of ethical theorizing, see M. Timmons, *Moral Theory: An Introduction* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), 3–4. Throughout this chapter, by “right” we mean *morally* right (similarly with “permissible,” “obligatory,” “ought,” and “wrong”), except where context clearly indicates otherwise.
2. Krister Bykvist and Peter Railton have suggested to us a fourth possibility: maybe virtue ethics could also be conceived of not as attempting to fulfill either of the two aims that we have distinguished between, but rather as providing a sort of *constraint* on theories that do aspire to accomplish the theoretical aim. For reasons of space, however, we will not pursue this interesting possibility in this chapter.
3. R. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 28. We have substituted “person” for “agent.” Alternative virtue ethical criteria of rightness are proposed in, for example, M. Slote, *Morals from Motives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); and C. Swanton, “A Virtue Ethical Account of Right Action,” *Ethics* 112 (2001): 32–52.
4. See, e.g., J. Doris, “Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics,” *Nous* 32 (1998): 504–530; G. Harman, “Human Flourishing, Ethics, and Liberty,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12 (1983): 307–322; G. Harman, “Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 99 (1999): 315–331; G. Harman, “Virtue Ethics without Character Traits,” in *Fact and Value*, edited by A. Byrne, R. Stalnaker, R. Wedgwood (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 117–127; R. Johnson, “Virtue and Right,” *Ethics* 113 (2003): 810–834; K. Setiya, *Reasons without Rationalism* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 7–14; F. Svensson, “Virtue Ethics and the Search for an Account of Right Action,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 13 (2010): 255–271; V. Tiberius, “How to Think about Virtue and Right,” *Philosophical Papers* 35 (2006): 247–265; B. Williams, “Replies,” in *World, Mind and Ethics*:

Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams, edited by J. Altham and R. Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 189–190.

5. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 46.
6. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 46.
7. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 46.
8. A further kind of case, frequently discussed in the literature, is this: someone who is not especially virtuous should from time to time take steps toward improving his character. A virtuous person, on the other hand, would not characteristically do that; since she is already virtuous, she does not need to. (See, e.g., Johnson, “Virtue and Right.”) If this kind of case is to threaten (VE), it seems that it should be construed as an instance of the problem in the text—so that a virtuous person is so good that she *could* not improve her character, at least not in the relevant way. For if she could, it is hard to see why she would not do so.
9. This concern (or at least one very close to it) has been raised in, for example, D. Copp and H. Sobel, “Morality and Virtue: An Assessment of Some Recent Work in Virtue Ethics,” *Ethics* 114 (2004): 547, 552; J. Driver, “Virtue Theory,” in *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory*, edited by J. Drier (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 118; D. McNaughton and P. Rawling, “Deontology,” in *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, edited by D. Copp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 454; J. Österberg, “The Virtues of Virtue Ethics,” in *Philosophical Crumbs*, edited by R. Sliwinski (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala Philosophical Studies, 1999), 286–287; F. Svensson, “Eudaimonist Virtue Ethics and Right Action: A Reassessment,” *Journal of Ethics* 15 (2011): 327–330; T. Tännsjö, *Understanding Ethics*, 3rd edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), chap. 6.
10. Whether this second way of putting it is helpful or not depends, in part, on how to treat counterpossibles; see section 4.
11. Cf. Hursthouse’s discussion of what she calls “V-rules.” Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 35–39.
12. See, for example, J. Annas, “Being Virtuous and Doing Right,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 78 (2004): 61–75; J. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, part I, for extended discussions of this point.
13. See, in particular, Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, chap. 2 and 3.
14. Cf. D. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), chap. 11.
15. According to Aristotle, in order for a person to have one virtue in full, the person must have practical intelligence or wisdom (*phronesis*), something which in turn implies that he or she must have the rest of the virtues as well (see book VI, ch. 13, of the *Nicomachean Ethics*).
16. Earlier versions of this chapter were presented at Gothenburg University, Uppsala University, and at a Higher Seminar in Practical Philosophy organized jointly by the philosophy departments in Stockholm and Uppsala. We wish to extend a warm thanks to everyone who contributed to the discussion on these occasions. Many thanks also to Stefaan Cuypers and Nancy Snow for useful comments.

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CHAPTER 26

CULTURAL RELATIVITY AND JUSTIFICATION

REBECCA L. STANGL

I. INTRODUCTION

THAT the norms endorsed by various cultures differ to some degree seems undeniable. But what follows for ethical theory from these descriptive facts is not at all obvious. For one, the depth and extent of such disagreement is controversial. For another, it is controversial whether or not the disagreement, such as it is, should undermine our confidence in the existence or knowability of universal moral norms. So the topic of cultural relativity and justification is of the first importance.

However, it is generally thought to be a meta-ethical topic, not a normative one. Whatever questions such relativity raises seem to be questions that any non-skeptical normative theory will have to answer. The inclusion of a chapter on cultural relativity and justification in this *Handbook* might therefore seem surprising. Virtue is a foundational concept in what has come to be recognized as one of the three major approaches to normative ethics: virtue ethics. As such, one might have assumed that a handbook on virtue would focus squarely on questions that arise within normative ethical theory.

But in fact, there are excellent reasons for its inclusion. On the one hand, friends and foes alike have often identified contemporary virtue ethics with an emphasis on concrete forms of life, rather than abstract or universal norms. Such an emphasis suggests that virtue may be tied to parochial forms of life in ways that deontological rules or universal commands to maximize utility are not. Taken to its most extreme, this suggests that a normative theory based centrally on the concept of virtue may lack the theoretical resources to justify any universal norms, or to criticize any extant cultural practices. It thus might seem to lead either to a pernicious form of meta-ethical moral relativism or moral skepticism.

And on the other hand, important strains of contemporary virtue ethics have lately exhibited a (somewhat surprising) return to some form of naturalism. And at least

one goal of such naturalism seems to be to find an account of human nature capable of grounding a universal account of the virtues. If this naturalistic project were to succeed, it might lend weight to the claim that virtue ethics is not only no worse off than deontology or consequentialism as regards the challenge of cultural relativity. It might suggest that it has better resources for meeting that challenge.

In what follows, I will consider both of these claims, and argue that they are both mistaken.

II. CLARIFICATORY COMMENTS ON CONCEPTUAL MATTERS

Before proceeding to either of these arguments, however, some clarificatory comments are in order. It is undeniable that there exists some degree of difference between cultures in the norms they endorse. But it is also not very interesting. If these differences concern only the application of universal norms, for example, then nothing of interest would follow. So even as concerns only descriptive facts, the philosophically interesting question focuses on the extent and depth of such disagreement.

Those who are impressed by the depth and degree of such disagreement generally endorse some form of descriptive moral relativism. The exact way such views are spelled out of course varies, but the important point they share in common is that different societies are taken to embrace different moral standards, and the differences between them are taken to be more important than any similarities they may share. This thesis is clearly at least partially an empirical one: to know whether it is true or false, we must know what norms different cultures actually endorse. But it is not only an empirical claim. Once all the facts are in, there will still remain the question of whether the disagreements in question are *more important* than the agreements. And this question seems not to be purely empirical: it depends also upon what are the proper aims of moral theory specifically, and moral discourse more generally.

But even for those who embrace descriptive moral relativism, it is not obvious what, if anything, follows. Disagreement abounds in scientific cases, but such disagreement is often taken to show only that one party is right and the other wrong. Likewise, one can accept descriptive moral relativism and take this to show only that some cultures are right and some cultures are wrong about the moral values they endorse. But while such a view is coherent, a number of philosophers have argued that it is not plausible. In the scientific case, they claim, there are clear standards of justification according to which some cultures are right and some are wrong. One culture, for example, may have superior empirical evidence. But in the moral case, no such explanation for the disagreement seems forthcoming. Cultures that differ profoundly over moral values need not have access to different information, nor need one of them be making some obvious mistake in reasoning from that information. Given this, there seems to be no way to rationally resolve the

disagreement at issue, even if only in principle. Philosophers convinced by this reasoning thus conclude that there are no universal norms to be found in the ethical realm.¹

At this point in the argument, there are at least two different directions in which one might proceed. The first was given its classic formulation in the work of J. L. Mackie. Mackie famously endorses both descriptive moral relativism and the claim that no rational resolution of these differences is possible. But when people make moral judgments, Mackie thinks, they aspire to make universal, objective truth claims. Such is the nature of moral judgments. Because there is no way to show that one set of moral judgments is more rationally justified than any other, this implicit claim to objective truth can never be made good. So the most reasonable thing to conclude is that there are no such moral properties. From this he concludes that all moral judgments are false.

There is, however, another conclusion one might draw. Suppose one grants that there are no universally justified moral norms. Rather than conclude that there are no justified norms whatsoever, one might instead conclude that there are only relatively justified moral norms. This idea of relative justification is perfectly cogent in some circumstances: a Sicilian might rightly be judged tall in the south of Italy and short in Los Angeles.² Likewise, some might say, in the moral case. Polygamy might be permissible for a medieval Muslim, but impermissible for a twentieth-century Western liberal. The key point is that moral judgments are to be justified not by their relation to some universal or absolute standard, but by reference to the standards internal to various local traditions or practices. This sort of view is generally referred to as meta-ethical moral relativism.³

I take the central question of this chapter to concern whether normative theories can meet the challenge posed by descriptive moral relativism. With the preceding distinctions in hand, I can now more clearly define what it would mean to meet that challenge. In short, it would be to show that the fact of descriptive moral relativism, such as it is, does not render non-relative justification impossible in the moral realm. Or, to put it another way: it would be to show that the fact of descriptive moral relativism, such as it is, does not imply either meta-ethical moral relativism or some kind of moral anti-realism or skepticism. Of course, this way of putting the point assumes that we want to avoid these outcomes. And one might contest that. But I take it that most defenders of comprehensive normative theories, virtue ethicists among them, do want to avoid these outcomes. My argument will be that descriptive moral relativism presents no special challenge for the justification of virtue ethics, but neither does neo-Aristotelian naturalism provide any special resources for answering the challenge it does present for normative ethics as a whole.

III. DOES DESCRIPTIVE MORAL RELATIVISM PRESENT A *SPECIAL CHALLENGE* FOR THE JUSTIFICATION OF VIRTUE ETHICS?

In her seminal 1988 essay, “Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach,” Martha Nussbaum observes that the return to virtue in contemporary ethics often seems

to bring with it a turn toward relativism.⁴ As exemplars of this tendency, she names Alasdair MacIntyre, Bernard Williams, and Philippa Foot. MacIntyre, Williams, and Foot share a suspicion of overly abstract modes of moral theory, which they associate with modern philosophy. Consequently, they champion a return to the concept of virtue, which they view as richer and more deeply grounded in actual human experience. But where Aristotle had combined this emphasis on lived human experience with an aspiration to give a single objective account of human flourishing, MacIntyre, Williams, and Foot all emphasize the importance of local traditions and practices as sources of moral justification. So even though none of these philosophers unequivocally endorses relativism, each of them makes large concessions to it. And this, Nussbaum thinks, is unfortunate. She therefore sets out to develop a non-relative account of the virtues inspired by Aristotle. I will return to this account later.

But before doing that, another question presents itself: *Why* should the return to virtue have brought with it a turn toward relativism? I do not mean to question Nussbaum's interpretations of the philosophers under discussion. Particularly given the date of her essay, her interpretive claim seems justified. Since then, some things have changed. The turn in the later work of both MacIntyre and Foot toward more naturalistic bases for their ethical theories represents a turn away from relativism. Nonetheless, the sense that virtue ethics faces a special problem with relativism seems to persist. In Hursthouse's 1999 *On Virtue Ethics*, for example, she takes it as one of the serious challenges facing virtue ethics as a systematic approach.⁵ In the remainder of this section, I will consider three possible reasons for this suspicion, and argue that none of them gives us a reason to think that descriptive moral relativism presents a special problem for virtue ethics.

One reason it might seem that virtue ethics, at least of the neo-Aristotelian variety, has a special problem with relativism derives from a particular interpretation of the naturalism thought to undergird it. Bernard Williams, for example, understands Aristotle to be offering an account of human nature that is intended to be objective and non-evaluative, standing outside of our ethical theorizing and therefore offering an independent ground for it.⁶ On Aristotle's view, nature can both stand outside our ethical theorizing and offer a ground for it because nature is teleological. As natural occurring kinds of beings, human beings have a teleological orientation; Aristotle believes there is something human beings are for. This is taken to be a metaphysical fact about humans, independent of our desires or particular ethical evaluations. But because there is something human beings are for, we can also ground ethical norms: ethical norms are those that allow human beings to reach their *telos*.

This, at any rate, is one interpretation of the purpose of Aristotle's function argument in the first chapter of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁷ But, according to Williams, this argument fails. It fails because the teleological picture of nature upon which it rests is false. What modern science has shown us is that there is no naturalistic account of what human beings are *for*; there is nothing to ground the account of the good life and so justify moral norms as means to its achievement.⁸ We are therefore left with one of two alternatives: to accept that there is no ultimate objective grounding for ethics, or to try to ground ethics in some local tradition or practice with no claim or pretense to objectivity. So, one might conclude, neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics does have a special relationship

to relativism. Aristotle hoped to ground ethics in an objective account of human nature and thereby to gain some purchase on critiquing the norms embraced by particular cultures. But post-Darwin, we know that the account of human nature he offers is not available. And so we lose whatever we had.

But the first thing to say in response to this objection is that it rests on a contentious interpretation of Aristotle. Both John McDowell and Martha Nussbaum have argued—compellingly, I think—that Aristotle never intended to give a purely objective, naturalistic grounding of the virtues from outside of all acquired normative notions.⁹ So the “loss” of a purely naturalistic theory of human nature cannot constitute a problem for modern virtue ethics.

Of course, one might respond that this only shows that virtue ethics had a problem long before its modern incarnation. Without some value-free conception of human nature, virtue ethics gives up its purchase on a universal grounding for virtue. Therefore, descriptive moral relativism will raise special problems for virtue ethics after all.

But this seems mistaken. The key premise underlying this objection is in fact not at all specific to virtue ethics. The key premise is that ethics requires a completely naturalistic, non-normative, basis if it is to avoid meta-ethical moral relativism or skepticism. If this is correct, problems loom not only for virtue ethics but also, for example, for non-naturalism or intuitionism. Historically, this includes such figures as Moore and Ross; in the contemporary landscape, it seems also to include Nagel’s kind of substantive realism.¹⁰ But Moore was a consequentialist. And Ross and Nagel are deontologists. So virtue ethics looks no worse off on these grounds than any other theory.

So if descriptive moral relativism raises a special problem for virtue ethics, it is not because of virtue ethics’ purported relationship to naturalism. But perhaps it is not naturalism that is supposed to be the problem, but the concept of virtue itself. In *On Virtue Ethics*, Rosalind Hursthouse grants that both deontology and virtue ethics face a threat from descriptive moral relativism with which utilitarians need not reckon.¹¹ In the end, Hursthouse argues that any version of utilitarianism to which this advantage applies faces decisive objections on other grounds. But why does she make this concession to begin with?

Hursthouse begins her comparative claim by noting that all three normative theories specify right action in terms of some concept to which descriptive moral relativism seems to apply. Deontologists tell us that right action is action in accord with correct moral rules or principles, but it is well known that cultures differ in what rules they endorse. Virtue ethicists tell us that right action is action in accord with the virtues, but it is well known that cultures differ in their list of which character traits are virtues (and how best to conceive of those virtues). Finally, utilitarians tell us that right action maximizes happiness, but cultures have certainly differed on what they took to be the relevant constituents of a happy life. So all three theories purport to give universally applicable accounts of right action, but all three theories are open to the worry that the concept by which they define right action is amenable only to relativistic accounts.

But in the case of the utilitarian, Hursthouse thinks, this relativism need not undermine the universal nature of its action guidance. Suppose we accept some kind of

utilitarianism in which the concept of happiness is intended to be value-neutral, in which the satisfaction of just anyone's desires or preferences counts as a good-making feature of outcomes. What we are to do, in this case, is to maximize the satisfaction of these desires or preferences. If members of one culture desire or prefer the provision of more material goods, then that counts in favor of giving them such goods. If members of another culture desire or prefer the provision of less material goods but more time for contemplation, then that counts in favor of helping them to organize their society in that way. All of this can simply be treated as an input to the utilitarian calculus, and we have no need to decide whose desires or preferences are better or worse. Not so in the case of the virtues or moral rules. In these cases, the differences between these two cultures will result not only in different inputs into some calculus from which one prescription for action can emerge, but different prescriptions for action. Thus, Hursthouse concludes that someone who accepts such a version of utilitarianism avoids any problems posed by descriptive moral relativism.

But this does not follow. It may be true that such a utilitarian does not have to worry about cultural disagreement about what makes individuals or cultures happy; she can simply incorporate that into her theory. But she certainly does have to worry about cultural disagreement about the moral importance of happiness (however it is conceived) and, what is more, about the moral importance of everyone's happiness weighing equally in whatever moral decisions are made. For some cultures will certainly reject the claim that happiness (understood in whatever fashion) is important at all. And some others will certainly reject the claim that everyone's happiness is equally important. They might care only about the happiness of members of their society, or even only the happiness of certain social classes within that society.

Of course, the utilitarian will view such people as mistaken. But the point is that she will then face the same question that descriptive moral relativism raises for anyone endorsing a universal, non-skeptical account of morality: Does the fact that some cultures reject her basic moral beliefs imply that they lack universal justification? This fundamental problem remains just so long as the utilitarian is putting forward universally binding normative claims that some cultures will reject, and she most certainly is doing this. Choosing to put those claims in the language of utility (even a "value-free" conception of utility) does nothing to alter that fact. So this second reason for thinking that virtue ethics faces a special challenge from descriptive moral relativism also seems mistaken.

Here is a third, and final, reason someone might think virtue ethics faces a special challenge from descriptive moral relativism: I have characterized virtue ethics as focused centrally on the concept of virtue. But the ancient theories from which it draws its chief inspiration might just as easily be said to focus centrally on the concept of happiness, or the good life. Following Julia Annas, we might go so far as to say that "any ethics based on virtue requires an account of the good life which the virtues enable us to achieve."¹² This account need not be naturalistic—some ancients clearly thought the good life for us was one in which we transcended the limitations of human nature to whatever degree possible—but it will be some view of how a life as a whole goes well.

Suppose, as seems reasonable, that this is right. We might then argue in the following way: Virtue ethics is based, fundamentally, on a conception of the “good life.” But conceptions of the good life are notoriously subject to what Rawls called “reasonable pluralism.”¹³ Given the burdens of judgment, we cannot expect otherwise rational and reasonable people to agree upon which conceptions of the good life are to be preferred. And one of the major sources of disagreement about our conceptions of the good life is precisely our different cultural traditions and practices. So any conception of ethics that is based, at a fundamental level, on such a conception will always be subject to rational disagreement. And there is no way to adjudicate the differences between them. If we hope to achieve any kind of objectivity in ethics, we would be better off limiting ourselves to a search for principles that could regulate the interactions of all rational and reasonable people, while leaving it up to them to seek the good life as they see fit. Precisely insofar as virtue ethics holds out the ambition of going beyond this, it will be subject to threat from the fact of descriptive moral relativism.

The issues raised by this line of thinking are extremely complex, and I cannot hope to solve all of them here. But for our purposes, it is not necessary to do so. Rather, I want only to observe that such an objection does not show that virtue ethics is worse off than any other comprehensive normative theory. In its Rawlsian version, the kind of contractualist reasoning that was supposed to be immune to controversy arising from competing visions of the good life was never intended to ground a comprehensive deontological ethical theory. It was rather intended to ground a political conception of justice that could be the focus of an overlapping consensus among such comprehensive theories. The contractualist theory of Scanlon is somewhat more ambitious, purporting to go beyond a theory of justice. But even Scanlon grants that it falls short of a comprehensive ethical theory. It is, rather, an account of one very important part of an ethical theory: the theory of “what we owe to each other.” So even if such contractualist reasoning is less threatened by descriptive moral relativism, this does not show that there is a comprehensive ethical theory that is less threatened by descriptive moral relativism than virtue ethics.¹⁴

Moreover, the implicit contrast here, between relatively uncontroversial claims about “what we owe to each other” and wildly controversial claims about “the good life,” is overdrawn. On the one hand, claims about “what we owe to each other” are based upon what it is reasonable to demand of one another. And the term “reasonable,” as Scanlon uses it, is avowedly a moral term. So it seems that it too will be open to cultural disagreement. On the other hand, while Scanlon grants that there is a plurality of good human lives, the pluralism is not unlimited. To count as an acceptable vision of the good life, one must recognize and incorporate the boundaries on behavior set by the morality of what we owe to each other. So Scanlon too will be making (if only implicitly) some universal claims about the “good.” When this observation is coupled with the plausible claim that virtue ethics need not insist that there is literally only one correct vision of the good life, the claim that virtue ethics faces a special problem from the facts of descriptive moral relativism looks even less plausible.

IV. DOES VIRTUE ETHICS HAVE SPECIAL RESOURCES FOR RESPONDING TO DESCRIPTIVE MORAL RELATIVISM?

So I conclude that the fact of descriptive moral relativism does not present a special problem for virtue ethics. This is good news for virtue ethicists. But might better news be forthcoming? Recent work in neo-Aristotelian naturalism might be taken to suggest not only that virtue ethics is no worse off than other normative theories in relation to the challenge presented by descriptive moral relativism, but also that it has special resources to respond to it. In particular, if neo-Aristotelian naturalism can connect virtue to an account of human nature as such, it might thereby neutralize any threat from descriptive moral relativism.

Of course, not all Aristotelians, much less all contemporary virtue ethicists, are committed to naturalism. Williams's influential dismissal of such a project, which I mentioned earlier, is by no means exceptional. Probably no book did more to revive interest in neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics than Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*. But as Aristotelian as *After Virtue* was in other respects, MacIntyre there famously rejects Aristotle's metaphysical biology as incompatible with modern science. MacIntyre retains the teleological structure of Aristotle's virtue theory, but replaces a naturalistic account of the goods that virtue allows us to achieve with a historically and socially situated account of the goods internal to particular practices and traditions.¹⁵

Nonetheless, and more recently, there has been a turn to avowedly naturalistic approaches among some prominent neo-Aristotelians. Most significant are Philippa Foot's *Natural Goodness* and the third section of Rosalind Hursthouse's *On Virtue Ethics*.¹⁶ (And even MacIntyre has changed his tune: his *Dependent Rational Animals* is not a full-fledged defense of naturalism, but seems to presuppose some version of it.¹⁷) Foot seeks to ground ethics in judgments concerning what she calls "natural normativity." The idea is that all living things exhibit discernible patterns in what it means for things to go well for them, and therefore for them to flourish. A rose plant with strong roots, glossy leaves, and beautiful, fragrant, blooms is flourishing. A tiger missing a limb, unable to mate, and hungry is not flourishing. Ethical evaluation, on this view, is simply a particular species of this general form of the evaluation of living things; ethics consists in judgments of natural normativity as applied to human beings. Thus a just, compassionate, and temperate person flourishes just as a beautiful rose bush flourishes. And a person who lacks courage is like a tiger missing a limb, or a wolf that refuses to hunt with the pack. She lacks something necessary for flourishing as the kind of being she is: a rational, social animal.

To this general picture, Hursthouse adds a more detailed account of how exactly such judgments should go. In general, Hursthouse claims, the characteristics of rational, social animals such as human beings should be evaluated according to whether they

promote four different ends: individual survival, continuance of the species, the characteristic pleasures of such creatures along with their freedom from pain, and the good functioning of the social group.¹⁸ Her argument is that the virtues, understood as we generally understand them, can be justified by appeal to these four ends. If this argument were to succeed, it would show that the account of the virtues as “we understand them” is not simply an account from within our cultural tradition, but one that can be justified by appeal to an account of human nature as such. A virtue ethics grounded in this neo-Aristotelian version of virtue ethics would thus have a decisive answer to any challenges thought to arise from descriptive moral relativism.

Let us consider how such an argument might proceed for one of the most central of the virtues, both to Aristotle and to his followers: justice. It does seem that rational social animals, such as we human beings are, will need something like the virtue of justice. If we are to live in community, there must be some set of rules or regulations governing how we distribute scarce goods and what basic rights we accord to one another. So the virtue of justice seems to aim at the fourth end enumerated by Hursthouse: the good functioning of society. Moreover, given natural human limitations, inculcating such a virtue might well serve to promote our individual survival. If so, justice would also serve the first end enumerated by Hursthouse.

This is all very sketchy, and would require much working out. But if the details could be filled in, Foot and Hursthouse would have a decisive response to the claim that the character trait of justice is a virtue only in some cultures. Facts about human nature as such would establish that justice is our best bet for human flourishing and thus a virtue as such.

But even were we to get this far, we would have answered only part of the challenge that descriptive moral relativism presents for virtues ethics. It is true that different cultures have accepted different character traits as virtues. For example, many in medieval Europe considered humility the most admirable of all the virtues; for the ancient Greeks, however, humility would have been counted a vice. So one challenge for the virtue ethicist is to justify which character traits count as virtues, given disagreement on this point. And the naturalism of Foot and Hursthouse might provide a way of answering this challenge in the case of justice.

But cultures not only disagree on which character traits are virtues. They also disagree over the correct accounts of the virtues. Does courage, for example, require the willingness to fight in defense of one's city? The Homeric Greeks believed that it did. But a modern Quaker might disagree. For her, conscientious objection to war might embody courage most of all. So a second challenge for the virtue ethicist is to justify particular accounts of the virtues, given disagreement on this point as well. And it is far from clear that the naturalism of Foot and Hursthouse can answer this challenge in the case of justice. For it is undeniable that differing cultures have had very different understandings of justice. Can we detect, among these differences, patterns of natural normativity such that some of these understandings promote human flourishing and some do not?

Christopher Gowans has argued very persuasively that, at least in some important range of cases, we cannot.¹⁹ Gowans's argument turns on the question of whether virtues

such as justice and charity must incorporate what he calls “moral universalism.” Moral universalism, as he uses the term, is simply the affirmation that “each human being has moral worth or standing, and hence deserves serious moral consideration.”²⁰ So defined, moral universalism is compatible with partiality: we might think we owe more to our children than to strangers. But it does require that each human being has some standing, and deserves to be treated in ways that recognize that standing. At its most minimal, it might simply affirm that there is a *prima facie* reason not to harm any human being. For most of us, the virtue of justice incorporates some such understanding. And both Foot and Hursthouse seem to agree with moral universalism; the former writes in *Natural Goodness* that a virtuous person will “recognize the claim of any human being to a certain kind of respect.”²¹

But not all viable cultures have recognized this. It is hard to imagine a culture surviving if it does not have some conception of justice, and therefore recognize the moral standing of (at least some) of those with whom one shares a daily life. But it is not hard to imagine a culture surviving with a radically constricted conception of justice, one that fails to recognize the moral standing of foreigners, women, or slaves. It is not hard to imagine because it has existed; we need look no further than archaic Greece for one example. And the fact that good humans have those characteristics that allow them to survive and contribute to the good functioning of their social group does not rule this out. Human beings may well be rational, social animals who can flourish only in community. But the communities they require to flourish do not appear to extend, as a matter of necessity, to all human beings as such. So the natural normativity of Foot and Hursthouse is not strong enough to rule out the restricted forms of justice in favor of the more universal ones. Presuming we do want to rule out such constricted accounts of justice, it is therefore not strong enough to meet the challenge raised by descriptive moral relativism.

There are a number of responses one might make to Gowans’s challenge. Foot and Hursthouse might argue that it is no longer true that human beings can flourish in largely isolated, small groups of human beings. The social world being such as it is, we are connected with human beings throughout the world, whether through trade, political, or religious ties. Given this, our social nature really will require us to embrace some more universalistic conception of justice.

But, at least as a response to the challenge of descriptive relativism, this answer is unsatisfying. Claims about natural normativity are supposed to be grounded in the kind of creatures we are, and those who lived in former times were not, in the relevant sense, different kind of beings. They too were social, rational animals. Given this, the affirmation of the moral standing of all human beings does not look like a deep moral fact, but a contingent application of natural normativity to our particular cultural location. This is implausible.

A more promising alternative would be to reply that, even if facts derived from natural normativity cannot take us all the way to moral universalism, they can still show that some character traits and ways of life are defective. At least in her earlier work, Foot seemed sympathetic to such a strategy. Thus, in “Morality and Art,” Foot claimed that

from the very concept of morality we can derive a strict proof of some moral propositions, such as those condemning the Nazis' treatment of the Jews, but other important moral judgments, such as claims about the permissibility of abortion, will be true or false only relative to particular choices we make.²²

But adopting such a strategy not only seems like a serious scaling back of the ambitions the later Foot and Hursthouse have adopted. It also seems like less than one might have hoped for in a response to the challenge of relativism. That each human being has serious moral standing serves, for many of us, as what Rawls called an initial fixed point in our moral judgments.²³ If forced to choose between it and the naturalistic account of justification proposed by Foot and Hursthouse, we would opt for the former and not the latter.

The preceding considerations suggest that virtue theorists would do well to heed John McDowell's advice in "Two Sorts of Naturalism."²⁴ There, he argued that mere nature would never be enough to justify the outlook of the virtuous person. One has no choice but to appeal to an avowedly ethical outlook on the world. Such an outlook is acquired via a moral upbringing, and can become internalized so as to appear to one as second nature. But it is not the kind of thing that exists from a neutral, external point of view. And so it cannot serve as an external justification of the perspective of the virtuous individual.

This is not to say that an account of human nature might not do some work in helping the virtue ethicist frame her response to the challenge of descriptive moral relativism. Consider again Martha Nussbaum's work in "Non-Relative Virtues."²⁵ Following Aristotle, Nussbaum believes that we can identify certain spheres of human life that virtually all of us experience and in which we need to make choices about how to act and respond. The "thin" concepts of the virtues are simply the dispositions to act and respond well in these respective spheres. The "thick" accounts of the virtue will be a particular specification of what it means to act and respond well in that sphere. All human beings, for example, are subject to injury, illness, and, eventually, death. All of us know this, and all of us must find some way to respond and act in the face of these facts of human experience. To the disposition to act and respond well in the face of dangers Aristotle gives the name "courage." The question then becomes what it means to act well in the face of these dangers. And different answers to this question will constitute different "thick" conceptions of courage.

The relevance of this project to answering our challenge is obvious. If Nussbaum is right that there are certain spheres of experience that virtually all human beings face, it seems she has an answer to the first part of the challenge that descriptive relativism presents for virtue ethicists: to secure agreement on the list of the virtues. Since all cultures will face these situations, all cultures will have to develop some account of how it is good to respond to them. Agreement on the list of virtues will thus be secured: everyone will agree that "courage" is a virtue just insofar as everyone has to face dangers and wants to face them well and not poorly.

This is not a trivial point. Nussbaum's article is a response to the early work of Alasdair MacIntyre. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre argues that we should retain the teleological

structure of Aristotle's theory of the virtues. But given the failure of Aristotle's metaphysical biology, such an end cannot be discovered in human nature. Where, then, can the end be found? It is found in the goods internal to human practices such as philosophy, art, and architecture. Virtues are just those character traits that allow one to achieve the goods internal to these practices. But these practices are avowedly human constructions, and their ultimate justification comes not from their ability to successfully navigate the possibilities and limitations imposed by our shared human nature, but from standards of rationality that are internal to traditions of inquiry that have cultural histories of their own.

To many, it seems as if MacIntyre (in this early work, at least) is committed to a relativistic theory of the virtues. This is not correct. For while the justification for the particular virtues may be relative to the traditions of which they are a part, MacIntyre also claims that traditions as a whole can be rationally vindicated over and against competing traditions.²⁶ In the course of their development, moral traditions almost inevitably confront various problems and contradictions. Sometimes the tradition has the internal resources to solve these problems, and sometimes it does not. Suppose that it does not, and that it encounters an alternative moral tradition. If this alternative moral tradition can both solve the problem and diagnose why the first tradition cannot, then it emerges as rationally superior.

But while this account avoids relativism, it gives rise to a worry about skepticism. On the kind of tradition-based conception of inquiry that MacIntyre endorses, the bar for justifying a tradition is set exceptionally high. The justification of the individual virtues depends on the tradition as a whole, and thus requires knowledge of that tradition as a whole. But what is more, the justification of that tradition requires significant knowledge of any other live traditions that one may encounter. And how many of us can really claim to have such understanding? In the end, virtually none.

Of course, one might try to put a positive spin on this. Perhaps we all should be more cautious in claiming justification for our moral beliefs. But even so: epistemic humility is one thing. Skepticism is another. And if we can avoid the latter, it seems worth trying to do so. As an alternative to MacIntyre, Nussbaum's use of the concept of human nature offers hope that we might. If she is right that the human condition is such that we can identify common spheres of experience, we can establish a single rational discourse about each of the virtues to which we have access in light of our shared humanity.

But even if successful, Nussbaum's appeal to human nature is strictly limited in what it can accomplish. The appeal to human nature identifies only the "thin" concept of the virtues. To answer the question of what the correct "thick" conceptions of virtues are, Nussbaum argues that we need now to look at the detailed specifications on offer, and the arguments given in their defense. Some of these arguments, Nussbaum thinks, will be better than others. Some of these specifications will depend upon false factual claims, or rest on unsupported traditions. Moreover, we need not operate under the assumption that there must be only one correct way of dealing with each sphere of life. It might be that the correct conception of a virtue is a disjunctive one, in which a number of different conceptualizations of courage are accepted as equally valid. Finally, as Nussbaum

notes, conceptions of the virtues are, on her view, always open to revision in light of new circumstances and evidence.²⁷

All of this is quite reasonable and helpful. But there is no claim that the correct thick conception of a virtue can be derived from human nature. Of course, if one of the thick conceptions on offer rests on false factual claims about human nature, that might eliminate it from contention. But to eliminate some possibilities is not yet to settle on the correct answers. Nor does Nussbaum claim otherwise. Rather, different accounts of the virtues can be seen as answering to common human possibilities and limitations, with no assumption that these answers will be given in purely naturalistic forms. Like McDowell, Nussbaum regards any demand that they be put in such form as anachronistic when attributed to Aristotle, and in any event unreasonable.²⁸

So Nussbaum's account offers no guarantee that the virtue theorist will be able to avoid skepticism or relativism via a notion of human nature. In this respect, her project is less ambitious than Foot's or Hursthouse's. But if what I have argued in the preceding is correct, that project does not succeed. So perhaps Nussbaum's less ambitious employment of the concept of human nature is to be welcomed.

V. CONCLUSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The existence of some degree of descriptive cultural relativism is beyond dispute. The implications of such disagreement are far from clear, and have been the subject of debate for as long as moral philosophy has existed. In this chapter, I have argued that whatever challenges such facts present for non-skeptical normative ethical theory in general, they present no greater challenges to virtue ethics in particular. I have also argued that neo-Aristotelian appeals to a naturalistic account of human nature cannot pre-empt such challenges.

But neither of these implies that virtue ethics does not have a distinctive contribution to make to the challenges raised by cultural relativism. In the first place, research into neo-Aristotelian naturalism is still in its early days, and so the final word on it has yet to be had. Perhaps its defenders will yet find a way to derive our most cherished moral norms from some completely naturalistic account of human nature.

But barring such developments, I suggest that virtue ethicists would do well to turn their attention away from completely naturalistic accounts of human nature and toward the virtues and vices themselves. Suppose we accept Nussbaum's claim that an account of human nature yields not one decisive answer to the questions of how best to conceive of each virtue, but rather one rational discourse about their nature. What we need in that case are rich philosophical accounts of the particular virtues and vices, drawing both from our own lived experience and cultural traditions, as well as cultural traditions differing from our own. Only once we have these accounts in hand can we determine whether the degree of cultural relativism that exists among them is problematic. Much

fine work is being done in this vein already.²⁹ But much remains to be done, and the field of virtue ethics is well poised to contribute to this project.

NOTES

1. This argument is widespread in the literature, but the classic expression of it is given in J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin, 1977), chap. 1.
2. I borrow the example from Thomas Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 332.
3. Such a view is, strictly speaking, compatible with Mackie's claims that ordinary people intend to make universally justified judgments when they assert moral claims. If one were to grant this, one could then endorse meta-ethical moral relativism as an account of how we should make moral judgments, rather than an account of how we do in fact make moral judgments.
4. Martha Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13(1) (1988): 32–53.
5. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), chap. 1.
6. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), chap. 2 and 3.
7. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Terence Irwin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1999), 1097b22–1098a22.
8. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), chap. 3.
9. Martha Nussbaum, "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics," in *World, Mind, and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams*, edited by J. E. J. Altham and Ross Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 86–131; John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *Monist* 62 (1979): 331–350; and John McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," in *Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory*, edited by Rosalind Hursthouse, Gavin Lawrence, and Warren Quinn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 149–170.
10. See, e.g., G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), esp. chap. 1; W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), esp. chap. 4; and Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), esp. chap. 8.
11. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 32–34.
12. Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics: What Kind of Naturalism?" in *Virtue Ethics Old and New*, edited by Stephen M. Gardiner (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press: 2005), 11.
13. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), esp. Part II.
14. Thomas Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), introduction and chap. 4.
15. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), especially chap. 2, 14, and 15.
16. Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001); and Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, chap. 8–11.
17. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (Chicago and LaSalle: Open Court, 1999).

18. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, chap. 9 and 10.
19. Christopher Gowans, "Virtue and Nature," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 25(1) (2008): 28–55.
20. Christopher Gowans, "Virtue and Nature," 40.
21. Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 103. Quoted in Christopher Gowans, "Virtue and Nature," 41–42.
22. Philippa Foot, "Morality and Art," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 56 (1970): 131–144.
23. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 17–22, 577–587.
24. John McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," in *Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory*, edited by Rosalind Hursthouse, Gavin Lawrence, and Warren Quinn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 149–179.
25. Martha Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach."
26. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1988); and Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1990).
27. Martha Nussbaum, "Non-relative Virtues," 43–45.
28. John McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism."
29. See, e.g., Howard J. Curzer, *Aristotle and the Virtues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Gabrielle Taylor, *Deadly Vices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Rebecca L. Walker and P. J. Ivanhoe (eds.), *Working Virtue: Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Stephen C. Angle and Michael Slote (eds.), *Virtue Ethics and Confucianism* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

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CHAPTER 27

VIRTUE, VICE, AND SITUATIONISM

TOM BATES AND PAULINE KLEINGELD

I. INTRODUCTION

VIRTUES are usually regarded as character traits. Character traits are regarded as dispositions to reason, feel, and act in trait-appropriate ways across a variety of trait-relevant situations; that is to say, character traits are associated with consistent patterns of behavior. They are usually conceived as “global” or “robust” in the sense that they are not tied to one specific situational context, but are supposed to manifest in trait-appropriate behavior across a variety of trait-relevant situations. Global character traits are usually conceived as stable, in the sense that the associated behavior is not easily disrupted by morally irrelevant situational variables. A global or robust trait of bravery, for example, will manifest when bravery is called for, whether on the battlefield, on the roller-coaster, or in the face of morally inappropriate requests of one’s superiors, and regardless of whether one is strongly encouraged by one’s friends or all alone. This conception of character traits is central to Aristotelian virtue ethics, but insofar as virtues are firm and stable dispositions to do what is morally required, they are granted crucial importance by many non-Aristotelians as well.

The existence of global character traits, as a matter of ordinary human psychology, has been called into question on empirical grounds, however, by several philosophers known as “situationists.” John Doris and Gilbert Harman, among others, claim that empirical research in social psychology shows that global character traits hardly exist.¹ Systematic observation in experimental settings indicates, they argue, that morally irrelevant or insignificant situational variables have huge effects on people’s morally relevant behavior. For example, the vast majority of people believe that one ought not inflict harm on others; yet, as Stanley Milgram shows in a famous series of experiments, a large majority of ordinary people are willing to deliver extremely painful and even fatal electric shocks to a likable man who makes mistakes in a memory test, at the mere request of an

experimenter and despite the fact that the victim is screaming in pain and has withdrawn his consent to the experiment.² Other studies show that the presence of inactive bystanders strongly reduces the rate at which people help others in need, and that being in a neutral mood, as compared to a good or bad mood, also reduces helping rates. Yet most people deny that, other things being equal, the mere presence of inactive bystanders, or being in a neutral mood as compared to a good one, is a valid reason not to help someone in need. If people generally did possess global character traits such as helpfulness or kindness, situationists argue, one would expect the subjects in these studies to behave rather differently. Given how easy it is to influence behavioral patterns in test subjects by introducing morally irrelevant or insignificant situational variables, the attribution of global character traits is generally unwarranted. Situationists conclude that behavior consistent with global traits is “rare enough to count as abnormal.”³ In their view, behavior is typically best explained by reference to situational factors that trigger subconscious and “depersonalized” response tendencies that are largely independent of agents’ moral values.⁴ Although some situationists are more radical in their rejection of “character” than others, they all agree that few, if any, people possess global character traits.

Merritt, Doris, and Harman formulate the core argument as the following *modus tollens*:

- (1) If behavior is typically ordered by robust traits, systematic observation will reveal pervasive behavioral consistency.
- (2) Systematic observation does *not* reveal pervasive behavioral consistency.⁵
- (3) Therefore, behavior is *not* typically ordered by robust traits.⁶

Situationists argue that their thesis spells trouble for Aristotelianism in particular. For if robust (or “global”) traits hardly exist, this seems to condemn Aristotelian virtue ethics as unrealistic, given that such traits are central to its conception of ethics.⁷ Their challenge has prompted a heated debate in ethics and moral psychology.

In this chapter, we argue that the situationists’ core thesis is empirically ill-supported. Situationists fail adequately to consider the explanatory potential of a key class of global character traits. They do consider one set of vices, namely, those involving dispositions to harm others, such as cruelty. But they fail to consider the possibility that much human behavior stems from global vices that are not associated with the pursuit of harm to others for its own sake, such as selfishness, cowardice, or laziness (in the morally objectionable sense). If one takes the possibility of this broader range of vices seriously, the empirical evidence suggests that global character traits may well be abundant.

In section I, we survey the debate to date and set the stage for the argument in the sections to follow. In section II, we analyze the structure of the reasoning in support of the thesis of situationism. We locate the flaw that makes the core argument unsound, and we discuss the role of vices in the assessment of the empirical evidence. In section III, we show that the very empirical evidence that situationists regard as the key support for their thesis in fact admits of an alternative explanation in terms of global traits. We conclude that the available evidence does not count in favor of situationism.

In arguing for this conclusion, we do not mean to deny the important influence of situational factors on human behavior, of course. All sides in the debate agree that situational variables affect behavior and that human behavior often reliably varies in response to variations in the circumstances (to give a trivial example: if it starts raining, drivers tend to turn on their windshield wipers). What is at issue in the debate we shall be discussing in this chapter is the fact that *morally relevant behavior* very often reliably covaries with *morally insignificant differences* in situational circumstances. The question is whether such patterns can plausibly be understood as stemming from the agents' global character traits, that is, as reflecting the agents' sensitivity to trait-relevant differences between the situations. Situationists deny this, arguing that such patterns are best explained by reference to the situational variables and the automatic response tendencies they trigger. We argue that their argument for this thesis is flawed because they overlook a possible trait-based explanation of the patterns.

II. SITUATIONISM AND VIRTUE ETHICS: THE STATE OF THE DEBATE

Situationists argue that Aristotelian virtue ethicists ignore or fail to realize that the stipulated connection between inner dispositions and observable behavioral patterns, which is crucial to the idea of virtuous character, is not confirmed empirically.⁸ If such a connection does not exist, then the virtue ethical ideal that is built on the assumption of such a connection turns out to be unrealistic. Most of the ensuing debate has focused on whether situationism really does pose a problem for Aristotelian virtue ethics. Many critics of situationism believe that the attack can be deflected, but situationists are not convinced by the rebuttals, and it seems that the debate has reached a stalemate. We start with a brief survey of the main argumentative moves concerning three central issues.

First, several authors have replied that the empirical evidence on which situationists rely does not actually show the nonexistence of global character traits.⁹ At most, it simply shows that virtues are *rare*—and the data show that a non-negligible minority of subjects do display “good” behavior.¹⁰ The rarity of virtue is not a challenge to Aristotelian virtue ethics—so the reply goes—because Aristotelians do not typically claim that virtuous character is widespread.¹¹ After all, on the Aristotelian conception, virtue in the full sense requires practical wisdom and the alignment of one's feelings with one's moral insight, and this is a demanding ideal. Equally important, genuine virtue is impossible to detect with the methods of the psychological experiments on which situationists base their argument. Different agents may perform the same observable behavior while doing so from radically different motives.¹² Other authors¹³ have argued that the empirical evidence in support of the “cognitive-affective personality system” (CAPS) theory of personality traits, as developed by Mischel and Shoda (1995), can be used to support character traits, if traits are understood in terms of that theory.

Second, and relatedly, critics have argued that situationists work with a mistaken conception of character. Situationists have been criticized for using a “behaviorist” notion of traits,¹⁴ for reducing virtues to “stereotypical behavior, in isolation from how people reason,”¹⁵ and for failing to recognize the intellectual nature of character.¹⁶ It is clear why situationists can be interpreted this way: they state that the criterion for appropriate trait attribution is that the trait be “reliably manifested” under the appropriate “trait-relevant eliciting conditions.”¹⁷ This makes it seem as if having a virtuous trait quasi-mechanically results in the appropriate response under the relevant circumstances. Instead, critics emphasize, character is an *internal* disposition, and one can possess a certain character trait even if one does not display the corresponding behavior on one particular occasion. For example, agents may not understand situations in the same way as the observer; hence what may look like inconsistency to an observer may be consistent when understood in terms of the agent’s construal of the situation. Critics have also argued that situationists fail to take account of the fact that character is typically conceived as being composed of many traits, and that in any given situation, different traits may pull in different directions. If the agent ends up acting on the basis of one trait, this does not mean that she does not possess the others.¹⁸ Also, an agent may possess a trait but not in full,¹⁹ or may have some traits but not others.²⁰

Third, critics of situationism have argued that there are alternative trait-based explanations for the empirical evidence. John Sabini and Maury Silver, for example, have argued that some of the experimental findings on which situationists rely can be explained in terms of subjects wanting to avoid embarrassment. Neera Badhwar has proposed an explanation of the Milgram results in terms of the subjects’ “pusillanimity.” These alternative explanations are said to indicate that the scope of the situationists’ argument is more limited than they claim.²¹

Virtue ethicists often regard these rebuttals as sufficient to put the matter to rest, but from the situationists’ perspective, there are rejoinders to these criticisms.²² First, when critics of situationism point out that character could simply be rare, situationists respond that their thesis still holds for the vast majority of cases. They regard “very rare” as bad enough.²³ More important, however, situationists insist that their challenge should not be reduced to the claim that virtuous behavior is rare. Their point is rather that morally relevant behavior typically varies with morally irrelevant or insignificant features of the situation, rather than with any alleged global traits of agents. This is the real challenge to virtue ethics.²⁴ As Merritt, Doris, and Harman put it, “It is not that people fail standards for good conduct, but that people can be induced to do so with such ease.”²⁵ The situationists’ point is that the factors that best explain behavior are typically not the agents’ alleged character traits, but, rather, largely morally irrelevant or insubstantial features of situations that trigger largely unconscious responses in broad segments of the population, regardless of their individual values and beliefs.

Second, situationists deny that their conception of traits is behaviorist or unintellectual. They have always acknowledged that Aristotelian virtues are “not *mere* dispositions but *intelligent* dispositions, characterized by distinctive patterns of emotional response, deliberation, and decision as well as by more overt behavior.”²⁶ Certainly, in their view,

trait-based action, should it exist, does not happen mechanically but stems from the agent's own "evaluative commitments."²⁷ Their point is, rather, that empirical evidence shows that behavior typically covaries with morally extraneous differences between experimental conditions, rather than with agents' alleged inner characteristics, and that the agents' inner evaluative commitments are therefore apparently largely behaviorally irrelevant.²⁸ More recently, situationists have emphasized that cognitive processes, too, depend on situational contexts.²⁹ Thus, the appeal to the internal nature of dispositions fails to sway situationists.³⁰ In fact, situationists tend to regard the emphasis on the internal nature of traits as a concession of the behavioral irrelevance of character thus conceived. The same is true of the claim that subjects might possess global traits, even if these do not manifest in their behavior.

Finally, concerning the third rebuttal, when critics point to reasons that can explain test subjects' behavior in specific cases, such as fear of embarrassment, the situationists reply that this applies at best to a limited set of studies:³¹

These explanations [in terms of reasons] suppose that the actor acted on what he took (or on reflection would take) to be a reason, but a large body of empirical work indicates that this may relatively seldom be the case.³²

They emphasize that there are many cases in which the discrepancy between the agents' values and their behavior is caused by different kinds of factors, such as the weather or the noise of a lawnmower. The situational factors are so disparate and so often unconscious or morally insignificant, situationists claim, that it is not possible to explain the evidence in terms of any one specific reason or trait.

III. WHY THE CORE ARGUMENT OF SITUATIONISM IS UNSOUND

In order to show that the core argument in support of situationism is unsound, we examine more closely just how exactly the evidence is supposed to show that behavior typically cannot be explained by underlying global traits. The broad idea of the situationists' core argument is quite clear: if global traits exist, then, in certain controlled circumstances, they reliably produce the behavior that one expects from agents who possess such traits; so if the expected behavior does not occur under these circumstances, then the agents apparently do not have such traits. Of course, this type of argument needs to be made on the basis of a sufficiently large evidential basis of the right kind. Global traits are not expected to produce trait-manifesting behavior in *every* trait-relevant situation. If a person refuses to help a thief in a robbery, this is no proof that she is not a helpful person; there may be other moral considerations that make it inappropriate to offer help. But situationists argue that the *general* absence of the behavior that we would expect to see if global traits did exist, especially under experimental circumstances

where the behavior would clearly be expected of someone who possesses the global trait, does give us reason to deny the existence of such traits, at least as a matter of ordinary moral psychology.

What, then, is the behavior that we should *expect*, according to situationists, if global traits are widespread? Doris's standard for trait attribution is that trait-consistent behavior is performed over a run of trait-relevant situations, some of which are "less than optimally conducive to that behavior."³³ Such situations are *diagnostic*: they are unfavorable enough to a specific type of behavior that if this type of behavior does occur, it is better explained by reference to the corresponding global character trait than by reference to situational factors. He writes, "we are justified in inferring the existence of an Aristotelian personality structure when a person's behavior reliably conforms to the patterns expected on postulation of that structure."³⁴

This leads to the question of *which* patterns one should expect if global traits did exist. Doris suggests the following conditional:

*If a person possesses a trait, that person will engage in trait-relevant behaviors in trait-relevant eliciting conditions with markedly above chance probability p.*³⁵

One problem here is that psychological experiments generally are not testing for the attribution of specific traits to specific individuals. Subjects are not asked to complete a range of experiments to see if patterns of behavior emerge in individual cases. Rather, the data are usually gathered on the basis of experiments involving many subjects, and the results are aggregated for the group. Consequently, the situationists reach their conclusion via a further move. They imagine what pattern of behavior would be expected to emerge from these experiments given a substantial number of people possessing *specific* global traits, and then they compare that pattern with the observed behavior of the group. In other words, the situationists make certain assumptions about the *kinds* of global traits that would be shared across the population, if global traits did exist. They argue that the observed behavior does not fit a pattern that is consistent with *these* traits, and on this basis they deny the existence of global traits.

There are two types of traits for which situationists examine the relation between expected and actual behavior, namely, virtuous global traits such as kindness or compassion, and vicious global traits such as cruelty or aggression. Many experiments look at helping behavior and seem to reveal that people often do not help in situations in which the need is obvious and the cost of helping is low. Moreover, it turns out to be remarkably easy to produce significant changes in helping behavior by introducing morally insignificant situational variables. If many people possess a virtue such as compassion, situationists assume, we would expect to see consistent rates of helping across situations that differ only in helping-irrelevant respects. Alternatively, if many people had a vicious global trait, such as cruelty, one would expect them consistently to engage in cruel behavior across situations. The observed behavior does not follow either pattern, however, and on this basis the situationists conclude that people typically do not possess global traits.

The problem with this argument, however, is that the evidence on which situationists rely at best problematizes the widespread existence of the two classes of global traits they consider, namely, *virtues* and *vices that involve malice*. In order for their argument to rule out the widespread existence of *all* types of global character traits, however, situationists should also rule out another class of global character traits, namely, *non-malicious vices*. This they neglect to do—or so we shall argue.³⁶

Situationists fail to address the possible explanatory value of global vices that do not involve the pursuit of harm to others, such as dispositions to selfishness, cowardice, laziness, and so on. Their standard for the required “behavioral consistency” is whether people behave in ways that are consistently morally good or consistently morally bad. Yet the vices that they overlook should not be expected to follow this pattern. These vices do not involve the pursuit of what is morally right, and so they should not be expected to manifest in behavior that is consistently morally good. But these traits do not necessarily lead to morally bad behavior, either. The selfish person may do the right thing when doing so is in her interest, the lazy person may do so when it is easy, and the coward when it is safe. Unlike sadists, these agents do not pursue harm to others as such. But they may well cause harm when that which is morally required runs counter to their interests, or when it involves effort or danger.

In other words, in the case of global non-malicious vices, we should expect a pattern of behavior that is neither consistently morally good nor consistently morally bad, but consistently in keeping with the specific vices in question. In order to be able to rule out the widespread existence of such global traits, situationists should test for patterns of moral laziness, cowardice, selfishness, and so on. Instead, however, they infer the general absence of trait-dependent behavioral patterns from the fact that people are neither consistently morally bad nor consistently morally good. This inference is invalid, however, because it neglects the alternative possibility that many people possess global non-malicious vices. In the next section, we show that the experimental evidence situationists appeal to is in fact consistent with the widespread existence of such global vices.

IV. THE CASE OF THE MISSING VICES

In this section, we examine three sets of empirical studies. First, we examine the evidence on which situationists build their case, and we argue that there are possible (and *prima facie* not implausible) explanations of the behavioral patterns in terms of non-malicious vices (3.1). Second, we show that there are some data that lend initial plausibility to the idea that many people possess non-malicious vices (3.2). Third, we consider evidence that might be taken to tell directly against the existence of such vices—namely, experiments in which subjects behave admirably (3.3). We shall not be arguing that the evidence proves the existence of global non-malicious vices, because there is not enough empirical evidence of the right kind to warrant this stronger claim. Rather, we argue that situationists fail to make the empirical case for their view.

i. The Evidence Allegedly Supporting Situationism

Milgram's Obedience Experiments

To show that situationists have not given suitable weight to the possibility of non-malicious vices, let us start by examining the way they rule out vice as an explanation of the test subjects' behavior in Milgram's "obedience experiments."³⁷ In a series of related experiments, Milgram showed that ordinary test subjects were willing to obey an experimenter who requested that they administer electric shocks to a "learner" (who was a confederate, presented as a likable fellow test subject). The experiment was said to examine the influence of punishment on learning, and the test subjects were instructed to administer electric shocks of gradually increasing severity each time the learner made a mistake on a word-pair memory test. Two-thirds of the test subjects turned out to be willing to administer extremely painful and even lethal shocks, by pushing levers labeled "danger: severe shock" (at 375 volts) or "XXX" (at 435 and 450 volts), despite the fact that the "learner" explicitly withdrew his consent at 150 volts and was screaming in pain (except at the highest voltages, when he was silent).

Situationists repeatedly refer to these experiments and consider them "powerful evidence for situationism."³⁸ People generally regard the behavior of the Milgram subjects as morally wrong, but nevertheless large numbers of test subjects fail to behave in a way that would be consistent with the corresponding virtuous character trait. Moreover, we should not assume that people lie about regarding the behavior as wrong and enjoy the opportunity to hurt the victim. Milgram considered the possibility that the test subjects' behavior was the product of "deeply aggressive instincts."³⁹ To test this hypothesis, he ran a variation of the experiment in which the subjects were free to choose the level of the shock they administered. While one subject went to the maximum, and one to 375 volts,⁴⁰ all other subjects stopped before 150 volts, with the mean final shock level between 75 and 90 volts.⁴¹ The situationists take this to show that the subjects' willingness to shock the victim did not stem from a desire to hurt him. On this basis they infer that global vice is not the best explanation of the observed behavior. Doris writes that the evidence "does not suggest that Milgram had stumbled onto an aberrant pocket of sadists," and that it instead proves "the power of the situation."⁴² Harman similarly rejects the suggestion that "extreme personal dispositions are at fault"⁴³ and infers from this that situational variables explain the behavior. Situationists generally regard this as sufficient to rule out vice as an explanation.

But this is too quick. The situationists overlook the set of global traits that do not consist in dispositions to harm others for its own sake but that, morally speaking, can nevertheless be considered to be global vices, that is, as dispositions to act in ways that involve specific forms of moral failure. For example, one could explain the subjects' behavior in terms of cowardice. One could say that they lacked the courage of their convictions, that they were cowed by the authority of the experimenter. Alternatively, one could explain the subjects' behavior in terms of a disposition to shift responsibility for one's actions to others, in this case to the experimenter (as many subjects explicitly did) or to the

victim (to whom some subjects shifted the blame on the grounds that he gave the wrong answers).⁴⁴ These dispositions are compatible with the observed behavior. There is no need to settle on any one specific disposition to explain the behavior of all or most of the obedient subjects; the observed behavior of different people may have to be explained in terms of different vices. As mentioned earlier, Milgram's experiments do not provide a sufficient basis on which to establish that specific individuals have specific traits, because doing so would require longitudinal studies of individual subjects. For the purpose of this chapter, however, the fact that the data are compatible with alternative explanations in terms of global vices means that systematic observation does reveal behavioral patterns that are consistent with global character traits, contrary to the situationists' claim.

The Group Effect

Other empirical evidence that situationists mention in support of their thesis are studies of group effects. The evidence from such studies shows that helping behavior is significantly reduced in the presence of others. As Doris points out, "mild social pressures can result in neglect of apparently serious ethical demands."⁴⁵ He argues that this evidence "presses charges of empirical inadequacy against characterological moral psychology" because the group effect shows that dispositions are not robust.⁴⁶

Substantial evidence for the proposition that the presence of other people serves to inhibit the impulse to help was provided by Bibb Latané and John Darley (1970, 38). They describe three processes that might inhibit helping. First, the agent who intervenes risks embarrassment if the situation turns out *not* to be one that needed her intervention, and the greater the "audience" of bystanders is, the higher the cost of unnecessary intervention. Second, agents may look to their peers to help define an apparently ambiguous situation. Their inaction may lead agents to believe that inaction is the expected or appropriate response. Finally, the presence of others reduces the cost of non-intervention, as responsibility is diffused throughout the group. The knowledge that others are present allows the agent to shift some of the responsibility to them.⁴⁷

Contrary to the situationists' claim, however, this evidence does not show that the behavior of the agents in question did not stem from global dispositions. We should consider the possible role of vices such as selfishness, laziness, or cowardice. The three processes identified by Latané and Darley are perfectly compatible with the idea that such traits cause inaction under the circumstances. If one has a lazy or selfish disposition, for example, one does not help when one believes one could get away with inaction, and one can more easily get away with inaction when others are present than when one is alone. The fact that there are others who could also act makes it possible to shift some of the responsibility to others; it allows one to offer the excuse that the situation was ambiguous or confusing (after all, the others did not act, so perhaps there was something they knew that the agent did not); and it also adds the potential social costs of embarrassment if one's intervention turns out to be misguided. On the basis of some or all of these considerations, agents who are selfish, lazy, or cowardly may well refrain from action. The availability of an explanation in terms of non-malicious vices implies that the group effect as such is in principle compatible with the existence of global traits.

A subset of experiments tested the group effect under conditions where there appeared to be a threat to all, including the test subject, and at first sight it might seem as if an explanation of the sort we suggest is impossible in these cases. Latané and Darley (1968) had a room gradually fill with smoke. Ross (1971) and Ross and Braband (1973) set off a ringing bell and a flashing “Fire” sign. In these cases there was also a marked drop in intervention rates when subjects in the room were in a group compared to subjects who were on their own.⁴⁸ Situationists might regard the results of these studies as incompatible with an explanation in terms of non-malicious vices. After all, one would be inclined to associate vices such as selfishness and cowardice with self-preserving behavior, so one might expect subjects with such vices to be more proactive in responding to the threat. Yet insofar as the inaction of others causes ambiguity about the situation, this may make the situation seem more ambiguous and less of a threat, which could explain the reduced intervention rates. And insofar as the presence of others diffuses responsibility, this may enable selfish or cowardly subjects to remain conservative with their efforts and not risk unwarranted intervention. In sum, the group effect is compatible with—and indeed perhaps best understood in the light of—a range of global non-malicious vices, even when the scenario involves a threat to the test subject.

The Mood Effect

Situationists also ground their argument in experimental findings that indicate that people’s willingness to help is affected by changes in their mood. Interestingly, it turns out that being in a good mood *or* a bad mood (as compared to a neutral one) makes one more likely to help.⁴⁹ It has also been demonstrated that mood and helping behavior are highly susceptible to minor situational influences, such as smell,⁵⁰ noise,⁵¹ minor good fortune,⁵² and the weather.⁵³

Situationists take these studies to indicate that people typically do not possess global character traits. After all, the factors that influence helping behavior are not themselves morally relevant, so the variation cannot be explained by reference to virtuous dispositions on the part of the subjects, and malice does not seem to be operative either. This then leads them to regard this evidence as providing support for the thesis of situationism.⁵⁴

Again, however, this conclusion does not follow. Remarkably, the leading explanation of why negative moods lead to increased helping behavior—the “mood management hypothesis”—and one of the two leading models for the effect of good mood on helping⁵⁵—the “mood maintenance hypothesis”—both see increased helping as a way of benefiting the agent.⁵⁶ Helping behavior is associated with the rewards of praise and social status, which increase positive affect. When we feel bad, we form a motivation to improve our mood, and helping is one way to do this. When we feel good, we form a motivation to maintain our positive affect, and again, one way to do this is by helping other people. Whether or not we conceive of this as a conscious process, the mood maintenance hypothesis makes clear that the behavioral evidence as such does not force us in the direction of situationism, for it provides an explanation in terms of an underlying disposition to help others only when doing so will make oneself feel better.

This analysis is compatible with apparent counterexamples. Mathews and Canon⁵⁷ found that people are much less likely to help an apparently injured man pick up his books when there was a power lawnmower running nearby than when background noise levels were normal. At first glance, this may seem to tell against the idea that people help in order to improve a negative mood (in this case due to the loud and unpleasant noise). Yet the mood-management hypothesis suggests that when helping is an effective means to improving mood, and when there is no less costly means available to do so, helping behavior will increase. In this experiment there was an easier means—escaping the noise by moving away. Given that the negative mood was a product of the loud noise and that it was easy to escape the noise, helping was *not* the easiest means for an agent to improve affect. We do not claim that the mood maintenance hypothesis indeed provides the best explanation; there are other possibilities as well. Our point is simply that the behavior observed in these experiments permits an explanation in terms of a stable desire for positive affect, which means that the evidence as such does not clearly show that people are acting at the mercy of situational stimuli.

In sum, the results of the three groups of studies discussed in section III.i, which situationists regard as strong evidence in support of their position, can also be explained in a way that is consistent with the widespread possession of global character traits. Therefore, these empirical studies do not make the case against global traits in general. In other words, they do not make the case for situationism.

ii. Moral Hypocrisy

There is at least one important line of research that lends initial empirical plausibility to the idea that people regularly act in ways that are consistent with non-malicious vices. Daniel Batson and colleagues have run a large number of empirical studies that show that many people display “moral hypocrisy,”⁵⁸ that is, that people wish to *appear* moral without being willing to *do* what is morally required. Of the many studies in support of this explanation, we discuss only one here. Batson et al. (1997) asked subjects to assign two tasks—one with positive consequences and one with neutral consequences—to themselves and another participant in the experiment. Subjects were told that the other participant would believe that the assignment was random. Their instructions included the following text, which was intended to give them an explicit cue about the moral nature of the dilemma:

Most participants feel that giving both people an equal chance—by, for example, flipping a coin—is the fairest way to assign themselves and the other participant to the tasks (we have provided a coin for you to flip if you wish). But the decision is entirely up to you.⁵⁹

Subjects were then given a coin to use in such a procedure if they wished, and they were left alone in a room. Afterward, nearly all the participants said that assigning the positive

task to the other person, or flipping the coin to decide, was the morally right thing to do, yet only about half chose to flip the coin. Of those who did not flip, 80%–90% chose to assign the positive task to themselves. Even more interesting, however, is the finding that of those who *did* flip the coin, 85%–90% assigned themselves the positive task.⁶⁰ In further studies of this nature,⁶¹ too, participants who flipped the coin in private assigned the positive task to themselves in the vast majority of cases.

These studies are not by themselves sufficient to prove that most of the test subjects were in fact acting from global vices such as dishonesty and selfishness, as this would require testing specifically for cross-situational consistency in individual agents. But the evidence is very suggestive and clearly *compatible* with the widespread existence of such global vices.

iii. Is There Direct Evidence against Global Vices?

We have been arguing that the situationists have overlooked the explanatory value of non-malicious vices because their conception of vices is too narrow and limited to malice. There are a few experiments, however, that could be taken as providing counter-evidence against the suggestion that global vices are widespread. In these experiments, subjects often act admirably. Situationists take this evidence, in combination with studies in which subjects largely act deplorably (such as the Milgram experiments), to constitute evidence against the existence of global character traits. For if some situational factors prompt people to act deplorably, and other factors prompt them to behave admirably, they argue, this constitutes evidence not just against agents possessing global virtues, but also against agents possessing global vices. Therefore, we should consider those experiments that situationists regard as supporting their view and that show agents displaying behavior that is generally regarded as morally good. A first objection to our thesis, then, is that some behavior observed in psychological experiments is simply *too good* for the agents to have global vices.

Peter Vranas cites two experiments in support of the claim that “[t]here are many situations in each of which most people (would) behave admirably.”⁶² In the first,⁶³ nearly all subjects helped a technician who had apparently suffered a severe electric shock. “Helping” here meant either offering direct personal assistance or indirect assistance by reporting the incident or obtaining help from others. In the second,⁶⁴ subjects who had been asked by a confederate to watch some item (a bag, for example) were very likely to directly confront a confederate thief who took the item. Vranas argues that people’s willingness to risk harm from confronting the thief or helping the technician represents “admirable” behavior. But if people behave, or would behave, admirably in many situations, he argues, we cannot give their overall character a negative evaluation: they are not “bad people.” On his account, people are neither good nor bad; they are indeterminate and have “no character status” at all.⁶⁵

Do cases like “thief” and “technician” indeed show that people’s behavior is too good for them to possess global vices of that sort we have been discussing? We do not think so.

First, we have not argued that people have *only* vices or that they *only ever act* on vices. There may well be a significant number of agents who do not have vices that impair their helping behavior in the two experiments at issue. If they have virtues, and even if their behavior in these specific experiments is impossible to explain in terms of global traits at all, this is still compatible with global vices being rather common.

Second, cases like “thief” and “technician” would tell against the possession of non-malicious global vices only if the subjects’ behavior revealed a motivation that was inconsistent with the possession of such vices. Even subjects with such vices will be led to the morally right thing under certain circumstances, however, and for all we know, this may have been true of a non-negligible number of the test subjects in these cases. In the case of “thief,” the subjects are directly asked to perform a task—watching and if necessary protecting the possessions of a confederate—and they explicitly agree to do so. They then find themselves faced with precisely the task they agreed to perform. Failure to do as they promised risks a confrontation or a serious loss of social standing if the confederate returns to find his possessions stolen and publicly blames the subject for it. Being motivated to avoid this kind of repercussion could explain—in at least a non-trivial number of cases—why people confront the thief. A similar kind of explanation might be available for “technician.” In this case, the subjects risk serious consequences if they walk past an obvious and life-threatening emergency without even reporting it, and this may motivate even a selfish person to do something. A lazy person may spring into action when the need is pressing enough, and reporting the incident is not so much work. A coward may enlist others to assist in helping the technician, but he will try to avoid touching the electrical equipment. These are just some examples of how the observed behavior could be explained in terms of underlying global traits. We are not claiming here that the helpful subjects in these studies were *actually* motivated by selfishness, laziness, or cowardice. The available evidence is insufficient to establish the motivations of the individual test subjects with certainty. As long as such non-malicious vices remain a possible (and *prima facie* not at all implausible) explanation of the subjects’ behavior, however, the observed behavior does not count in favor of situationism.

A second objection against our thesis, somewhat different from the first, is that the behavior observed in test subjects is *not bad enough* to be explained in terms of vices. Christian Miller points to evidence of widespread cheating behavior⁶⁶ and widespread lying behavior,⁶⁷ but he argues that this is not evidence that people possess a global trait of dishonesty because there are *limits* to the kinds of cheating and lying that people engage in. In particular, while most people tend to cheat to some extent when the opportunity arises, they do not tend to cheat as much as possible. For example, Lisa Shu and colleagues⁶⁸ found that subjects answering problems, who would receive \$0.50 for each correct answer, reported that they answered 13.22 problems correctly (on average) when they could shred the answer sheet immediately afterward, so no one could check their result. This compared to an average of 7.97 correct answers in the control group. So while people clearly took the opportunity to cheat, they did not maximize their profit, for they could have reported a total of 20 correct answers. In further work, Nina Mazar and colleagues⁶⁹ found that when subjects were prompted to recall the Ten Commandments,

this kind of cheating went down. Miller follows Mazar and colleagues in holding that people typically have a conception of themselves as honest, and that this limits their cheating behavior.⁷⁰ Moreover, he holds that the fact that people cheat less when primed by some moral code is evidence that people have the belief that honesty is appropriate, which can rule their behavior when they are primed in this way. Overall, Miller argues that there are a number of ways in which people act, appear to be motivated, and think of themselves that do not fit the pattern we would expect from people who have a global trait of dishonesty. In particular, we would not expect dishonest persons to think of themselves as honest, to hold that being honest is appropriate, or to fail to maximize a cheating opportunity.⁷¹

Miller's conception of vice is dissatisfying in several respects, however. First, maximizing every cheating opportunity is not a plausible condition for the trait of dishonesty. Whether one lies that one had 13 or 20 correct answers, when one actually had only 8, one is cheating either way. Those who cheated may well have figured that it would be rather improbable, in the eyes of the experimenter, for them to have answered all questions correctly, and they may have wanted to avoid looking suspicious. Similarly, one can be disposed to lie without this requiring that everything one ever says be a lie; the disposition is usually tied to situations in which lying is to one's advantage and one can lie without ruining one's reputation as trustworthy or running into other trouble. The amount of lying a liar can engage in is naturally limited by the condition that one needs to preserve the trust of others for one's lies to be effective.

A second problem concerns Miller's contention that an agent, in order to qualify as having a vice, needs to be wholeheartedly committed to the behavior in question and not regard it as morally wrong.⁷² This, too, seems an implausible condition. It is not odd to conceive of dishonest people as regarding themselves as being committed to honesty; after all, they are dishonest, so they may well engage in some form of rationalization. More important, however, is the fact that dishonest people need not endorse their own dishonest behavior in all respects in order to qualify as dishonest. They may harbor hopes of becoming better people—indeed, they may feel bad about themselves—and this is compatible with their nevertheless robustly acting dishonestly across a broad range of situations. Indeed, within the tradition of Aristotelian virtue ethics as well as Kantianism, vices are usually regarded as dispositions that involve internal conflict on the part of the agent who has them.⁷³ Miller rejects this aspect of vice because he regards it as a necessary condition for attributing a vice to an agent that the agent feels no distress when acting in accordance with the vice and does not believe that acting in this way is wrong. We regard this condition as too strong. A selfish agent may reliably decide to act in a way that is morally impermissible while knowing that it is morally wrong. For example, she may reliably decide to give priority to trivial interests of her own over the urgent needs of others, while knowing that her practical decisions are morally indefensible. Because such a "selfish" agent is disposed to actively *pursue* her self-interest in morally problematic ways, her action is not due to weakness of will, but to vice. The fact that she is aware that what she is doing is morally wrong does not make her action any less vice-based.

At the end of this discussion, it is worth noting that one should expect an important evidential asymmetry between virtues and vices. Virtues are, by their nature, praiseworthy, so we can expect people to express their virtues in public (at least insofar as the virtues they acknowledge are also regarded as such in their social and cultural context). Vices, by contrast, are traits people will often try to hide from the public eye.⁷⁴ Therefore, we can allow more numerous instances of vice-contrary behavior before having to conclude that a person does not have vices than we can allow instances of virtue-contrary behavior before having to deny that a person has virtues.

This does not immunize vice from empirical challenge, however. If Batson's test subjects dutifully flipped their coins and assigned the positive consequences tasks to others in roughly 50% of the cases, we would have no reason to suspect them of moral hypocrisy. Rather, our point is that the evidential asymmetry between virtue-based and vice-based behavior should be taken into account when assessing the empirical evidence concerning the existence of global vices. It is much harder to rule out the widespread possession of global vices than situationists tend to assume.

Finally, we have not argued or meant to suggest that people's behavior is *typically* (let alone always) caused by global non-malicious vices. We have argued that situationists have overlooked the possibility that the observed behavior is often (or at least in a substantial number of cases) best explained by reference to such vices and hence that their own position lacks the empirical support they claim for it. To what extent global non-malicious vices can actually explain human behavior remains to be seen, and establishing this requires research of a different type than the experiments we have been discussing. But even if longitudinal studies of large numbers of individual subjects showed that such vices explain behavior merely in a sizable minority of cases, this would already suffice to confirm that situationism is mistaken. The situationists argue that global character-trait-dependent behavior is "rare enough to count as abnormal," and that people's morally relevant behavior is "typically" the result of depersonalized response tendencies triggered by morally irrelevant or insignificant features in the situational context. To show this bold thesis to be mistaken, it is enough if global vices such as laziness, cowardice, and selfishness turn out to be common enough to count as all-too-ordinary elements of human moral psychology.

V. CONCLUSION

We have argued that situationists overlook the explanatory potential of global non-malicious vices, and that the empirical evidence to which they appeal is consistent with the widespread possession of global character traits because it is consistent with the widespread existence of global non-malicious vices. Our point is most fundamentally a point about the structure of the situationists' argument and their use of the empirical evidence. If our analysis is correct, the evidence does not show the thesis of situationism to be true; in fact, the evidence is fully compatible with the view they oppose, namely,

the thesis that human behavior is often best explained by reference to global character traits.

Establishing the extent to which people in fact act on the basis of global traits—and *a fortiori* establishing the possibility of moral self-improvement and genuine virtue—is an altogether different matter. Any descriptive claims regarding people's possession of virtues and vices will have to be based on a type of research that hardly exists and that is methodologically difficult to carry out, namely, on longitudinal studies involving the same subjects in a variety of circumstances.

NOTES

1. E.g., J. M. Doris, "Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics," *Noûs* 32 (1998): 504–530; J. M. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); G. Harman, "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 99 (1999): 315–331; G. Harman, "The Nonexistence of Character Traits," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 100 (2000): 223–226; G. Harman, "Skepticism about Character Traits," *The Journal of Ethics* 13 (2009): 235–242; M. Merritt, J. M. Doris, and G. Harman, "Character," in *The Moral Psychology Handbook*, edited by J. M. Doris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 355–401; P. B. M. Vranas, "The Indeterminacy Paradox: Character Evaluations and Human Psychology," *Noûs* 39 (2005): 1–42.
2. S. Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (London: Pinter and Martin, 1974).
3. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, 65.
4. Merritt et al., "Character," 370.
5. There is something misleading about this second premise, because in a sense the situationists themselves argue that systematic observation *does* reveal pervasive behavioral consistency. They claim that human behavior reveals pervasive *situation-dependent* consistency. Therefore, it would have been clearer if they had formulated the second premise in terms of the absence of *trait-dependent* behavioral consistency. For, as Doris puts it, "the question is whether the behavioral regularity we observe is to be primarily explained by reference to robust dispositional structures or situational regularity [. . .]. I insist that the striking variability of behavior with situational variation favors the latter hypothesis." Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, 26. Thus, the question is not so much whether there is behavioral consistency, but whether the behavioral evidence is consistent with its being caused by underlying global traits. We shall take the second premise to mean that systematic observation does not reveal pervasive *trait-dependent* behavioral consistency.
6. Merritt et al., "Character," 357–358; identical in J. M. Doris, "Précis of Lack of Character," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 71 (2005): 633.
7. M. Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Doris, "Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics"; Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*; Harman, "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error"; Harman, "The Nonexistence of Character Traits"; Harman, "Skepticism about Character Traits"; M. Merritt, "Virtue Ethics and Situationist Personality Psychology," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 3 (2000): 365–383; Vranas, "The

- Indeterminacy Paradox: Character Evaluations and Human Psychology”; Merritt et al., “Character.”
8. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, 15–22.
 9. C. Miller, “Social Psychology and Virtue Ethics,” *Journal of Ethics* 7 (2003): 365–392; C. Miller, “Social Psychology, Mood, and Helping: Mixed Results for Virtue Ethics,” *The Journal of Ethics* 13 (2009): 145–173; C. Miller, “Character Traits, Social Psychology, and Impediments to Helping Behavior,” *Journal of Ethics and Social Psychology* 5 (2010): 1–36; N. Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010); E. J. Wielenberg, “Saving Character,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 9 (2006): 461–491.
 10. Some situationists explicitly allow for the existence of such a minority (e.g., Vranas, “The Indeterminacy Paradox: Character Evaluations and Human Psychology”) without, however, regarding this as evidence of global traits. On Vranas’s view, it is compatible with the thesis that character is typically fragmented.
 11. E.g., R. Kamtekar, “Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of our Character,” *Ethics* 114 (2004): 482–485.
 12. K. Kristjánsson, “An Aristotelian Critique of Situationism,” *Philosophy* 83 (2008): 55–76.
 13. D. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009); Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory*; J. Webber, “Character, Attitude and Disposition,” *European Journal of Philosophy*, (2013), doi: 10.1111/ejop.12028.
 14. J. Webber, “Virtue, Character and Situation,” *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 3 (2006): 193–213; J. Webber, “Character, Global and Local,” *Utilitas* 19 (2007): 430–434.
 15. Kamtekar, “Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of our Character,” 460, 477.
 16. J. Annas, “Comments on John Doris’s Lack of Character,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 71 (2005): 639; Kamtekar, “Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of our Character”; Kristjánsson, “An Aristotelian Critique of Situationism”; J. J. Kupperman, “The Indispensability of Character,” *Philosophy* 76 (2001): 239–250; G. Sreenivasan, “Errors about Errors: Virtue Theory and Trait Attribution,” *Mind* 111 (2002): 47–68.
 17. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, 22.
 18. Webber, “Virtue, Character and Situation”; Kamtekar, “Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of our Character.”
 19. Miller, “Social Psychology and Virtue Ethics,” 378–379.
 20. Miller, “Character Traits, Social Psychology, and Impediments to Helping Behavior.”
 21. J. Sabini and M. Silver, “Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued,” *Ethics* 115 (2005): 535–562; N. K. Badhwar, “The Milgram Experiments, Learned Helplessness, and Character Traits,” *The Journal of Ethics* 13 (2009): 278–287.
 22. See Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*; most extensively Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction*, chap. 3; on the dialectic of the debate, see also J. Prinz, “The Normativity Challenge: Cultural Psychology Provides the Real Threat to Virtue Ethics,” *Journal of Ethics* 13 (2009): 120–127.
 23. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, 115, where this objection is anticipated.
 24. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, 35.
 25. Merritt et al., “Character,” 357.
 26. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, 17; emphasis in original.
 27. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, 20.
 28. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, 16–27.

29. Merritt et al., "Character," 359–360.
30. Merritt et al., "Character," 358–360, 366.
31. Merritt et al., "Character," 367–370.
32. Merritt et al., "Character," 369–370.
33. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, 19.
34. Doris, "Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics," 507.
35. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, 19, emphasis in original.
36. The point about the situationists' argument structure is developed in more detail in P. Kleingeld, "Consistent Egoists and Situation Managers: Two Problems for Situationism," *Philosophical Explorations* 18 (2015): 344–361, along with a critique of their conception of "situation management." The present chapter shows how the results of the relevant empirical studies can indeed be interpreted as consistent with the widespread possession of non-malicious vices. A more extensive discussion of the empirical record can be found in T. E. Bates, *Vice Versa: Situationism and Character Pessimism* (Dissertation University of Groningen, 2016).
37. Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*.
38. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, 39.
39. Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*, 71.
40. It is worth noting that these data are compatible with, though not decisive evidence for, the existence of a disposition to cruelty in a small minority.
41. Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*, 61.
42. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, 42.
43. Harman, "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error," 322.
44. Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*, 203–204.
45. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, 33.
46. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, 28.
47. B. Latané and J. M. Darley, *The Unresponsive Bystander: Why Doesn't He Help?* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), 125; B. Latané and S. Nida, "Ten Years of Research on Group Sizes and Helping," *Psychological Bulletin* 89 (1981): 309.
48. Latané and Nida, "Ten Years of Research on Group Sizes and Helping," 312.
49. M. Schaller and R. B. Cialdini, "Happiness, Sadness, and Helping: A Motivational Integration," in *Handbook of Motivation and Cognition*, vol. II: *Foundations of Social Behavior*, edited by E. T. Higgins and R. M. Sorrentino (New York: Guilford, 1990), 265–296.
50. R. A. Baron, and J. Thomley, "A Whiff of Reality: Positive Affect as a Potential Mediator of the Effects of Pleasant Fragrances on Task Performance and Helping," *Environment and Behavior* 26 (1994): 766–784; R. A. Baron, "The Sweet Smell of . . . Helping: Effects of Pleasant Ambient Fragrance on Prosocial Behavior in Shopping Malls," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 23 (1997): 498–503.
51. K. E. Mathews and L. K. Canon, "Environmental Noise Level as a Determinant of Helping Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 32 (1975): 571–577.
52. A. M. Isen and P. F. Levin, "Effect of Feeling Good on Helping: Cookies and Kindness," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 21 (1972): 384–388; P. F. Levin and A. M. Isen, "Further Studies on the Effect of Feeling Good on Helping," *Sociometry* 38 (1975): 141–147.
53. M. R. Cunningham, "Weather, Mood, and Helping Behavior: Quasi-experiments with the Sunshine Samaritan," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37 (1979): 1947–1956.

54. E.g., Merritt et al., "Character," 356–357.
55. The alternative model is the "concomitance model," which suggests that increased helping is a byproduct of the other cognitive changes caused by positive affect, such as improved task performance, cooperativeness, optimism about the future, and increased information acquisition. Miller, "Social Psychology, Mood, and Helping: Mixed Results for Virtue Ethics," 154.
56. Miller, "Social Psychology, Mood, and Helping: Mixed Results for Virtue Ethics," 152, 159.
57. Mathews and Canon, "Environmental Noise Level as a Determinant of Helping Behavior," 574–575.
58. For representative work, see C. D. Batson, D. Kobrynowicz, J. L. Dinnerstein, H. C. Kampf, and A. D. Wilson, "In a Very Different Voice: Unmasking Moral Hypocrisy," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 72 (1997): 1335–1348; C. D. Batson, E. R. Thompson, G. Seufferling, H. Whitney, and J. A. Strongman, "Moral Hypocrisy: Appearing Moral to Oneself Without Being So," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77 (1999): 525–537; C. D. Batson, E. R. Thompson, and H. Chen, "Moral Hypocrisy: Addressing Some Alternatives," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 83 (2002): 330–339; C. D. Batson, E. Collins, and A. A. Powell, "Doing Business after the Fall: The Virtue of Moral Hypocrisy," *Journal of Business Ethics* 66 (2006): 321–335.
59. Batson et al., "In a Very Different Voice: Unmasking Moral Hypocrisy," 1341.
60. Batson et al., "In a Very Different Voice: Unmasking Moral Hypocrisy," 1342.
61. See, for example, Batson et al., "Moral Hypocrisy: Appearing Moral to Oneself Without Being So"; Batson et al., "Moral Hypocrisy: Addressing Some Alternatives."
62. Vranas, "The Indeterminacy Paradox: Character Evaluations and Human Psychology," 4.
63. R. D., Clark, III, and L. E. Word, "Where is the Apathetic Bystander? Situational Characteristics of the Emergency," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 29 (1974): 279–287.
64. T. Moriarty, "Crime, Commitment, and the Responsive Bystander: Two Field Experiments," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 31 (1975): 370–376.
65. Vranas, "The Indeterminacy Paradox: Character Evaluations and Human Psychology," 2.
66. See C. Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 62–65, for an overview.
67. C. Miller, *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 286–290.
68. L. Shu, F. Gino., and M. Bazerman, "Dishonest Deed, Clear Conscience: When Cheating Leads to Moral Disengagement and Motivated Forgetting," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 37 (2011): 330–349.
69. N. Mazar, O. Amir, and D. Ariely, "The Dishonesty of Honest People: A Theory of Self-Concept Maintenance," *Journal of Marketing Research* 45(6) (2008): 633–644.
70. Miller, *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory*, 69.
71. See Miller, *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory*, 312–313, for a summary of these conditions.
72. Miller, *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory*, 303, 312–313.
73. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated and edited by R. Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1166b; I. Kant, *Groundwork of The Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by M. J. Gregor, in *Practical Philosophy*, edited by M. J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 454.

74. This is not to deny that there may be certain social contexts in which it is considered “cool” to flaunt one’s vices. Also, there may be significant disagreement as to whether certain traits are virtues or vices.

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CHAPTER 28

VIRTUE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PSYCHOLOGY

KRISTJÁN KRISTJÁNSSON

I. INTRODUCTION: THE NEED FOR A REALITY CHECK

At the risk of sounding overly self-conscious, it may be instructive to rehearse some thoughts that surfaced when I was entrusted with the task of writing a chapter about psychological approaches to virtue. Philosophers pretend to have a license to poke their noses into everything. Yet assigning this particular task to a philosopher (and one particularly interested in the application of virtue constructs in the field of education), rather than to an able and interested psychologist, seems a controversial move.¹ At any rate, it ineluctably sets the tone for the forthcoming discussion, adding to what was already a reflexive title, “Virtue from the Perspective of Psychology,” an implicit second layer of reflexivity: “as seen through a philosophical lens.” Moreover, the editor will know that I have in the past come down heavily on the side of “academic trespassing” between psychology and philosophy in the field of virtue ethics and its applications; hence, no one should expect a non-partisan account. Indeed, my personal sympathies are explicitly with those I characterize in the following as “integrators” and “mavericks.”

All that said, I do take a slightly dimmer view of the current state of the courtship between philosophy and psychology in the virtue field than many of my colleagues on either side of “the great divide.” The sunny view that the clash of the two academic cultures has already been transcended may stand in need of a *reality check*—and that is basically what I attempt in this chapter. While it is undoubtedly true that pockets of interest in virtue now exist within psychology where none was found before, and that a number of philosophers have adopted a more “experimental” mindset, true collaborations may

still be less widespread and entrenched than they are sometimes made out to be. I offer that suggestion here not only as a historical working hypothesis—about the *de facto* state of cross-fertilizations between the two fields—but also as an indication of my suspicion that a formidable fence of conflicting assumptions may still separate the two, a fence that requires something more than just time and patience to tear down.²

To perform the promised reality check, we are arguably best served by an exploration that prioritizes breadth over depth. Hence, considerable parts of the discussion that follows will be fast-paced and general, aiming at identifying trends and trajectories, rather than fleshing out detailed arguments. Space does not allow me, however, to write the chapter in the form of an introductory piece. I assume from the outset that readers are *au fait* with terms such as “virtue,” “character,” *hexis*, *eudaimonia*, and *phronesis*, or—more specifically—with those terms as they have been freighted with an Aristotelian or quasi-Aristotelian understanding in recently revived virtue theories and related accounts of character education.³

The most natural place to start an exploration of what appears to be the new ecumenism between philosophy and psychology on virtue is with the methodological approach that seems to be the driving force behind it. That approach is moral *naturalism*—a brand of moral *realism* that considers some or all moral properties as natural properties and sees all ethical theorizing as ultimately answerable to factual evidence. Animating virtue ethics, this naturalism and its corollary thesis that moral ideals (including virtue ideals) must be “psychologically real” for “creatures like us” constitute the reason why many social scientists see virtue ethicists as a group of moral philosophers they can finally do business with.⁴ Yet when Elizabeth Anscombe (re)launched virtue ethics with her famous edict that moral philosophy be laid to rest until we had a decent account of human nature, action, and flourishing, there is little indication that she considered this best done by exploiting psychological evidence, gathered among “the many,” as distinct from more rigorous philosophical insights about human psychology, uncovered in the armchairs of “the wise.”⁵ Whatever Anscombe’s view may have been, however, the standard interpretation by both philosophers and psychologists, currently active in this discourse, is that since it is an empirical rather than a conceptual fact that people “need” the virtues, philosophical virtue ethics must be informed by a “bottom-up approach” that settles moral questions by providing empirical evidence on what makes people tick.⁶ On this view, Aristotelian virtue ethics has to be aligned with experimental moral psychology in order to be viable and plausible.⁷ The input of the psychological evidence is then ideally seen as happening on two levels: the *conceptual* level, where philosophical theories of virtue are informed by conceptualizations of “the many” of what those virtues “mean for them”; and the *normative* level, where questions of the value of specific *hexeis* (virtues or vices) are settled by providing evidence of how they make actual people flourish or flounder.⁸

But there is more to virtue ethics than the naturalistic assumption. It comes with a whole repertoire of terms that are theoretically “thick”: loaded with philosophical and folk-psychological assumptions. As we see in the following two sections, this is precisely the reason why many psychologists will rebuff any advances to partake in virtue

discourses. One route to providing a focus for the new ecumenism will be to systematically unload (reinterpret or reconfigure) some of those main terms, in order to make them more palatable for mainstream social scientists. I shall briefly mention three examples of such endeavors here, if only in order to cast them aside as attempts to secure crossover work on the cheap.

The first example is of the praise bestowed upon Aristotelian virtue theory by the *enfant terrible* of moral psychology, Jonathan Haidt, who claims to love Aristotle's notions of "natural virtue," "habit," and "habituation," and who considers his own psychological offerings to bolster those concepts.⁹ A quick look at Haidt's understanding of Aristotelian virtue theory reveals, however, that he systematically misreads its main terms in order to inject into it his own brands of sentimentalism, nativism, and automatism.¹⁰ What we end up with is controversial psychological evidence underwriting a misbegotten Aristotelianism. The second example is of a recent attempt by social scientists Kesebir and Diener to provide empirical evidence for the predictors (most notably, for present purposes, virtue predictors) of eudaimonic well-being or flourishing. Misconceiving the virtues as potential causes, rather than constituents, of *eudaimonia*, they assume that evidence of successful predictions of subjective well-being will suffice, as "the two concepts are sufficiently close, and subjective well-being can reasonably be used as a proxy for eudaimonic well-being."¹¹ Their account glosses over so many important distinctions, and betrays such an inadequate grasp of the virtue-ethics landscape, that it can scarcely be taken seriously as a contribution to an ecumenical enterprise. The final example is of a philosopher, Lorraine Besser-Jones, who argues unapologetically for the need to "scale back" the traditional ambitions of Aristotelian virtue ethics, in order to make it fully naturalized and amenable to social scientific input.¹² Besser-Jones understands "virtue" in instrumentalist terms simply as a state of character that reliably and predictably enables us to act well, in the sense of satisfying innate human needs. She rejects the notion of an intrinsic motivation to engage in virtuous activity as "psychologically implausible," and she does not think that even highly developed moral agents can be expected to derive flow-like enjoyment from such activity, any more than from eating broccoli, although they will be strongly extrinsically motivated to engage in it.

I bite my tongue not to lash out at the three preceding accounts. In any case, such response would be superfluous to present purposes; what I am flagging here is simply that my interest in this chapter is in psychological virtue research that is conducted *without* an assumption of the need to reject, beforehand, the theoretical baggage offered by traditional virtue ethics and to revamp its basic terms. It must be said that something of a rosy picture has been emerging of late of the courtship between this (more theoretically stringent) sort of psychology and (Aristotelian) virtue ethics, with *positive psychology's* explicit aim to pursue "the social science equivalent of virtue ethics" typically being offered as a case in point.¹³ The standard narrative invoked is, then, of the historical "waxing and waning" and, at present, the "waxing again" of virtue research in psychology, with more and more psychologists (even "almost everyone today") wanting to revise the early twentieth-century obliteration of character-and-virtue terms from their discipline.¹⁴ According to this narrative, the exclusion of those terms

made the discipline “narrower and shallower”; hence, it stands in need of “conceptual enrichment”—and this is exactly what the courtship with contemporary virtue ethics provides.¹⁵ Conversely, engagement with actual social scientific evidence grounds and de-trivializes philosophical virtue ethics by transporting it away from mere armchair conjectures.¹⁶

My aim in this chapter is not so much to reject this happy-courtship narrative as to problematize some of its refrains. The marriage of virtue ethics and empirical psychology is not made in heaven, and their courtship is not free from tiffs and spats. For example, “autonomism” (aka “armchair traditionalism”) is still rife in academic moral philosophy, probably more common than “integrationism.”¹⁷ Any news of the death of virtue skepticism in psychology is also exaggerated and untimely. For instance, in my own favorite neck of the woods—applied virtue ethics as education for character—whose “symbolic capital” depends on the close alignment of public, philosophical, political, and psychological assumptions, the psychological connection arguably constitutes the weakest link. Thus, frequent doubts tend to exist in psychological circles about the very idea of character education, and many of those doubts reflect more serious misgivings about “the science” behind virtue theories and the idea of education for virtue. I have gone so far as calling this weakness “the elephant in the room” of character education.¹⁸

The aim in the following section is to bring the more general, underlying psychological misgivings to the fore. I, then, go on in section III to categorize the recent surge of interest in virtue within psychology by way of a taxonomy—hopefully illuminating, albeit slightly tongue-in-cheek—of four different levels of engagement with virtue constructs in the field. Section IV moves the spotlight to potential psychological inputs into conceptual understandings of virtue and to residual philosophical doubts about that ecumenical enterprise. I close in section V with further reflections on the current state of play and a prognosis of what the future may hold in store for “virtue from the perspective of psychology.”

II. PSYCHOLOGICAL MISGIVINGS ABOUT VIRTUE

What holds psychologists back from adopting a virtue-based research agenda? What turns them into virtue skeptics or virtue abnegators? Psychologists rarely write papers with titles such as “Why I am not into virtue.” When they consider a certain research agenda ruled out by their criteria of scientificity, they indicate that by quietly ignoring the agenda rather than by fulminating against it. My following distillation of ten common misgivings that psychologists (and often, by extension, other social scientists) harbor about virtue is, therefore, derived as much by picking up subtle cues in discussions with some of them as on a review of the relevant literatures. I try to gather objections from

different subfields within psychology, such as personality psychology and social psychology, although those do not always coincide and are sometimes at odds with one another. While I have tried to rebut or at least mitigate some of those objections in the past, space does not allow any serious critical engagement here. I simply present the following misgivings as ones that need to be responded to satisfactorily if virtue is to gain a significant foothold in psychology.

First is the *problem of normativity and adjudication*. This is the most common misgiving, and the one that requires the lengthiest elaboration, although its basic idea is simple and compelling: psychology is a science that trades in objectivity. Virtues, however, incorporate moral (as well as other normative) values, which are subjective and relative, and also entail prescriptions. Adopting a virtue-based agenda would turn psychologists into moralists and would rob them of scientific credibility, as they would blatantly be violating Hume's two famous laws: of the distinction between facts and values and the distinction between descriptions and prescriptions. To pile on the agony, conflicts between competing virtues (such as honesty versus considerateness) are common and stand, from a moral point of view, in need of *phronesis*-guided adjudication. Psychologists, however, cannot possibly become internally engaged in such adjudications (as distinct from viewing those from the outside) since that would demote them, for good, from their role as "disenchanted" scientists.¹⁹

The provenance of those misgivings is often told in the form of a—now familiar—narrative of how their recognition dawned on psychologists in the 1930s, when they assumed the mantle of Weber's *Wertfreiheit* (including moral anti-realism) agenda for all social science and, more specifically, when a clear distinction came to be made, post-Allport, between personality as "character devaluated" (a topic of respectable psychological inquiry) and character as "personality evaluated" (best left to moralists).²⁰ This distinction has persisted, and the majority of personality psychologists still cling to it, although repeated empirical surveys show that the criteria of individual difference that laypeople are interested in—when performing such mundane tasks as looking for the characteristics of the ideal partner in dating agencies—are moral character traits, such as honesty, rather than, say, the famous Big Five traits. Indeed, moral traits predominate in person perception and evaluation, although most psychologists do not want to touch them with a barge pole.²¹

The allure of the problem of normativity and adjudication, with its prohibition of value judgments in science, comes clearest to the fore in the theory of the group of people who have been most vocal in retrieving the language of virtue in psychology: *positive psychologists*. While claiming, on the one hand, to be pursuing the social-science equivalent of virtue ethics (see earlier), they appear, on the other hand, to be extremely embarrassed and apologetic about their agenda—qualifying it in various ways.²² Thus, instead of abandoning moral anti-realism explicitly—for example, by arguing that value judgments describe the world of evaluation rather than evaluating the world of description—they sit on the fence with regard to moral realism, by offering their account of the value of virtues in terms of mere empirical generalizations; and they refuse to

tamper in the slightest with Hume's is–ought distinction, a distinction they see as ruling out any psychological involvement in adjudication debates.²³

However attracted they are by the ubiquity of real-life virtue discourses, which seem to offer objective rather than merely subjective or relative takes on the virtues, positive psychologists share with their less virtue-oriented colleagues the fear of wholly abandoning Hume's fact–value distinction. After giving this fear some thought, it seems to me that the sticking point must be the implicit assumption that the fact–value distinction and the is–ought distinction entail each other, so that by abandoning the former one is also forced to abandon the latter.²⁴ The missing but implicit premise in this argument appears to be *motivational internalism*: the thesis that all moral judgments conceptually entail motivation and hence prescription. This is a radical—albeit a popular—thesis in moral philosophy; but we have good reason to assume that Aristotle did not believe in it and that committed contemporary virtue ethicists need not either.²⁵ One can, for example, pass factual judgments about the goodness of honesty without intrinsically implying “Be honest!” just as one can pass factual judgments about the badness of smoking without intrinsically implying “Do not smoke!” Psychologists avail themselves all the time of judgments about good or bad psychological health without worrying that, thereby, they have turned themselves into prescriptivists. Although this is rarely made explicit, they must be assuming a thesis about the *uniqueness of moral language* that somehow rules out the possibility of the sort of motivationally externalist use of moral judgments that is considered in order for health judgments.

The uniqueness thesis may come in different forms, but a strong, *meta*-version of it is often seen in social scientific writings about morality. According to this version, psychologists who become internally engaged in virtue research—directly or obliquely challenging the fact–value distinction—are not so much guilty of a specific error of judgment as they are of committing a serious category mistake, by misidentifying the very “nature of morality” and moral language. The function of morality is *not* to determine truth, for example about good or bad character traits or flourishing lives, but rather to prescribe rules of behavior, guarded by sanctions. Morality is thus a system of social control where the rules and sanctions “wear the trousers (i.e. that carry the meaning).”²⁶ On this understanding, any serious psychological attempt to overcome the problem of normativity and adjudication involves succumbing to an anti-scientific teleological impulse. Rules are not true or false; and pontificating about good or bad moral precepts is not psychology.

Second is the *problem of intrinsic worth*. Essential to Aristotle's own, and any Aristotelian, virtue ethics is the idea that virtues are intrinsically valuable, irrespective of, or at least in addition to, their extrinsic benefits.²⁷ This idea is typically conveyed by specifying the virtues as a defining aspect of human flourishing—indicating that they are both *irreplaceable* by anything else and *objectively valuable*. It must be said that the point is lost on most psychologists; they simply do not get it. Their own “crier in the desert,” Blaine Fowers, sees instrumentalism (couched in the common currency of subjective desire) as an article of faith in most of psychology—one that is considered beyond

scrutiny—and he faults this “disguised ideology” for a lot of what is ethically wrong with the discipline as it is currently practiced.²⁸

Positive psychology seemed to be breaking with this tradition when Peterson and Seligman posited, as one of their criteria of character strength, that it be “morally valued in its own right, even in the absence of obvious beneficial outcomes.”²⁹ Yet, apparently oblivious to this assumption, most of positive psychology is conducted under the guidance of business-as-usual instrumentalism. For instance, Barbara Fredrickson treats gratitude simply as a positive emotion that is valuable insofar as it “broadens and builds” personal resources.³⁰ This means that gratitude is, in principle, replaceable by any other means that happens to be more useful for this instrumental task—whereas gratitude *qua* quasi-Aristotelian virtue, as presumably understood by Peterson and Seligman, would be an irreplaceable part of the flourishing life.³¹ It goes without saying that instrumentalism is also rampant in contemporary theories of character education, where “character virtues” are often understood simply as any performance traits that contribute to improved school attainment.³²

Third is the *problem of situationism*. While the idea that human agents are swayed by the force of situational factors, rather than robust character traits, never achieved the same cult status in psychology as in philosophy—and even seems to have gone into something of a remission there—many psychologists (especially social psychologists) will consider virtue ethicists to be too cavalier about situationist finding.³³ Notably, Aristotelian “dispositionists” have developed a standard and much rehearsed set of objections to situationism.³⁴ The most famous of those is the *anti-behavioristic objection*, according to which the mainstay of moral character does not lie in behavioral reactions—which may be panic-ridden and “out of character,” especially if agents are placed in unfamiliar situations where experience-derived scripts do not kick in—but rather in (often retrospective) emotional reactions. In general, virtue is not supposed to be about correct behavior exclusively, or even essentially, but a multifactored schema of perception, cognition, motivation, and reason-responsive emotion. While psychologists may acknowledge this objection, they will be quick to point out that the proposed stability and robustness of those additional factors (beyond behavior) then needs to be established through empirical research—a request that philosophers have typically spurned.

Another tack taken by philosophers is to argue that much of the situationist debate is conducted at cross-purposes, as the opposing camps simply operate with different sets of conceptual understandings of the very notion of a “situation.” So, whereas situationists focus on situations that are broad, passive, extraordinary, and subject to strong contextual pressures, dispositionists confine their attention to situations that are narrow, active, ordinary, and subject to weak pressures.³⁵ Some psychologists have contributed to this conceptual discourse; yet the mainstream view in psychological circles is to be skeptical of any “solutions” to psychological quandaries that are meant to rely on mere conceptual maneuvers.³⁶

Fourth is the problem of *sentimentalism*. I use “sentimentalism” here as an umbrella term for a range of interrelated theories that Jonathan Haidt has chosen to call “the new

synthesis” in moral psychology: theories marrying hard sentimentalist ontology with nativism, social intuitionism, and modularism.³⁷ The “new synthesis” draws, *inter alia*, upon state-of-the-art neuroscientific evidence, purported to show that in moral judgment, “intuition comes first, strategic reasoning second.”³⁸ Findings about how our emotion-and-intuition-controlled “dog” simply wags its rational “tail” *ex post facto* are meant to demonstrate that the typical virtue-ethics view of the reflective and rational expression and development of moral traits is essentially misguided.³⁹ That said, quite a lot of the critique by Haidt and his colleagues of hard rationalist moralities will be music to the ears of Aristotelian virtue ethicists. After all, no other moral theory is as sensitive to the emotional construction of selfhood and morality. Yet virtue ethicists will consider the pendulum in this new sentimentalism to have swung too far away from reason, and they will in the end take no less serious an objection to Haidt than they do to Kant, seeing the former as representing the deficiency but the latter the excess of the golden mean of “soft” (emotion-imbued) rationalism.⁴⁰ But the sentimentalists remain unfazed, arguing—with some reason, it seems—that it is then incumbent on virtue ethicists to offer alternative explanations of the empirical findings in question. Implicit in this demand is also the charge that Aristotelian virtue ethics is seriously out of touch by not taking account of current neuroscientific research. The great scientist Aristotle would probably be dividing his time between the philosophical armchair and the MRI lab if he were alive today, but it is true that not many current virtue ethicists seem to share Aristotle’s hard naturalist willingness to get his hands dirty.⁴¹

Fifth is the *problem of predictivism*. Virtue ethicists typically obsess with identifying the precise conceptual conditions of individual virtues and how they fit into specific spheres of human experience; consider, for example, Roberts’s careful work on the virtue of gratitude.⁴² Psychologists typically find this exclusive obsession with conceptual issues quirky or, at best, mildly amusing. What they will be looking for are broad dimensions of temperament that can offer “incremental validity” over and beyond the Big Five traits. For example, Wood, Maltby, Stewart, and Joseph conceptualize gratitude as a broad, unitary personality trait involving “a life orientation towards noticing and appreciating the positive in the world.”⁴³ There is no concern here with identifying features that are conceptually necessary for ascriptions of gratitude to be fitting (as distinct from other putative emotional virtues such as appreciation), nor with grounding this specification rigorously either in the judgments of the “many” or the “wise.” What matters most for them is that this broad “new” trait seems to offer validity beyond any of the Big Five traits in predicting significant life outcomes such as subjective well-being. This predictivism, which animates much of social science, is entirely foreign to the mindset of most philosophers and constitutes a major barrier to cross-disciplinary understandings and collaborations.

Sixth is the *problem of language*. In addition to previously explained concerns about the value-ladenness of virtue talk, many psychologists worry that the concepts of “moral character” and (especially) “virtue” are not proper objects of scientific study in modernity, either because they have fallen largely out of everyday use, or because they carry unfortunate connotations in laypeople’s current language (as religious, conservative,

old-fashioned, Victorian, etc.). The empirical evidence here seems to be mixed. While some sources record a decline in the use of virtue concepts in popular texts of late, other sources indicate that ordinary people, even children, have no difficulties in relating to the language of the virtues in much the same way that philosophers would—and without any of the anticipated biases.⁴⁴ However, those conflicting findings aside, it must be said that philosophers are in general much more sanguine than psychologists are of the possibility of retrieving and making salient to ordinary language-users philosophical content, embodied in classic language, that may have become dissipated in everyday parlance.

Seventh is the *problem of prosociality*. When psychologists discuss morality, they commonly do so in terms of “prosociality”—a term rarely used by moral philosophers in general or virtue ethicists in particular.⁴⁵ Further, when psychologists think of prosocial traits, it seems to me that what first springs to their mind are the attributes of empathy and sympathy, which undisputedly benefit other persons and, arguably, society at large. Virtue ethicists typically have a much more nuanced view of the morally well-rounded life: namely, a life with a proper admixture of virtues. Among the virtues that they are likely to foreground are some that seem to have very scant connections to “prosociality,” or may even appear inimical to it. Examples of the former sort of virtues are the self-regarding ones such as pride. Examples of the latter are desert-based virtues such as Aristotle’s “satisfied indignation”: the virtuous pleasure at another person’s deserved bad fortune.⁴⁶ Most psychologists will fail to distinguish between this presumed “virtue” and simple *Schadenfreude*, which can hardly count as “prosocial.” I mention this here as a special problem for psychologists in adopting a virtue-based perspective, for although “prosociality” is not a word that falls easily from the lips of utilitarians and Kantians either, the problem is compounded in virtue ethics, which defines “morality” in terms of flourishing—and can easily make do without not only the word “prosocial,” but also the word “moral,” which was not part of Aristotle’s vocabulary.

Eight is the problem of *anti-self-realism*. Paragons of virtue in Aristotle’s system are not only “really worthy” of great things; they also “think” themselves worthy of them.⁴⁷ In psychological jargon, good character is thus not only about “selfhood” but also “self-concept” or “self-identity”: the beliefs we harbor about our “selves” and the characteristics we attribute to them. Yet in virtue ethics, the emphasis has remained firmly on character *qua* actual moral selfhood. This jars, however, with much of contemporary social psychology, which is typically anti-self-realist—namely, it rejects the ontological existence of any underlying, actual self beneath all the self-attributions, or at least deems this putative self to be epistemologically impenetrable.⁴⁸ Notably, this “cult of identity” in social psychology distinguishes itself as markedly from the “cult of personality” in personality psychology, as it does from the “cult of character” in virtue ethics. One might presume that focusing exclusively on (socially constructed) self-identity rather than any deep underlying structures would at least facilitate efforts at character education. That is not the case, however, as social psychologists claim to have discovered a certain need people have for self-confirmations of existing identities—a need that typically trumps the need for self-enhancements.⁴⁹ Moreover, even if self-concept can be enhanced (e.g., by boosting self-esteem), such interventions can be more psychosocially hazardous

than leaving well enough alone.⁵⁰ In general, social psychologists will question virtue ethicists' "naïve self-realism" and their optimistic view about the transparency of the self and its amenability to change.⁵¹

Ninth is the *problem of measurement*. While it is perhaps not a problem for pure theorists in virtue ethics that the constructs of "virtue" and "character" are difficult to measure, this problem is an acute one for applied virtue ethics, such as character education in schools, as proposed interventions in practical settings will not be taken seriously, either by social scientists or policymakers, if no methods exist to measure impact. It must be admitted that efforts at measurements in this area have so far been either nonexistent, relying instead on anecdotal evidence, or lame, relying on proxies for character such as moral reasoning skills, mere behavioral change, or self-concept development, none of which amounts, however, to exploring what virtue ethicists themselves understand by the cultivation of character. A recent large conference on this problem revealed the disarray and, to some extent, the despair in the field.⁵² Many psychologists will consider the sad state of character measurement as a reason for sidestepping the field altogether.⁵³ Others react differently, either suggesting that mere self-reports can after all do the trick, or embarking on a journey to help character educationists find better ways to measure what they want to measure.⁵⁴

Tenth is the *problem of education*.⁵⁵ This problem has both a theoretical and a practical side. The theoretical side of it is that while contemporary accounts still rely heavily on educational methods proposed by Aristotle, his descriptions of those methods are neither sufficiently detailed nor fully coherent internally.⁵⁶ Moreover, as psychologists will be quick to point out, the Aristotelian staples have rarely been brought up to date in light of current empirical findings. The practical side is closely related to the previously noted problem of measurement: character educationists have been successful in demonstrating the effectiveness of interventions to enhance (a) "virtue literacy" (cognitive understanding of virtues and ability to apply them to new, relevant contexts), and interventions to improve (b) virtuous (looking) behavior.⁵⁷ However, to demonstrate that an improvement in real virtue (on a virtue ethical understanding) has taken place, it needs to be shown not only that (a) and (b) co-occur but also that (a) causes (b). Failure to show that so far will—not unreasonably—be seen as a chink in the armor of applied virtue ethics by many psychologists.⁵⁸ Another large group of psychologists—behaviorists and quasi-behaviorists—will take a different tack, however, by simply questioning what all this fuss concerning virtue and causality is about if the interventions really make kids behave better.

III. RETRIEVALS OF VIRTUE IN PSYCHOLOGY: A TAXONOMY

As I have now paid due respect to the anti-virtue catechisms—misgivings in psychology that bespeak various sorts of skepticism about incorporating virtue in psychological

research—it is time to turn to what is often referred to as the *retrieval*, or at any rate the recent *surge of interest*, in virtue within the discipline. While it is true that a crowd of psychologists seems to have gathered around the construct of virtue of late, a crowd is not company, at least not when it is as divided as the one in question here. My doubts that a major retrieval of virtue is underway in psychology—as distinct from scattered, individual exercises in retrieval—will be expressed in the following by dint of a light-hearted taxonomy. To cut a long story short, from what I can see, the group of current psychologists who have made efforts to take on board virtue-and-character-related insights can be divided into four broad camps—of what I call the “dabblers,” the “reconceptualizers,” the “conciliators,” and the “mavericks.” None of those is, however, front of house or mainstream in contemporary academic psychology, and of the four, only the “mavericks” can be counted as rabid converts to the cause.

Characterizing the *dabblers* is that they have identified a niche for virtue within mainstream psychology but—erroneously supposing their hands to be clean of philosophy—have done so without engaging with the concept in a theoretically profound way. I see positive psychologists as the prototypical dabblers. With a few individual exceptions within the movement, its grasp of virtue theory is perfunctory; and it is not clear how the ingredients of Aristotelian virtue and “flow” are meant to blend with Stoic resiliency, Buddhist mindfulness, and hedonist pleasure into a uniform soup. Hence, virtue ethicists need a long spoon to sup with positive psychologists.⁵⁹ On a more positive note, there is no denying that positive psychologists have stuck their necks out in spearheading recent moves to “reclaim the study of character and virtue as legitimate topics of psychological inquiry”; and there is much to admire in Peterson and Seligman’s epoch-making 2004 work, not least its consistent focus on virtues as “the bedrock of the human condition.”⁶⁰ The authors do argue skillfully throughout, and with considerable chutzpah, that bringing virtue into the fold of psychology provides it with “richer psychological content and greater explanatory power.”⁶¹ Their empirical research into the universality of common virtues and character strengths also does much to rebut the widespread cultural relativism about virtues in psychological circles, crystallized in Kohlberg’s famous dismissal of any “bag of virtues” theories.⁶² Yet there still exists in their work the fatal and unfounded prejudice that fully relinquishing Hume’s fact-value distinction will mean abandoning his is–ought distinction (see previous section), thus turning psychology into prescriptive moralism. They have also failed to grasp the Aristotelian point that offering a theory of virtue education without a virtue adjudicator (such as *phronesis*) is doomed to be a self-defeating, futile endeavor.⁶³

Furthermore, although Peterson and Seligman’s work seems to indicate an understanding of the intrinsic value of virtues in a flourishing life, most of their fellow positive psychologists still understand virtue exclusively in instrumentalist terms, as already noted. This disharmony within the movement will be put to a serious test in the launch of a large international initiative on “positive education” (the educational incarnation of positive psychology). The current mission statement of positive education strikes a delicate balance between a non-instrumentalist flourishing agenda and an instrumentalist efficiency-and-positivity one.⁶⁴ Future developments of positive education will decide

whether positive psychologists will want to advance from, or remain at, the level of dabblers in virtue.

The *reconceptualizers* engage with virtue concepts in more theoretically nuanced ways than the dabblers, adopting Aristotelian insights and making a sustained attempt to disabuse their colleagues of misunderstandings. They also explain and justify the role of character *qua* “personality evaluated” on psychological agendas. However, the reconceptualizers have typically either not (yet) teased out the practical implications of their theoretical retrievals, or they are just beginning to subject their notions to empirical scrutiny. A research group at Wake Forest University, comprising William Fleeson, R. Michael Furr, Eranda Jayawickreme, and others, represents typical reconceptualizing. In an enlightening overview article, they chart the advantages that a character-based approach can bring to the study of moral behavior, and they propose an ambitious research agenda, on which psychologists and philosophers could collaborate.⁶⁵ In another article, they make practical use of their budding reconceptualizations through a novel contribution to the situationism debate—by characterizing virtue traits as “density distributions of personality states.”⁶⁶ As opposed to the dabblers, the reconceptualizers are distinctly “upwardly mobile” with regard to their understanding and application of virtue constructs.

The *conciliators* have gone further down the line of making practical use of virtue ethical insights. However, they typically try to combine those with other paradigms through intrepid fusions or elaborate syntheses. Darcia Narvaez and Dan Lapsley count as prototypical conciliators. While suggesting that academic fence-mending may sometimes be more reasonable than fence-crossing—and preferring “psychologized morality” to “moralized psychology—they have made significant strides in fusing virtue ethical insights with neo-Kohlbergianism, as well as with recent moral-identity theories, into a multifaceted social-cognitive approach to personality.⁶⁷ Moral character is then understood in terms of the (chronic) accessibility of moral schemas for social information processing; and on this understanding, such schemas (rather than traits) carry our dispositions.⁶⁸ Of the two authors, Narvaez seems to be the even greater conciliator, as she also draws on evolutionary theory to identify basic ethical orientations (issuing in what she calls Triune Ethics Theory) and, more recently, she has added a version of moral primitivism, based on early-life neurobiology, to the pack.⁶⁹ Difficult as it is to keep up with Narvaez’s ever-expanding syntheses, the virtue elements continue to be seen as complementary “add-ons” in this enterprise, rather than its “core”; hence, it is not apt to designate it as a full retrieval of virtue.

Two other recent conciliatory efforts deserve a mention here. Damon and Colby continue to expand their impressive research agenda on moral exemplarity, drawing on classic, virtue-ethics sources no less than recent work on moral identity and their own empirical findings.⁷⁰ Moreover, in a surprising twist, proponents of Self-Determination Theory (SDT)—a powerful and widely applied model of human well-being—have recently teamed up with an Aristotelian educational philosopher, Randall Curren, to strengthen the Aristotelian elements in SDT research, thus defying the challenge that this model has typically been considered non-virtue-relevant and even amoral.⁷¹

All these conciliatory efforts can be seen as genuine exercises in virtue retrieval. Yet only in the case of the *mavericks* will the terminology of “full retrieval” be credible. The mavericks have disposed of the fact–value distinction altogether and argue that in order to make sense of people’s actual psychology, we need to apply an Aristotelian conceptual repertoire to it. Blaine Fowers is the maverick par excellence, and his 2005 book, *Virtue and Psychology*, must count as the unofficial bible of virtue-based psychology. At once tough-minded and invigorating, Fowers is more than just conversant in virtue; he accommodates it explicitly into his very understanding of what psychology *is* (or rather *should be*) about, and also suggests an essential role for the virtues in the professional ethics and education of psychological practitioners.⁷² Most significant, he is actively engaged in addressing, one by one, the remaining misgivings in psychology about virtue that I reviewed in the previous section; and in his latest contribution, he attempts to square his virtue-based psychology with the latest research in evolutionary psychology and neuroscience.⁷³ While perhaps slightly more optimistic than I am about the Sesame of academic psychology opening up to virtue talk, he does rue that the current “psychological literatures on the topics of virtue and the good life are extremely fragmented.”⁷⁴

Another notable maverick is Barry Schwartz, who has done more than anyone else to correct positive psychological misapprehensions about the role of *phronesis* as an adjudicating meta-virtue, and to explain how an understanding of this role is compatible with our state-of-the-art knowledge about the working of the nervous system.⁷⁵ At the extreme end of the scale is, then, Svend Brinkmann, who, in spelling out his bold claim that psychology “is a moral science and psychological phenomena are moral phenomena,” disposes not only with the fact–value distinction but also with the is–ought distinction—a daring if perhaps an overly ambitious move.⁷⁶ Only in the case of these mavericks can we profitably speak of the full alignment of the elements that make up a comprehensively virtue-sensitive psychology. However, as the mavericks only constitute a small minority of *outliers* and *gatecrashers* in today’s psychology, it is premature to consider them to have turned the tide of the mainstream or, indeed, to have assuaged the worries that I delineated in the previous section.

IV. SPECIFYING VIRTUE

CONCEPTS: INTEGRATORS VERSUS TRADITIONALISTS

I have so far concentrated on controversies regarding the role of psychology in substantive debates about virtue. There is another level, however, where many theorists see a role for psychology, namely in helping identify the meaning of virtue terms. Received wisdom has it that psychologists and philosophers go about specifying the “grammar” or conceptual contours of open-textured, naturalistic concepts—for example, concepts

designing virtues such as gratitude—in radically different ways.⁷⁷ While philosophers rely on their own armchair intuitions about the nature and scope of such concepts, psychologists aim at specifications that are social scientific “all the way down” to the conceptual common ground, thus eliciting the views of “the many,” rather than just “the wise,” about what concepts really mean.

We need to resist having such rigid stereotypes foisted upon us, however, as a close examination of actual conceptual methodologies reveals that psychologists are no less prone than philosophers to relying on their own intuitions or *argumentum-ad-verecundiam* nods to supposed authorities in the field.⁷⁸ To be sure, a distinction can be made between “armchair traditionalists” and “integrators” in conceptual studies, but that distinction (a) is not clear-cut but exists on a sliding scale, and (b) cuts across the psychology–philosophy divide, although the firmest digging-in of theoretical heels against integrationism usually comes from philosophers.⁷⁹ Psychologists are in general more likely to find “mere” conceptual controversies too trivial to enter into; hence the standard philosophical complaint about psychology as a field of “conceptual sloppiness” where language has gone “on holiday.”⁸⁰

The *integrators* will typically ground their approach in evidential naturalism, according to which eliciting laypeople’s beliefs about a given concept—say, gratitude—constitutes the natural “first word” of teasing out the grammar of the concept, if not necessarily the “last word,” as people may be conceptually confused and need (re)education.⁸¹ This qualification will be particularly apt in the case of children, where an education toward “literacy” in a virtue such as gratitude will involve teaching them the proper application of the relevant virtue term.⁸² If, however, say 80% of people disagree in the end with a given philosophical elucidation of a concept, this creates a presumption *against* that elucidation; it becomes incumbent on the philosopher to provide a strong justification for disrespecting ordinary language.⁸³ This is what it means to take laypeople’s beliefs as “the first word,” for if the philosopher subsequently wants to use the given specification to make normative claims about the given virtue—in order to sway people one way or another—those claims will miss the mark if the virtue term means something radically different to the public than to the philosopher. Notably, many psychologists who either resent or remain agnostic about psychology’s role in normative debates about virtues will be sympathetic to psychology’s role in helping explore people’s conceptual understandings of virtue terms—and they may even be open to ecumenical collaborations with philosophers in this area.⁸⁴ They will be wary, however, of philosophers assuming the role of “amateur experimentalists”—imitating badly what psychologists can do well.⁸⁵

As already noted, although many psychologists covertly assume the position of *armchair traditionalism* in conceptual studies, only philosophers typically argue for it overtly.⁸⁶ What they will point out is that conceptual analysis is philosophers’ traditional stock in trade—and since it has worked pretty well in the past, philosophical cobblers had better stick to their last. This does not mean fighting shy altogether of empirical evidence about actual concept use, but rather accepting that such evidence can only be of *marginal* relevance. The main reason is that performance errors are common in

laypeople's use of terms. For example, "loose talk" is ubiquitous, where people apply concepts to referents that fulfill some (perhaps subsidiary) criteria of proper application but lack crucial necessary features. What the philosopher is interested in, however, is proper and coherent concept use; hence the need to "trim the ragged edges" of ordinary use. On this view, the likelihood that any social scientific surveys of language use provide useful insights into virtue concepts is low. As Kauppinen puts it, "The odds are that either the outcome is easily anticipated from the armchair, or one or another distorting factor intervenes to produce results that merit no weight in conceptual analysis."⁸⁷

As suggested earlier, armchair traditionalism and integrationism are extreme ends of a spectrum. Thus, Robert C. Roberts has amended his elucidation of the conceptual contours of gratitude slightly in light of empirical evidence, showing that only 1%–2% of people, young or old, subscribe to the view that a proper application of the term "gratitude" requires the benefactor to have gone above and beyond the call of duty in creating a benefit for the beneficiary.⁸⁸ However, although now having relaxed his previous "supererogation condition" on gratitude, Roberts remains within the camp of traditionalism through his clear separation of philosophical and empirical considerations in the field of conceptual studies.

All in all, while the study of virtue concepts is an area where psychological and philosophical research could potentially run in beneficial adjustments to one another, it is still moot to what extent such collaborations will materialize in years to come and will prove useful.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The theoretical case for academic ecumenism between psychology and philosophy in researching virtue is strong. It is difficult to see how philosophical musings that are not compatible with social scientific evidence can have real-world traction, especially in applied areas of virtue ethics, such as character education. It is also difficult to see how psychological research into laypeople's beliefs or understandings of virtue can make do without taking into account the conceptual and normative work that philosophers, dating back to the ancient Greeks, have conducted on virtue—work that often informs those very beliefs and understandings, tacitly or explicitly. Moreover, as laypeople understand individual differences substantially in terms of character-and-virtue differences, it seems to go against the very grain of a social scientific mindset to ignore this understanding.

Interdisciplinarity is an ideal to which lip service is commonly paid nowadays; yet it is notoriously hard to achieve. I have argued in this chapter that despite honorable efforts from both sides, it is still too early to say whether interdisciplinary cooperations between psychologists and philosophers in the area of virtue are edging closer to what could be truly called a collapse of an academic fence. At any rate, it is clear that, just as Valerie Tiberius has argued in the case of objective accounts of well-being, virtue-based

accounts of personality are still on the fringes of psychological work.⁸⁹ Criers in the desert, such as Blaine Fowers, are being swamped by more domineering voices; recall section III. Section II indicated that mainstream psychologists will need to abandon a number of long-held convictions for a full retrieval of virtue to emerge—as virtue constructs cannot be grafted onto alien stems. Moreover, section IV reminded us that skepticism about ecumenism in this area is not limited to psychologists; many philosophers fear that they would be spreading their energies too thin, or even importing foreign elements to their theorizing, if they failed to keep a secure distance from raw empirical evidence about how people use virtue terms. Questions of possible cooperations are also not only *academic* questions; they relate to *power relations* between individuals and disciplines. Even the essentially ecumenically minded psychologists Lapsley and Narvaez find it hard to conceptualize such cooperations in terms that do not reflect potential power conflicts between “psychologized morality” and “moralized psychology.”⁹⁰

While not the most motivated critic of “integrators” and “mavericks,” I have tried in this chapter to produce as even-handed a reality check as possible. Mitigating the somewhat pessimistic conclusions that I may seem to have reached must be the historical point that a much-hoped-for “new ecumenism” between psychology and philosophy on virtue would be anything but “new.” Rather, it would resume a thread from the Enlightenment and pre-Enlightenment past when most, if not all, moral philosophers considered it obvious that their philosophy should be called before the tribunal of psychology, which at that time, of course, was still pursued as part of philosophy. It was not so much that psychology abandoned philosophy, then, as the other way around: moral philosophers (especially Kantians) pulled up the drawbridge on empirical evidence. Subsequently, they found themselves in the peculiar position of having surrounded themselves by a moat drained of water.⁹¹ Some of them—virtue ethicists in particular—have now dared to cross this moat again, but the question remains whether psychologists are ready to meet them halfway, or if they continue to consider it more sensible to keep a safe distance, following the principle that good fences make good neighbors.⁹²

NOTES

1. Cf. David Carr’s contribution to this volume (Chapter 32).
2. See K. Kristjánsson, *The Self and Its Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), chap. 3.
3. For an overview, see, e.g., J. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); K. Kristjánsson, *Aristotelian Character Education* (London: Routledge, 2015), chap. 1.
4. O. Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 32. See, e.g., D. Lapsley and D. Narvaez, “‘Psychologized Morality’ and Its Discontents, or, Do Good Fences Make Good Neighbours?” in *Getting Involved: Global Citizenship Development and Sources of Moral Value*, edited by F. Oser and W. Veugelers (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2008), 279–292.
5. G. E. M. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” *Philosophy* 33(1) (1958): 1–19.

6. L. Besser-Jones, *Eudaimonic Ethics: The Philosophy and Psychology of Living Well* (London: Routledge, 2014), 5.
7. See, e.g., M. Ferkany and B. Creed, "Intellectualist Aristotelian Character Education: An Outline and Assessment," *Educational Theory* 64(6) (2014): 567–587, esp. 571.
8. See, e.g., L. Gulliford, "Psychology's Contribution to Ethics: Two Case Studies," in *Dual Process Theories in Moral Psychology: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Theoretical, Empirical, and Practical Considerations*, edited by C. Brand (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2015), 139–158.
9. See J. Haidt and C. Joseph, "Intuitive Ethics: How Innately Prepared Intuitions Generate Culturally Variable Virtues," *Daedalus* 133(4) (2004): 55–66, esp. 61–62; J. Haidt, "Out Take from *The Righteous Mind: Virtue Ethics*" (2012), <http://righteousmind.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Righteous-Mind-outtake.virtue.ethics.pdf>.
10. For a critique, see K. Kristjánsson, "The 'New Synthesis in Moral Psychology' versus Aristotelianism: Content and Consequences," in *Dual-Process Theories in Moral Psychology: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Theoretical, Empirical, and Practical Considerations*, edited by C. Brand (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2015), 249–270.
11. P. Kesebir and E. Diener, "A Virtuous Cycle: The Relationship between Happiness and Virtue," in *The Philosophy and Psychology of Character and Happiness*, edited by N. E. Snow and F. V. Trivigno (London: Routledge, 2014), 287–305, 288.
12. Besser-Jones, *Eudaimonic Ethics*, 27.
13. C. Peterson and M. E. P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 89.
14. Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 5. See B. J. Fowers, "Placing Virtue and the Human Good in Psychology," *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* 32(1) (2012): 1–9, 4.
15. B. J. Fowers, *Virtue and Psychology: Pursuing Excellence in Ordinary Practices* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2005), 3–4.
16. See, e.g., A. Higgins and A. Dyschkant, "Interdisciplinary Collaborations in Philosophy," *Metaphilosophy* 45(4) (2014): 372–398. My discussion in this chapter is almost entirely confined to social scientific evidence from *psychology*; a corollary chapter could be written, however, about the alleged retrieval of virtue in sociology; cf. A. Sayer, *Why Things Matter to People: Social Science, Values and Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
17. See, e.g., A. Kauppinen, "Ethics and Empirical Psychology: Critical Remarks to Empirically Informed Ethics," in *Empirically Informed Ethics: Morality between Facts and Norms*, edited by M. Christen (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 279–305.
18. Kristjánsson, *Aristotelian Character Education*, chap. 8.
19. For a clear statement of this position, see, e.g., H. H. Kendler, "Psychology and Ethics: Interactions and Conflicts," *Philosophical Psychology* 15(4) (2002): 489–508.
20. G. W. Allport, *Personality: A Psychological Interpretation* (New York: Holt, 1937), 52. For the story of this sea change, see, e.g., K. Kristjánsson, *Virtues and Vices in Positive Psychology: A Philosophical Critique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), chap. 3.
21. G. P. Goodwin, J. Piazza, and P. Rozin, "Moral Character Predominates in Person Perception and Evaluation," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 106(1) (2014): 148–168; cf. Kristjánsson, *Virtues and Vices*, chap. 3.
22. As Peterson and Seligman freely acknowledge, they constantly looked over their shoulders, "fearing that we would be criticized as politically incorrect or insensitive," *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 58.

23. This is the position taken in J. Kovesi's classic, *Moral Notions* (London: Routledge, 1971). See esp. M. E. P. Seligman, *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment* (New York: Free Press, 2002); and Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*. For a critique, see Kristjánsson, *Virtues and Vices*, chap. 2.
24. See Kristjánsson, *Virtues and Vices*, chap. 4–5.
25. See Kristjánsson, *Virtues and Vices*, chap. 5. For the opposite view, see C. Strandberg, "Aristotle's Internalism in the *Nicomachean Ethics*," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 34(1) (2000): 71–87.
26. See, e.g., M. L. Fein, "Social Science and Morality: An Empirical Analysis," *Society* 51(5) (2014): 452–463.
27. Notably, one need not subscribe to any form of virtue ethics, narrowly understood, to grasp the idea of the intrinsic value of the virtues; this was, for example, the conception of the utilitarian John Stuart Mill; see J. Driver, "Mill, Moral Sentimentalism, and the Cultivation of Virtue," in *Cultivating Virtue: Perspectives from Philosophy, Theology, and Psychology*, edited by N. E. Snow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 49–64.
28. B. J. Fowers, "Instrumentalism and Psychology: Beyond Using and Being Used," *Theory and Psychology* 20(1) (2010): 102–124.
29. Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 19.
30. B. Fredrickson, "Gratitude, Like Other Positive Emotions, Broadens and Builds," in *The Psychology of Gratitude*, edited by R. A. Emmons and M. E. McCullough (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 145–166.
31. Even if Aristotle himself did not acknowledge gratitude as a virtue (a contested issue), Aristotelians can. See K. Kristjánsson, "An Aristotelian Virtue of Gratitude," *Topoi* 34(2) (2015): 499–511.
32. See, e.g., P. Tough, *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character* (London: Random House, 2013). For a critique, see Kristjánsson, *Aristotelian Character Education*, chap. 1. Cf. also Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, *Framework for Character Education in Schools*, <http://jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/other-centre-papers/Framework.pdf>.
33. On this remission, drawing on W. Mischel and Y. Shoda, "A Cognitive–Affective System Theory of Personality: Reconceptualizing Situations, Dispositions, Dynamics, and Invariance in Personality Structure," *Psychological Review* 102(2) (1995): 246–268, see E. Jayawickreme, P. Meindl, E. G. Helzer, R. M. Furr, and W. Fleeson, "Virtuous States and Virtuous Traits: How the Empirical Evidence Regarding the Existence of Broad Traits Saves Virtue Ethics from the Situationist Critique," *Theory and Research in Education* 12(3) (2014): 283–308; G. T. Lefevor, B. J. Fowers, S. Ahn, L. Cohen, and S. Lang, "On the Necessity and Sufficiency of Situational Influences on Helping Behavior: A Meta-Analysis," manuscript in preparation. For a philosophical elaboration, see N. E. Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory* (London: Routledge, 2010). See, e.g., J. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and, even more radically, G. Harman, "No Character or Personality," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 13(1) (2003): 87–94.
34. See Kristjánsson, *The Self and Its Emotions*, chap. 6.
35. See Kristjánsson, *Virtues and Vices*, chap. 6.
36. See, e.g., Y. Yang, Y., S. J. Read, and L. C. Miller, "The Concept of Situations," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 3(6) (2009): 1018–1037; H. T. Reis, "Reinvigorating the

- Concept of Situation in Social Psychology," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 12(4) (2008): 311–329.
37. J. Haidt, "The New Synthesis in Moral Psychology," *Science* 316 (May 18) (2007): 998–1002.
 38. J. Haidt, "Moral Psychology for the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of Moral Education* 42(3) (2013): 281–297, 286.
 39. J. Haidt, "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment," *Psychological Review* 108(4) (2001): 814–834.
 40. See Kristjánsson, "The New Synthesis."
 41. Yet see O. Flanagan and R. A. Williams, "What Does the Modularity of Morals Have to Do with Ethics? Four Moral Sprouts Plus or Minus a Few," *Topics in Cognitive Science* 2(3) (2010): 430–453.
 42. R. C. Roberts, "The Blessings of Gratitude: A Conceptual Analysis," in *The Psychology of Gratitude*, edited by R. A. Emmons and M. E. McCullough (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 58–78.
 43. A. M. Wood, J. Maltby, N. Stewart, and S. Joseph, "Conceptualizing Gratitude and Appreciation as a Unitary Personality Trait," *Personality and Individual Differences* 44(7) (2008): 621–632.
 44. See, e.g., P. Kesebir and S. Kesebir, "The Cultural Salience of Moral Character and Virtue Declined in Twentieth Century America," *Journal of Positive Psychology* 7(6) (2012): 471–480. See, e.g., J. Arthur, T. Harrison, D. Carr, K. Kristjánsson, and I. Davison, *The Knightly Virtues: Cultivating Good Character through Literature* (Birmingham: Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2014), <http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/KV%20New%20PDF/KnightlyViruesReport.pdf>. Cf. D. Walker, R. Curren, and C. Jones, "Good Friendships among Children: A Theoretical and Empirical Investigation," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 46(3) (2016): 286–309.
 45. Sometimes the even blander term "positive relationships" is used.
 46. See K. Kristjánsson, *Justice and Desert-Based Emotions* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), chap. 3.
 47. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by T. Irwin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1985), 97 (1123b2–4).
 48. Interest in self-concept *qua* identity is obviously not limited to social psychology. Not to mention whole schools of thought in sociology (e.g., Bourdieu and his followers on *habitus*), a number of philosophers have offered penetrating analyses of the psycho-moral organizing role of self-concept(ions), among them thinkers otherwise as distinct as Harry Frankfurt and Charles Taylor. Yet self-concept is typically not high on virtue-ethics agendas, with the exception (perhaps) of Alasdair MacIntyre on narrative selfhood. For references and a discussion, see Kristjánsson, *The Self and Its Emotions*, chap. 2.
 49. See W. B. Swann, Jr., *Self-Traps: The Elusive Quest for Higher Self-Esteem* (New York: W. H. Freeman, 1996).
 50. See R. F. Baumeister, J. D. Campbell, J. I. Krueger, and K. D. Vohs, "Does High Self-esteem Cause Better Performance, Interpersonal Success, Happiness, or Healthier Lifestyles?" *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 4(1) (2003): 1–44.
 51. Not much of this alleged optimism can be found in Aristotle himself, however; see Kristjánsson, *Aristotelian Character Education*, chap. 5.
 52. All the contributions are available at <http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/485/papers/conference-papers/can-virtue-be-measured-papers>.
 53. Harking back to Allport, *Personality*.

54. The VIA surveys, used in positive psychology, utilize simple self-reports. See Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*. Seligman seems now to be getting cold feet about this methodology, however; see further in Kristjánsson, *Aristotelian Character Education*, chap. 3. See, e.g., B. J. Fowers, "Toward Programmatic Research on Virtue Assessment: Challenges and Prospects," *Theory and Research in Education* 12(3) (2014): 309–328.
55. Cf. David Carr's contribution to this volume (Chapter 32).
56. For a discussion and possible amendments, see Kristjánsson, *Aristotelian Character Education*.
57. See, e.g., Arthur et al., *Knightly Virtues*; cf. D. Carr and T. Harrison, *Educating Character through Stories* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2015). See various examples in M. W. Berkowitz and M. C. Bier, *What Works in Character Education: A Research-Driven Guide for Educators* (Washington, DC: Character Education Partnership, 2006), <http://www.specialneedsbsa.org/OrgHeaders/2523/What%20Works%20in%20Character%20Education.pdf>. Notably, Berkowitz—one of the most prominent advocates of virtue-based character education in the United States—is a life-span developmental psychologist himself by training and might thus seem to constitute a counterexample to the bleak picture drawn in the following section. However, most of his recent work would count as "educational" rather than "psychological," narrowly understood.
58. Obviously, causality is a tricky notion in both philosophy and psychology. Some psychologists take co-occurrence as a proxy for causality in a more robust sense, or even as causality. Others may simply argue that if observed behavioral changes follow immediately upon the heels of the invocation of a program of virtue education—aimed at changing states of character—then an inference to the best possible explanation will ascribe those behavioral changes to changes in character.
59. This is an overarching point argued in Kristjánsson, *Virtues and Vices*.
60. Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 3. Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 4.
61. Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 88.
62. L. Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development*, Vol. 1: *The Philosophy of Moral Development* (San Francisco: Harper and Row), 184. Apart from some efforts from the neo-Kohlbergians mentioned later in this section, scant attention has been given, by positive psychologists and other psychologists, to the developmental aspects of virtue acquisition. The task of reconstructing a Kohlberg-like theory of virtue development has thus fallen to philosophers, doing so mainly from the armchair; see, e.g., W. Sanderse, "An Aristotelian Model of Moral Development," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 49(3) (2015): 382–398. For a notable exception to the lack of interest in virtue in developmental psychology, see R. A. Thompson, "The Development of Virtue: A Perspective from Developmental Psychology," in *Cultivating Virtue, Perspectives from Philosophy, Theology, and Psychology*, edited by N. E. Snow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 279–306.
63. See B. Schwartz and K. E. Sharpe, "Practical Wisdom: Aristotle Meets Positive Psychology," *Journal of Happiness Studies* 7(3) (2006): 377–395; cf. Kristjánsson, *Virtues and Vices*, chap 7.
64. Available at <http://www.ipositive-education.net/movement/>.
65. W. Fleeson, R. M. Furr, E. Jayawickreme, P. Meindl, and E. G. Helzer, "Character: The Prospects for a Personality-Based Perspective on Morality," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 8(4) (2014): 178–191.

66. Jayawickreme et al., "Virtuous States and Virtuous Traits."
67. Lapsley and Narvaez, "Psychologized Morality." For an opposite view, see D. Carr, "Moralized Psychology or Psychologized Morality? Ethics and Psychology in Recent Theorizing about Moral and Character Education," *Educational Theory* 57(4) (2007): 389–402. See, e.g., D. Lapsley and D. Narvaez, "A Social-Cognitive View of Moral Character," in *Moral Development, Self, and Identity*, edited by D. Lapsley and D. Narvaez (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2004), 189–212. Other prominent neo-Kohlbergians, such as Steve Thoma, have begun to explore virtues, but they typically see them as forming an intermediate level of moral judgment between thin "bedrock schemas" and thick, contextualized codes of conduct; see, e.g., S. Thoma, P. Derryberry, and H. M. Crowson, "Describing and Testing an Intermediate Concept Measure of Adolescent Moral Thinking," *Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology* 10(2) (2013): 239–252.
68. D. Lapsley and D. Narvaez, "The Having, Doing, and Being of Moral Personality," in *The Philosophy and Psychology of Character and Happiness*, edited by N. E. Snow and F. V. Trivigno (London: Routledge, 2014), 133–159, 141.
69. D. Narvaez, "Triune Ethics: The Neurobiological Roots of our Multiple Moralities," *New Ideas in Psychology* 26(1) (2008): 95–119. D. Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality: Evolution, Culture, and Wisdom* (New York: Norton, 2014).
70. A. Colby and W. Damon, *Some Do Care: Contemporary Lives of Moral Commitment* (New York: The Free Press, 1992); W. Damon and A. Colby, *The Power of Ideals: The Real Story of Moral Choice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
71. See R. M. Ryan, R. R. Curren, and E. L. Deci, "What Humans Need: Flourishing in Aristotelian Philosophy and Self-Determination Theory," in *The Best within Us: Positive Psychology Perspectives on Eudaimonia*, edited by A. S. Waterman (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2013), 57–75.
72. Fowers, *Virtue and Psychology*, 217.
73. See, e.g., his various pieces of work that have been cited in this chapter. B. Fowers, *The Evolution of Ethics: Human Sociality and the Emergence of Ethical Mindedness* (London: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2015).
74. Fowers, "Placing Virtue," 1.
75. B. Schwartz and K. E. Sharpe, *Practical Wisdom: The Right Way to Do the Right Thing* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2010).
76. S. Brinkmann, *Psychology as a Moral Science: Perspectives on Normativity* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 145. For a critique, see Kristjánsson, *Virtues and Vices*, chap. 4.
77. Those are typically contrasted with the *closed* concepts of logic and mathematics, where necessary and sufficient conditions for an item's falling under a concept can typically be given.
78. See examples in L. Gulliford, B. Morgan, and K. Kristjánsson, "Recent Work on the Concept of Gratitude in Philosophy and Psychology," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 47(3) (2013): 285–317.
79. See, e.g., Kauppinen, "Ethics and Empirical Psychology."
80. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1973), §38, 232.
81. The rhetoric of the "first word" and "last word" comes from J. L. Austin, "A Plea for Excuses," in *Ordinary Language*, edited by V. C. Chappell (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1964): 41–63, 49. Yet many would consider Austin himself to be closer to the armchair traditionalists.

82. See, e.g., B. Morgan, L. Gulliford, and D. Carr, "Educating Gratitude: Some Conceptual and Moral Misgivings," *Journal of Moral Education* 44(1) (2015): 97–111.
83. For an argument along those lines, see B. Morgan and L. Gulliford, "Measuring Virtuous Gratitude," Conference Presentation, *Varieties of Virtue Ethics* Jubilee Centre Conference (2015), http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/conference_papers/Varieties_of_Virtue_Ethics/Gulliford_LizandMorgan_Blaire.pdf. See also Higgins and Dyschkant, "Interdisciplinary Collaborations," 385.
84. See Higgins and Dyschkant, "Interdisciplinary Collaborations."
85. See Higgins and Dyschkant, "Interdisciplinary Collaborations," 389.
86. See, e.g., Kauppinen, "Ethics and Empirical Psychology."
87. Kauppinen, "Ethics and Empirical Psychology," 285.
88. Compare Roberts, "Blessings of Gratitude," with his "The Normative and the Empirical in the Study of Gratitude," *Res Philosophica* 92(4) (2015): 883–914, and how he has been inspired by findings reviewed in Morgan and Gulliford, "Measuring Virtuous Gratitude."
89. V. Tiberius, "Well-Being: Psychological Research for Philosophers," *Philosophy Compass* 1(5) (2006): 493–505, 495.
90. Lapsley and Narvaez, "'Psychologized Morality.'"
91. For this metaphor and a more detailed historical narrative, see K. A. Appiah, *Experiments in Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 21.
92. I would like to thank James Arthur, David Walker, Randall Curren, Blaire Morgan, Liz Gulliford, and Blaine Fowers for helpful comments on an earlier draft, as well as the volume editor, Nancy Snow.

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PART VI

APPLIED
VIRTUE ETHICS

CHAPTER 29

TOWARD AN EMPIRICALLY INFORMED APPROACH TO MEDICAL VIRTUES

JUSTIN OAKLEY

IN the world's first national professional code of ethics for medicine, the American Medical Association in 1847 declared that "the physician should be the minister of hope and comfort to the sick; that, by such cordials to the drooping spirit, he may smooth the bed of death, revive expiring life, and counteract the depressing influence of those maladies which often disturb the tranquility of the most resigned in their last moments."¹ As healers, doctors were also expected to understand what were seen as the spiritual aspects of consoling patients, particularly at a time when medical interventions tended to be somewhat ineffective. Healing patients is still a central part of a doctor's role. However, the virtue of medical beneficence, which is crucial to serving patients' health, is no longer standardly understood to include a preparedness to instill hope in the dying, nor a willingness to offer patients spiritual advice where medications have failed. While traditional medical virtues such as medical beneficence and medical courage remain key elements of what it is to be a virtuous doctor, what these virtues amount to in practice has changed significantly over the years. Some of what once passed for medical beneficence is now seen as misguided and unjustifiably paternalistic. The medical profession has learned that nurturing false hope in dying patients does not really serve patients' best interests—particularly now that better evidence is available about when patients in such circumstances are likely to die. Also, the ethical demand to respect patient autonomy, which has been near the forefront of bioethics since its inception, has led to much greater emphasis on the medical virtue of honesty in patient care, and doctors have also thereby been encouraged to step back somewhat from shepherding patients' hopes and fears about their conditions. And while medical courage still includes a willingness to confront serious infectious diseases and to perform difficult procedures, the unprecedented technological advances of contemporary medicine have led to a broadening of this virtue, which now typically includes developing an understanding of when to cease

sophisticated medical interventions, and of how to conduct the resulting difficult conversations with patients and their families when that time comes. Further, where being a trustworthy practitioner and an effective healer were once believed to require that a doctor have high standards of personal integrity in his everyday life, a distinct role virtue of professional integrity has subsequently developed, which some argue opens the possibility that doctors could be reliably guided by the proper goals of medicine and so be effective healers and trustworthy practitioners without necessarily having exceptional levels of integrity and trustworthiness in their everyday lives.

A key influence on these changes to what some familiar medical virtues require of doctors in practice has been empirical research into how patients' interests are best served by doctors, and into how beneficence and other medical dispositions, such as courage, trustworthiness, and honesty, best serve health, as a core part of the proper goals of medicine. And indeed, this is how it should be. A doctor's impulse to heal her patients, if it is to be successful, needs to be answerable to what the evidence tells us works well in practice, as this provides an important reality check on what we might imagine good doctors to be like. This influence of empirical research on accounts of medical virtue mirrors the role that empirical studies and observations about human nature have played in the accounts of broad-based virtues developed by many of the pioneers of contemporary virtue ethics, such as Philippa Foot, Rosalind Hursthouse, Michael Slote, Christine Swanton, and Julia Annas.²

In this chapter I focus on medical ethics as a central part of bioethics, to discuss the various ways in which virtue ethics approaches to medical ethics draw productively on, and are open to challenge by, relevant empirical research. I do this in the spirit of recent contributions by virtue ethicists, such as Daniel Russell and Nancy Snow, to the development of a more empirically informed virtue ethics generally, particularly in response to the situationist critique of virtue ethics led by philosophers such as John Doris and Gilbert Harman.³ Medical virtue ethics offers an instructive case study in how practice, and research on practice, can usefully inform theory building and development—particularly as some of the earliest applications of virtue ethics anywhere can be found in the field of medical ethics from the 1980s onward. In the wake of the far-reaching evidence-based medicine movement, good medical practice is itself now seen as appropriately responsive to empirical studies, which makes medical practice an ideal context in which to examine how virtue ethics can benefit from empirical research. I also aim to bring out in this chapter how good empirically informed medical ethics is a two-way street, going from the inside out, and back again. For such an ethics draws on empirical research not only to develop action guidance that suitably acknowledges the realities of clinical practice, but also in using those realities to help shape a robust moral psychology of medical virtue itself. In what follows, I consider the role of empirical research at three levels. First, I discuss how empirical research can help in the development of a strong evidence-based moral psychology of medical virtue; and, using the overarching intellectual virtue of *phronesis* as an example in this context, I draw out some general desiderata for an adequate moral psychology of medical virtue. Second, I consider how empirical research plays a crucial role in the devising of a well-grounded account

of medical role virtues. Third, I indicate how research into the impact of policy changes on medical practice can help with deriving defensible policy applications from a medical virtue ethics. While my focus here is mainly on virtue and *medical* ethics, many of the lessons should be readily generalizable to other health professions, and hopefully beyond health-care practice itself.

I. THE MORAL PSYCHOLOGY OF MEDICAL VIRTUE

To some philosophers and bioethicists, early work in medical virtue ethics, inspired by the revival of virtue ethics in philosophy, had something of an insular and antiquated air, where traditional medical virtues were endorsed, and were supplemented by further medical virtues derived analytically by reflecting on how general broad-based virtues might be applied to medical practice. For example, some accounts of good doctor-patient relationships portrayed them as having a partiality similar to that found in friendship, and so the virtues of a doctor could be derived, to some extent, from what would count as virtues in a good friend.⁴ Other accounts at that time outlined how and when virtuous doctors could bring their personal values to bear on their clinical practice, as seen in conscientious objection.⁵

However, these approaches to medical virtues attracted significant criticism as excessively *a priori*, in being insufficiently responsive to the realities of contemporary medical practice, where doctors are often strangers to their patients, and where patients expect a certain standard of care from the health-care system, whichever doctor they end up seeing for their care. For example, Robert Veatch argued that friendship models of doctor-patient relationships are a poor fit for contemporary health-care delivery, which tends to be characterized by anonymity, rather than long-standing professional relationships between doctors and patients, and he suggested that this is indeed the way that many patients prefer things to be.⁶ And, in discussing professional-client relationships more generally, Tim Dare argued that encouraging virtuous character traits in professionals creates vulnerabilities for clients and patients, because their access to essential services thereby becomes too dependent on the *personal* values of the practitioner they encounter: “The clients of professionals typically rely upon relative strangers, to whom they stand in relationships of considerable inequality of expertise, for things of importance, when they cannot reliably assess the diligence or expertise of the professional. Clients do not have access to information about the character of their professionals in a way which would make it reasonable to ask them to place themselves in positions of vulnerability in reliance upon character-based considerations.”⁷ But on more evidence-based approaches to the moral psychology of medical virtue, these sorts of concerns would count as good reasons why friendship does not provide such an appropriate model for virtuous doctor-patient relationships. While doctors sometimes need to give special

weight to the interests of their own patients, if the evidence indicates that “befriending” patients serves their best interests poorly, then this is an important reason for doctors not to model their virtues on those of friends.

Indeed, the inadequacies of more *a priori* approaches to medical virtues were already becoming apparent during the ascendancy of scientific medicine later in the nineteenth century.⁸ Scientific medicine reached new heights from the latter half of the twentieth century with the emergence of the evidence-based medicine movement, which as its founder David Sackett explains, uses robust standards of evidence as the basis for clinical decision-making: “Evidence-based medicine . . . is the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients. The practice of evidence-based medicine means integrating individual clinical expertise with the best available external clinical evidence from systematic research.”⁹ In some respects, then, the more evidence-based approaches to medical virtues that have been developed in recent decades can be viewed as further applications of this more rigorous approach to good medical practice generally.¹⁰

In developing an adequate moral psychology of medical virtue, are there lessons that might be learned from the use of empirical research in accounts of virtue more generally? The empirical basis for virtues is clearly seen in the naturalistic Aristotelian virtue ethics elaborated by some of its contemporary founders, such as Philippa Foot and Rosalind Hursthouse. Foot argued for the eudaimonistic view that a virtuous person is a good example of a human being, and she went on to provide an account of what sorts of lives could count as flourishing lives for human beings. According to Foot, a distinguishing feature of good human lives is the development and exercise of practical rationality: “rational choice should be seen as an aspect of human goodness, standing at the heart of the virtues rather than out there on its own.”¹¹ Hursthouse shares Foot’s Aristotelian approach to virtues as character traits that humans need to flourish, and argues that what makes a character trait a virtue in humans is that it serves well the following four “naturalistic” ends: individual survival, individual characteristic enjoyment and freedom from pain, the good functioning of the social group, and the continuance of the species.¹²

In launching the situationist critique of virtue ethics, John Doris noted that the popularity of Aristotelian virtue ethics “owes much to the promise of an engaging and life-like moral psychology.”¹³ However, Doris argued that a large body of social psychology research indicates that talk of global character traits does not have much explanatory power, compared with accounts that emphasize the role played by the circumstances in which people find themselves.¹⁴ Maria Merritt, Doris, and Gilbert Harman summarize the relevant experimental evidence, which they find indicates that the best predictors of our behavior are not any character traits we might have, but rather that “the extent of subjects’ engagement in overt harming/nonharming or helping/nonhelping behaviour will vary depending on the physical position, or social status, or both, of other persons in the situation.”¹⁵

Doctors are by no means immune from these sorts of situational influences in their clinical practice. The best-known work on such factors in a medical context is Frederic

Hafferty and Ronald Franks's research on what they call the "hidden curriculum" in medicine. Poor role models are evidently a strong countervailing influence on medical graduates acting on the ethical principles and dispositions they are taught in medical school.¹⁶ Some clinicians continue to see ethical analysis of decisions as pointless, believing that ethics is too time-consuming, is an entirely subjective matter, or that there are in any case "no right answers" to ethical questions. Hafferty and Franks describe the corrosive influence of such clinicians on medical graduates as the "hidden curriculum" in medicine: "Medical training involves . . . learning new rules about feelings and about mistakes and the management of failure [It] is not just learning about becoming a physician, it involves learning how to 'cease' to be a lay person It is during medical training . . . that students learn to establish the primacy of individual experience along with the 'dangers' of becoming 'too' involved, 'too' reflective, or 'too' introspective."¹⁷

However, a number of philosophers have recently demonstrated that the situationist critique of virtue ethics has been somewhat misdirected, as it targets a caricature of virtue ethics in assuming that research subjects' character traits and virtues can be straightforwardly inferred from how the subjects are disposed to react in a particular experimental situation, with little reference to factors such as differences between subjects' own interpretations of that situation.¹⁸ As a number of contemporary virtue ethicists have explained, the approach employs a more empirically sound conception of character than that criticized by the philosophical situationists. For example, Julia Annas emphasizes how each virtue involves a disposition "not just to act, but also to reason, respond, and feel in certain ways."¹⁹ And she argues that philosophical situationists' critiques are incompatible with "any account which makes virtue a matter of learning and habituation in a way building up practical reasoning as an essential part of virtue. For such accounts of virtue are not about character traits which are acquired or expressed merely in acting in certain ways."²⁰ And Daniel Russell argues for a cognitive-affective conception of the virtues, according to which "we understand behavioral consistency from the agent's point of view, and understand one's consistent character trait to be a virtue just in case one's own standard of consistency where that trait is concerned is *also* an ethically good one, in virtue of which one acts for ethically good reasons."²¹ Moreover, several philosophers have argued that this more empirically adequate conception of character is actually reinforced by the evidence highlighted in the situationist critique. For example, in analyzing the factors that seemed to contribute to the abuse of prisoners by US military personnel at Abu Ghraib, Nancy Snow argues that "[i]dentifying problematic situational pressures can . . . point the way to the kind of character formation that would be helpful in combating them."²² Snow argues that virtues are important and distinctive forms of what she calls 'social intelligence,' which "can be loosely defined as the knowledge, cognitive abilities, and affective sensitivities, such as empathy, that enable us to navigate our social world," or, in other words, having a well-developed ability to "read people."²³ Perhaps, then, this more empirically robust conception of character, which includes agents' own construals of situations and situational influences, could provide us with a more adequate basis for an account of medical virtues.

Indeed, being mindful in acting of the sorts of specific situational factors that can undermine virtuous action is part of what Russell sees as having the virtue of *phronesis*, or practical intelligence, which he regards as involved in all virtues.²⁴ Roughly speaking, *phronesis* enables us to see the general in the particular, and can be understood as an overarching normative disposition that regulates the more specific dispositions involved in particular virtues. Without *phronesis*, our lives would be, as Aristotle puts it, more like those of “lower animals [who] . . . have no universal judgement but only imagination and memory of particulars.”²⁵ In the case of medicine, the rise of the evidence-based medicine movement might seem to obviate the need for doctors to have the above-mentioned sort of situational awareness or judgment in their work. However, Kathryn Montgomery, in her influential book *How Doctors Think*, argues that clinical judgment plays an essential role in good evidence-based medicine, and that doctors therefore still need to develop what she regards as the intellectual virtue of *phronesis* in making practically intelligent clinical judgments about particular cases.²⁶ Drawing on her analyses of clinical judgments in detailed case studies and her extensive experience in teaching medical humanities, Montgomery provides an empirically informed moral psychology of the virtue of *phronesis* in medical contexts. According to Montgomery, having *phronesis* in medicine goes beyond grasping general facts about the nature of the human body and biological functioning to use in what she sees as paradigmatically scientific reasoning, and involves doctors drawing on their knowledge and their experience to make astute clinical judgments in diagnosing the ills and addressing the needs of each individual patient. Montgomery emphasizes how *phronesis* in medicine requires well-developed interpretive skills, so that doctors learn how best to construe patients’ signs and symptoms (such as whether “reddish bumps” are a rash or are the initial stage of measles),²⁷ and that these sorts of interpretive skills are not reducible to the diagnostic algorithms, practice guidelines, and treatment protocols so prevalent in contemporary medical practice. On this account, medical *phronesis* is necessarily empirically informed—by the doctor’s own clinical experience, among other things—and it involves a form of “situated rationality.” Further, Montgomery understands excellence in clinical judgment as the development of what is essentially *moral* knowledge, since judging well in such contexts involves genuinely understanding the good of each particular patient (and drawing on one’s mature clinical judgments about how best to serve it).²⁸

An empirically informed account of the virtue of medical *phronesis* can also draw on the rich body of research into biases and cognitive errors in human decision-making, not only to help raise doctors’ awareness of such factors in order to minimize their impact, but also to assist practically intelligent doctors in understanding when various decision-making heuristics might appropriately be employed. For example, Jerome Groopman documents how in diagnosing patients, doctors are inclined to give undue weight to similarities that the patient’s symptoms have with conditions that doctors see commonly (for example, misdiagnosing as viral pneumonia what is actually the less frequently encountered condition of aspirin toxicity), and how doctors are inclined to “cherry-pick symptoms” in order to confirm a diagnosis that they have already settled

on.²⁹ Groopman discusses how recognizing such biases can help doctors to prevent their clinical decisions from being undermined by them. Similarly, Steven Dubovsky and colleagues demonstrate how assisting medical graduates to understand and better evaluate various pharmaceutical marketing techniques to which they will be exposed raises graduates' awareness of inappropriate influences on their prescribing behavior.³⁰ Nevertheless, in certain circumstances, some simplified heuristics can evidently help doctors to make more practically intelligent clinical decisions under conditions of uncertainty than those they might otherwise make on the basis of sophisticated clinical algorithms—for example, adopting simple triage in certain emergency situations can evidently lead to better overall outcomes than does invoking more complex decision-making aids.³¹

In emphasizing what she calls the “teachability criterion” for virtues, Julia Annas argues that virtue cannot be adequately understood or responsibly advocated without giving an account of how the virtue(s) in question can be inculcated or taught. Annas argues that virtues should be understood as skills “that exhibit the practical intelligence of the skilled craftsperson or athlete,” and that “part of the attraction of an ethics of virtue has always been the point that virtue is familiar and recognizable by all, so it would still be a damaging result if virtue is hopelessly unattainable by all but a few.”³² This is also an instructive point for medical virtue ethics. For example, effective techniques must be found for teaching medical students not only the sort of clinical judgment that Montgomery and others refer to as *phronesis* in this context, but also a resilience in the face of the hidden curriculum in medicine.³³

So, what general desiderata for an adequate moral psychology of medical virtue might be elucidated thus far from our discussion of the influence of character and situational factors on good medical practice? First, it seems clear that such a moral psychology would employ a concept of virtue that is comprehensive, in the sense that it would incorporate an awareness of situational and environmental factors that are conducive to or that undermine virtuous behavior, along with the cognitive, motivational, and affective dimensions of virtue, including agents' own construals of the situations they find themselves in. Second, it would be open to the findings of empirical research into what are realistic standards in the core skills of diagnosis and prognosis for medical graduates to aspire to attain, in developing and becoming adept at the sort of clinical judgment involved in the virtue of medical *phronesis*.³⁴ Third, a satisfactory moral psychology of medical virtue would provide resources for helping us see how medical virtues, understood in these comprehensive and evidence-based ways, can be successfully taught. For it does not seem unrealistic for medical programs to aim at inculcating certain virtues in their graduates, at least insofar as such programs can help graduates to identify and contend with various pro-virtue and contra-virtue environments, thereby helping them to develop practically intelligent character traits. Fourth, such a moral psychology would also be responsive to empirical and philosophical research into how decisions in conditions of uncertainty are best made, even in circumstances where the prevalence of such uncertainties might be diminished by advances in biomedical research and knowledge about a particular condition or disease.

II. EMPIRICALLY INFORMED ROLE VIRTUES FOR MEDICAL DOCTORS

When more philosophically sophisticated forms of medical virtue ethics were initially developed during the 1980s, discussion focused largely on applications of broad-based virtues like benevolence, courage, and trustworthiness to medical practice. More recently, however, accounts of role-differentiated virtues for various medical practitioners have been devised, such as medical beneficence and medical courage, and empirical research has been indispensable to such accounts at the theory-building stage, in helping to determine which candidate role virtues for doctors are plausibly acceptable, and what these virtues actually consist in.

There has been considerable discussion, for instance, about what the virtue of medical beneficence is plausibly thought to involve. Robert Veatch colorfully expressed the concern that doctors acting from this virtue will be “well-intentioned, bungling, do-gooders.” He asks us to consider “instilling benevolence in medical students so they will be disposed to do good. The most one could get is actions that do good; that is, benevolence, if we are lucky, leads to beneficence. Even that relation is problematic, however. Benevolent character could actually produce worse action.”³⁵ In illustrating his concern, Veatch uses the example of a doctor withholding material information about the nature and risks of a procedure for the patient’s sake: “We need to know, for example, whether he will be guided by beneficence to support the ‘therapeutic privilege’ of withholding information to benefit the patient or, alternatively, will follow autonomy, making the traumatic, but important disclosure.”³⁶ However, strong paternalistic withholding of such information is *evidently* bad for patients’ health. This is not simply a conceptual matter, but can be seen in many studies of the impact of withholding bad news from patients about their diagnosis and prognosis.³⁷

Daniel Russell makes a similar point, in discussing what virtue ethics can learn about consequences from Utilitarianism. Russell argues that we usually cannot know exactly what specific goals are virtuous to pursue “in advance of thinking about the consequences of different ways of pursuing those goals . . . healing is a doctor’s goal, but only in the very broadest, abstract sense; it becomes a goal that a doctor *can actually pursue* with a given patient only when the doctor determines what healing would *amount to* in that patient.”³⁸ Russell gives examples of the characteristic goals of various broad-based virtues, and argues that “[s]uch goals are results, so practical intelligence must make those goals determinate by understanding not only what matters but also what really works, . . . [as] the road to unintended consequences is paved with easy answers to hard questions.”³⁹ Likewise, Christine Swanton emphasizes the importance of virtues “hitting the target” of the contextually relevant virtue, and she discusses various examples of candidate virtues that fail to hit their target.⁴⁰

Aristotle was well aware of the importance of using practical wisdom to help enable virtuous character traits to achieve their goals. For example, he discusses how the

virtue of liberality involves giving to others not indiscriminately “from the heart,” but requires using judgment and discernment, as it is “the mark of the liberal man to give to the right people . . . with pleasure or without pain.” The liberal person “will refrain from giving to anybody and everybody, that he may have something to give to the right people, at the right time.”⁴¹ Michael Slote’s work on agent-based virtue ethics also construes genuine benevolence as requiring an empathetic understanding of the needs of the recipient, and monitoring one’s action to see that it is actually helping them.⁴² So, the virtue of medical beneficence requires doctors to provide patients not with what simply “feels beneficent,” but involves understanding each patient’s particular needs and circumstances so that the doctor’s actions are likely to actually benefit the patient. And, empirical research into the benefits and harms of various medical decisions is indispensable to enabling a doctor’s beneficent impulses to home in on each patient’s particular interests.

Another role virtue in medicine, which has been better calibrated by relevant empirical research, is medical courage. Aristotle explains that courage involves a disposition to confidently face dangers for a worthy goal, while remaining appropriately fearful of those dangers, and that the virtue of courage is a mean between the twin vices of cowardice and rashness.⁴³ Where accounts of the role virtue of medical beneficence have drawn productively on empirical research bearing on the singular focus of this virtue on patients’ best interests, accounts of medical courage as a role virtue for doctors can draw on empirical studies into the two key dimensions of this virtue—that is, research into how manageable are the risks of harm to patient(s), and research into what risks of harm there might be to the doctors themselves in facing these dangers (and what the probabilities of such practitioner harms are). For example, medical courage involves a willingness by doctors to face serious infectious diseases, without rashly failing to take adequate precautions against becoming infected themselves. Thus, during the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, research into the effectiveness of different safety protocols, along with proper data collection about the spread of the disease, helped enable doctors treating this condition there to understand what actions would actually count as judicious expressions of medical courage, rather than as unintelligent medical rashness.⁴⁴ Such research is especially important, given the anecdotal reports of individual practitioners who, out of misplaced bravado, disregard grave personal risks in an emerging serious epidemic by attempting to treat newly infected patients without taking sufficient precautions for their own safety—as reportedly occurred in Toronto during the early stages of the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic in 2003⁴⁵—and particularly when such practitioners urge their colleagues to follow suit. The role virtue of medical courage can also be expressed by a junior surgeon acting as a whistleblower on a more senior colleague whose ability with a delicate surgical procedure has become questionable.

Concerns have been expressed about the possibility that valorizing medical courage could facilitate complacency among health-care administrators about unethical institutional structures and could place unfair burdens on doctors to expose medical errors.⁴⁶ Leaving patient safety to the courage of individual medical whistleblowers is

indeed a poor, last resort, form of accountability. But here again, empirical research has an important role to play in properly directing medically courageous behavior. If studies reveal that more courageous actions by doctors do actually lead to greater institutional complacency about (for instance) medical errors, then this indicates that improved institutional structures and environments need to be developed so that the onus of protecting patients' interests is not placed unduly on the courageousness of individual practitioners.

In their 2010 book, *The Virtuous Psychiatrist*, Jennifer Radden and John Sadler developed an account of role-differentiated virtues for psychiatrists that draws extensively on empirical research into the realities of mental health practice. Radden and Sadler ground their account of psychiatric role virtues in what they find to be the distinctive and characteristic features of psychiatric practice, such as the specific vulnerabilities of psychiatric patients due to deficiencies in judgment about their own best interests, and in their diminished capacities for insight, communication, and self-control.⁴⁷ Because of these features, Radden and Sadler argue that the sort of character that a psychiatrist has and manifests in her clinical practice is of the utmost importance, as patients in mental health care are especially vulnerable to exploitation. The role-differentiated virtues of psychiatrists, on this account, therefore include integrity, self-knowledge, self-unity, and realism, along with "unselfing," whereby a therapist has a "personally effaced yet acutely attentive and affectively attuned attitude toward the patient, the relationship, and its boundaries."⁴⁸

The recent emergence of public health ethics as a vibrant sub-specialty of bioethics has also given rise to the development of accounts of virtues in public health practitioners, and empirical research in this field has likewise been vital in grounding and clarifying what character traits actually help practitioners to serve the proper goals of public health. For example, public health physicians sometimes require courage to challenge overly managerial approaches to health issues such as vaccination and interventions into obesity. Also, demonstrating that those responsible for health data collection and surveillance are trustworthy involves undertaking research into which approaches to these tasks build, or conversely undermine, public trust in such endeavors.⁴⁹ Further, monitoring the safety and quality of the care one provides is an ethical responsibility for all clinicians, and doing this well arguably requires clinicians to have various epistemic virtues, such as the requisite perceptual, cognitive, and inferential skills, along with intellectual humility and, perhaps, intellectual curiosity.⁵⁰ Again, empirical research helps to identify what qualities count as virtues here, but also clarifies how to apply them in particular cases. For example, understanding what inferences about a cardiac surgeon's level of performance are warranted from data about the mortality rates of this surgeon's patients requires relatively sophisticated inferential skills, along with skill in adequately comprehending the context of data collection. Familiarizing oneself with empirical research into how such data collection methods have been piloted and applied elsewhere plays an important educative role here in helping clinicians improve their interpretive and inferential skills in relation to such data.

III. EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY

APPLICATIONS OF VIRTUE ETHICS TO THE REGULATION OF MEDICAL PRACTICE

While empirical research undoubtedly has a role to play in grounding a realistic moral psychology of medical virtue and in assessing various candidate role virtues for doctors, relatively little work has been done so far on developing virtue ethics approaches to medical policy and the regulation of medical practice, and so it is less clear how empirical research might be fruitfully employed here. Indeed, concerns are sometimes expressed about whether virtue ethics has sufficient resources to provide a basis for distinctive policy recommendations generally, in the context of professional practice and beyond.

One obstacle to such ventures has been the assumption that policy must be designed in ways that enable observers to somehow detect the motives an individual doctor might be acting from, when, for example, he prescribes a medication from a pharmaceutical company with which he has financial or other ties. Thus, a 2009 US Institute of Medicine report on conflicts of interest argues that policies in this area cannot investigate doctors' motives for their decisions:

conflict of interest policies . . . do not focus on the motives in a particular case. First, reliably ascertaining or inferring motives in this context is usually impossible for those assessing whether a relationship constitutes a conflict of interest. Generally, medical research, patient care, and education involve multiple considerations and many small judgments and decisions that are impractical to review; and even if they were reviewed, they would likely not yield a clear picture of the underlying motivation Second, any thorough effort to determine motivation in a particular case would be improperly intrusive and highly time-consuming.⁵¹

But while doctors' motives for their clinical decisions may indeed be not altogether transparent to others, doctors are also expected to be committed to applying certain governing conditions to guide their behavior, and these governing conditions may be more open to empirical study. A doctor whose prescribing decisions are governed primarily by their aim of retaining the wealthiest patients might still act from motives of care in their medication-prescribing decisions. At a more general level, a doctor who works in a rural area only on the condition that she receives a substantial financial incentive for doing so could still act from motives of empathy toward her patients in that area. A possible evidence-based policy application of virtue ethics could focus on the likely impact of a policy on the proper governing conditions of doctor-patient relationships, without needing to determine any effects that such a policy might have on practitioners' motives in those relationships. For example, one could evaluate whether direct-to-consumer advertising (DTCA) of prescription pharmaceuticals should be

legally permitted by examining empirical studies of the impact that laws allowing this practice have evidently had on therapeutic relationships between doctors and patients, and thus on doctors' virtues.

It seems that a key reason why a particular doctor-patient relationship counts as a therapeutic relationship is whether, for example, the doctor's medication-prescribing decisions are governed by a genuine commitment to serve his patient's best interests (even if the medications thereby prescribed sometimes unforeseeably fail to do this). And the nature of a doctor's professional relationships with his patients can reveal the presence (or absence) of certain medical virtues because having those virtues itself importantly involves (among other things) applying certain governing conditions to his clinical decisions and professional relationships with patients. For instance, if a doctor's medication-prescribing decisions for a certain patient were governed primarily by the doctor's financial self-interest rather than by his patient's best health interests, then that would obviously count against any claim that the doctor has and acts on the virtue of medical beneficence, at least in this context.

And so, what does the evidence tell us about the governing conditions of doctors' drug-prescribing decisions in jurisdictions where pharmaceutical DTCA has been legalized, such as the United States? Examining empirical research on this question promises to help illuminate whether or not legalizing pharmaceutical DTCA undermines doctors developing, maintaining, and acting on relevant medical virtues, such as medical beneficence. It turns out that there is much evidence indicating that legalized pharmaceutical DTCA increases clinically inappropriate prescribing—mainly by increasing brand-specific requests from patients, along with levels of physician acquiescence to such requests. Further, the evidence suggests that although many doctors working in such jurisdictions are aware that acquiescing to a patient's brand-specific request will often entail that the patient receives a clinically inappropriate medication, some doctors will nevertheless proceed with prescribing a clinically inappropriate drug for the patient, in any case.⁵² In such circumstances, it is arguable that a consistent pattern of such prescribing behavior redefines the doctor-patient relationship into something other than a therapeutic relationship, and the doctor would thereby fail to exhibit the virtue of medical beneficence in that relationship. And so, there seems to be good evidential grounds for thinking that legalized pharmaceutical DTCA undermines medical virtue.

However, it may be too swift for policymakers to respond to such findings by supporting a prohibition on direct-to-consumer-advertising of pharmaceuticals. Perhaps virtue ethics could take a graduated approach here. That is, where there is evidence of *maximal* physician acquiescence, and interventions other than prohibition seem to have *little* prospect of success here, virtue ethics could then be used to support a *prohibition* on pharmaceutical DTCA. But where *minimal* physician acquiescence is evident, and interventions other than prohibition seem to have *much* prospect of success here, then perhaps efforts to strengthen doctors' medical virtues to avoid inappropriate prescribing may be more defensible than would an outright ban on pharmaceutical DTCA.

Another example of such a virtue ethics-based policy model would be to consider the impact on therapeutic doctor-patient relationships of certain institutional incentives that have the unintended consequence of encouraging hospitals and doctors to acquiesce to requests from patients' families to provide interventions to a dying relative, even when those interventions are futile. For insofar as such incentives lead doctors to provide non-therapeutic interventions at the request of patients' families, those doctors are, again, arguably redefining their professional relationships with patients as no longer therapeutic relationships, and would thereby seem to be abandoning the virtue of medical beneficence in the context of those relationships. And, on the virtue ethics policy approach outlined here, these unintended virtue-undermining consequences of such incentives would count as a strong reason against policies allowing such incentives.

IV. CONCLUSION

We have seen here how the place of many of those virtues traditionally taken as integral to good medical practice have been reinforced, clarified, and, in some cases, extended by empirical research in moral psychology, in doctors' roles, and on the impact of various health-care policies on doctor-patient relationships. Also, the general desiderata for an adequate moral psychology of medical virtue bring empirical studies in psychology to bear directly not only on the nature and expression of various role virtues in medical practice, but also on the justification of health-care policies that acknowledge and support doctors developing and acting on the medical virtues that communities have entrusted them to be guided by in their clinical practice. The importance of empirical studies for a robust medical virtue ethics promises to keep accounts of medical virtues responsive to clinical realities and to the genuinely best interests of patients into the future. Medical practice is likely to become even more scientific, especially with the more personalized medicine enabled by advances in genomics and biotechnology. It will be intriguing to see whether genomic medicine spawns novel medical virtues, and whether it leads virtues such as medical beneficence to be understood in more individualized ways. Also, empirical research into virtue-supporting and virtue-undermining environments will have important implications for accounts of medical virtues, particularly if policymakers begin to weigh more heavily the likely impact of various health-care policy initiatives on therapeutic doctor-patient relationships, and thus on doctors' medical virtues themselves. A related question for future research is whether policymakers should be guided here by how therapeutic doctor-patient relationships and medical virtues would *ideally* be nurtured and preserved, or by more modest but perhaps *achievable* ways of supporting such relationships and virtues. In any case, a robust medical virtue ethics would not rest solely on the findings of empirical research into these and related questions, but would also incorporate significant philosophical and conceptual innovation on the nature of virtues themselves. For only then can the findings of such research

be interpreted and applied in ways that genuinely help doctors to best serve the proper goals of medical practice itself.⁵³

NOTES

1. American Medical Association, *Code of Ethics of the American Medical Association*, 1847, chap. 1, article 1, no. 4, p. 9.
2. See Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Michael Slote, *Morals from Motives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
3. See Daniel C. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), and Nancy E. Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010). For early elaborations of the situationist critique, see John M. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behaviour* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Gilbert Harman, "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 99 (1998–1999): 315–331. See also John Campbell, "Can Philosophical Accounts of Altruism Survive Experimental Data on Helping Behaviour?" *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1999): 26–45.
4. See, e.g., James F. Drane, *Becoming a Good Doctor: The Place of Virtue and Character in Medical Ethics* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1988).
5. See, e.g., Edmund D. Pellegrino and David C. Thomasma, *A Philosophical Basis of Medical Practice: Toward a Philosophy and Ethic of the Healing Professions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 272–273; David C. Thomasma, "Beyond Medical Paternalism and Patient Autonomy: A Model of Physician Conscience for the Physician-Patient Relationship," *Annals of Internal Medicine* 98 (1983): 247; and David C. Thomasma, "Establishing the Moral Basis of Medicine: Edmund D. Pellegrino's Philosophy of Medicine," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 15 (1990): 250.
6. Robert M. Veatch, "The Physician as Stranger: The Ethics of the Anonymous Patient-Physician Relationship," in *The Clinical Encounter*, edited by Earl Shelp (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1985). Veatch explains that "[s]ome perhaps, prefer not to have their 'friends' see them in weakness, which often (but not always) is the condition of patients seeking medical professional help. Others may simply prefer the sense of mystery that comes from being more private people or simply not care to spend the time and energy necessary to build this particular set of friendships" (202).
7. Tim Dare, "The Secret Courts of Men's Hearts': Legal Ethics and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*," in *Ethical Challenges to Legal Education and Conduct*, edited by Kim Economides (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 1998), 139–140. Dare adds, "We do not tend to know our professionals personally. Nonetheless, we often, of necessity, place ourselves in positions of vulnerability to them in a way and to an extent which we would typically reserve for much more intimate relationships. In these latter relationships we have grounds—our intimate or personal knowledge of the individual—to make assessments of the character of the person to whom we are vulnerable, of their motivations, their priorities, and so forth, which explain our willingness to place ourselves in their hands. But because most of us do not have

- this kind of detailed knowledge of our professionals, we cannot rely upon the character of our professionals as we rely upon the characters of friends" (139).
8. For example, Rev. Charles T. Quintard commented in his 1855 graduation address to Memphis Medical College that "I have thus glanced at some of the moral characteristics of the true Physician, and have alluded, incidentally, to his mental qualifications. These last, however, are sometimes, and I may say often found disconnected from the former. Brilliancy of intellect and profundity of learning, do not pre-suppose either benevolence of disposition, or purity of heart . . . Good men are not all physicians, nor are all physicians good men. I may esteem and honor a man for his purity, but I cannot esteem a physician who trusts alone to kindness of disposition for the performance of his duties and responsibilities." Charles Todd Quintard, "Address to the Graduating Class of the Memphis Medical College," 1855, quoted in Jonathan Imber, *Trusting Doctors: The Decline of Moral Authority in American Medicine* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 12–13. Imber mentions that a similar point was made by Francis Bacon in the early seventeenth century.
 9. David L. Sackett, "Evidence-Based Medicine," *Seminars in Perinatology* 21(1) 1997: 3.
 10. These evolving views of medical virtues and good doctor-patient relationships remind us that it is only relatively recently in the history of medicine that more reliable evidence has become available of what sorts of dispositions in doctors really do serve proper goals of medicine like health. This sort of teleological approach to developing an account of medical virtues is seen especially in Aristotelian theories of medical virtue, where serving the goal of health is a key criterion of what can count as a medical virtue—mirroring the way in which serving the goal of *eudaimonia* is central to determining what character traits can count as virtues in everyday life (see Justin Oakley and Dean Cocking, *Virtue Ethics and Professional Roles* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001]). Because most contemporary medical virtue ethics are Aristotelian in this respect, I will here concentrate mainly on the role of empirical evidence in Aristotelian medical virtue ethics.
 11. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 81. See also Philippa Foot, "Euthanasia," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 6 (1977): 85–112.
 12. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 200–201, 208, 248.
 13. John M. Doris, "Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics," *Nous* 32 (1998): 512. See also Doris, *Lack of Character*.
 14. See Doris, *Lack of Character*.
 15. Maria W. Merriitt, John M. Doris, and Gilbert Harman, "Character," in *The Moral Psychology Handbook*, edited by John M. Doris and the Moral Psychology Research Group (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 381. However, they go on to argue that our realizing the influence of such factors may not help any virtue ethics claim that we can then learn to overcome such counter-moral influences, as they argue that "the causal interaction [by which the above-mentioned situational factors influence our behavior] is mediated by cognitive processes that operate outside subjects' intentional direction and may result in behaviour contrary to their reflectively affirmed moral commitments" (382).
 16. See, for example, Steve Bolsin, Tom Faunce, and Justin Oakley, "Practical Virtue Ethics: Healthcare Whistleblowing and Portable Digital Technology," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 31 (2005): 612–618; and James Arthur, Kristján Kristjánsson, Hywel Thomas, Ben Kotzee, Agnieszka Ignatowicz, and Tian Qiu, *Virtuous Medical Practice*, Research Report, The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, University of Birmingham, 2015: <http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/1555/projects/gratitude-britain/virtuous-medical-practice>.

17. Frederic W. Hafferty and Ronald Franks, "The Hidden Curriculum, Ethics Teaching, and the Structure of Medical Education, *Academic Medicine* 69 (1994): 865–866. See also Frederic W. Hafferty and Joseph F. O'Donnell (eds.), *The Hidden Curriculum in Health Professional Education* (Lebanon, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2014).
18. The importance of subjects' construals of their situation was demonstrated in Daniel Batson and others' follow-up to Darley and Batson's Good Samaritan experiment, using a comparable experimental design, as the researchers comment that "subjects' helping responses indicated that being in a hurry did not by itself reduce concern or compassion Conflicting demands, not callousness, appeared to account for the tendency for those in a hurry not to stop and help someone in possible need" (C. Daniel Batson, Pamela J. Cochran, Marshall F. Biederman, James L. Blosser, Maurice J. Ryan, and Bruce Vogt, "Failure to Help When in a Hurry: Callousness or Conflict?" *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 4 (1978): 100.
19. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, 173.
20. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, 173.
21. Daniel C. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, 324. See also Chapter 27 on philosophical situationism in this volume. See also Tom Bates and Pauline Kleingeld, 'Virtue, Vice, and Situationism', this volume, Chapter 27.
22. Nancy E. Snow, "How Ethical Theory Can Improve Practice: Lessons from Abu Ghraib," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 12 (2009): 563. See also Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory*, especially her discussion of how people can effectively confront and combat any prejudices they might hold (34–37).
23. Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence*, 63. Snow adds here, "More colloquially, we can describe social intelligence as 'people smarts,' and contrast it with academic intelligence, or 'book smarts'" (63).
24. See Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*.
25. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1141b9–17.
26. Kathryn Montgomery, *How Doctors Think: Clinical Judgment and the Practice of Medicine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Montgomery seems to regard *phronesis* in a medical context not as a role virtue, but as a subset of general *phronesis* in everyday life and so as a form of practical intelligence, which "enables physicians to fit their knowledge and experience to the circumstances of each patient . . . [which] takes account of context, unpredicted but potentially significant variables, and, especially, the process of change over time" (33).
27. Montgomery, *How Doctors Think*, 45–46.
28. Montgomery, *How Doctors Think*, 41.
29. Jerome Groopman, *How Doctors Think* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 2007), 64–66. The first of these inclinations makes use of what is known as the "availability heuristic" (after the pioneering work of economists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky), while the second is known as "confirmation bias."
30. Steven L. Dubovsky, et al. "Can Academic Departments Maintain Industry Relationships While Promoting Physician Professionalism?" *Academic Medicine* 85(1) (January 2010): 68–73.
31. See Gerd Gigerenzer and Stephanie Kurzenhauser, "Fast and Frugal Heuristics in Medical Decision Making," in *Science and Medicine in Dialogue: Thinking Through Particulars and Universals*, edited by Roger Bibace (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 3–15.
32. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, 169, 173.

33. See, e.g., Kristjan Kristjánsson, "Phronesis as an Ideal in Professional Medical Ethics: Some Preliminary Positionings And Problematics," *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* 36 (2015): 299–320; and J. P. Messina and Chris W. Suprenant, "Situationism and the Neglect of Negative Moral Education," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 18 (2015): 835–849. Also, there is some evidence that more experiential approaches to teaching medical ethics and medical virtues can helpfully complement more traditional approaches, in providing more effective ways of enabling graduates to resist the undermining influence of negative role models in medical practice.
34. See Kristjan Kristjánsson, "Phronesis as an Ideal in Professional Medical Ethics."
35. Robert M. Veatch, "The Danger of Virtue," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 13 (1988): 445.
36. Veatch, "The Danger of Virtue," 446.
37. See, e.g., Irving L. Janis, *Psychological Stress: Psychoanalytic and Behavioral Studies of Surgical Patients* (New York: John Wiley, 1958); Sharon M. Parker et al., "A Systematic Review of Prognostic/End-of-Life Communication with Adults in the Advanced Stages of a Life-Limiting Illness: Patient/Caregiver Preferences for the Content, Style, and Timing of Information," *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* 34 (2007): 81–93; Dennis H. Novack et al., "Changes in Physicians' Attitudes Towards Telling the Cancer Patient," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 241 (1979): 897–900; Nicholas A. Christakis, *Death Foretold: Prophecy and Prognosis in Medical Care* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); and the empirical studies carried out by the President's Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Biomedical and Behavioral Research, *Making Health Care Decisions: The Ethical and Legal Implications of Informed Consent in the Patient-Practitioner Relationship, Volume One: Report*, October 1982, as summarized on, e.g., p. 75 of this report. <https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/handle/10822/559354>
38. Daniel C. Russell, "What Virtue Ethics Can Learn from Utilitarianism," in Ben Eggleston and Dale E. Miller (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Utilitarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 261.
39. Russell, "What Virtue Ethics Can Learn from Utilitarianism," 262, 264.
40. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*. See Swanton's example (235) of Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating's failed attempt at beneficence toward Queen Elizabeth II, by putting his arm around her waist to usher her to her place at an official function, a gesture that many regarded as unnecessary and intrusive.
41. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by W. D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 1120a11–22, 1120b4–5. These views can in some ways be seen as early precursors of the contemporary *effective altruism* movement, which urges us to consider more thoroughly how our actions, ranging from charitable donations to career decisions, can be guided by rigorous evidence rather than solely by emotional considerations, so that our decisions can do the most good for the world, all things considered.
42. See Slote, *Morals from Motives*.
43. See *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, chap. 7.
44. See <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/ebola/one-year-report/response-in-2015/en/>.
45. See Tim Brookes, *Behind the Mask: How the World Survived SARS, The First Epidemic of the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: American Public Health Association, 2005).
46. See Ann Hamric, Margaret Mohrman, and John Arras, "Must We Be Courageous?" *Hastings Center Report* 45 (2015): 33–40.

47. Jennifer Radden and John Z. Sadler, *The Virtuous Psychiatrist: Character Ethics in Psychiatric Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 34–39.
48. Radden and Sadler, *The Virtuous Psychiatrist*, 132.
49. See Stephen Holland, *Public Health Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 33–36; Solomon Benatar and Ross Upshur, “Virtue in Medicine Reconsidered: Individual Health and Global Health,” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 56 (2013): 126–147.
50. See James A. Marcum, “The Epistemically Virtuous Clinician,” *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* 30 (2009): 249–265.
51. B. Lo and M. Field (eds.), *Conflicts of Interest in Medical Research Education, and Practice*, Institute of Medicine (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2009), 50–51.
52. See J. S. Weissman et al., “Physicians Report on Patient Encounters Involving Direct-to-Consumer Advertising,” *Health Affairs (Millwood)*. 2004 (suppl web exclusives): W4-219–W4-233, at W4-227. For a fascinating study of doctors’ explanations of their acting against their better judgment in making these clinically inappropriate prescribing decisions, see A. Tentler et al., “Factors Affecting Physicians’ Responses to Patients’ Requests for Antidepressants: Focus Group Study,” *Journal of General and Internal Medicine* 23 (2008): 51–57.
53. I am grateful to Nancy Snow for her excellent comments on a previous version of this chapter.

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CHAPTER 30

CHARACTER-BASED BUSINESS ETHICS

MIGUEL ALZOLA

I. INTRODUCTION

SOME scholars believe that business ethics is, fundamentally, about certain characteristics of actions, about how consistent such actions are with certain rules, about the expected results of such actions, and about the principles that everyone should reasonably accept or that no one could reasonably reject. Virtue ethicists in business believe that ethics is primarily about the person, his or her character, and the virtues and vices that are part of it; it is only secondarily about the acts that character causes—acts that may or may not conform to some ethical principles and rules of action. One may do the right thing by accident or for the wrong reason, and knowledge of the criteria that make an act right does not guarantee that the agent would act accordingly.

Over sixty years ago, Anscombe (1958) and Maslow (1954) reintroduced the idea of virtue and character into Anglo-American moral philosophy and psychology. In business ethics, Solomon (1992) began to argue for virtue ethics as a way into business in the early 1990s, followed by Dobson (1994), Hartman (1995), Koehn (1995, 1998), Moberg (1999), Moore (2003), and Audi (2012), among other influential scholars. Character and virtue have undergone a significant resurgence in psychology and organizational scholarship.¹ As in all areas of applied ethics, virtue ethics is now regarded as one of three major approaches in business ethics.² Indeed, it is the most popular normative theory in terms of the number of articles published in *Business Ethics Quarterly*, the leading academic journal in the field.³ Still, it is subjected to serious criticisms. It is challenged by economists, political theorists, psychologists, and sociologists. And it is regarded with suspicion in business schools. In this chapter, I shall outline a character-based theory of business ethics and critically examine some of the aforementioned challenges.

II. A THEORY OF THE PRACTICE OF BUSINESS

Business ethics is the discipline that critically studies the moral features of commercial activity. As an academic field, it developed closely to the field of medical ethics, which had emerged ten years earlier (in the 1960s). Under the influence of Rawls's theory of justice, the first business ethicists framed the application of ethics to economics and business along the lines of political philosophy, rather than normative ethics.⁴ Therefore, it was originally focused on issues of public policy toward business—especially emphasizing the publicly traded corporation—and the institutions of capitalism, rather than the standards of what is morally required, permitted, and prohibited when conducting business.⁵

Virtue ethicists advocate a shift in business ethics research from political philosophy to managerial ethics, that is, away from the study of the ways in which theories of justice and democracy evaluate markets and organizational rules⁶ and toward decision-making process at the individual and the organizational level.⁷

A virtue ethical theory of business must be not only a normative theory about abstract principles and side constraints, but also a theory of practice that is accessible to the people for whom business ethics is not just a subject of study but a way of life. Accordingly, the appropriate ethical theory for business is then teleological and character-based. It is a theory of the practice of business that is concerned with the character of those who engage in business. It must emphasize the role of virtue in contributing to the achievement of the purpose of that practice (business).

The theory's most distinctive feature is that it is character based: it is primarily concerned with the moral evaluation of persons and business practices.⁸ It is interested in ideals—rather than principles—of the good life and the excellences of character that make a person flourish as a human being (in the context of economic institutions). Accordingly, the basic judgments in business ethics are judgments about character, a claim that amounts to two theses. First, judgments about the value of an agent's qualities of character are independent of the judgment of the agent's actions. Second, the notion of virtue justifies the notion of rightness in a way that is explanatorily prior, meaning that the moral value of an act cannot be assessed independently from the person performing the act.⁹

One of the main attractions of the character approach in business is that, unlike its competitors—which are mainly concerned with actions and principles—it provides a richer perspective of moral motivation. Knowledge of the criteria that make some act right or wrong does not give the agent sufficient reasons for doing it (or refraining from doing it); it does not guarantee that the agent will do the right thing, or even be able to figure out what he or she ought to do. The salesperson who misleads a client about the benefits of the product he or she sells does not ignore the wrongness of misrepresentation, but may not be able to align what he or she knows about the product with what he or she wants to do.

The concept of the person in action-based business ethics is psychologically unrealistic and even morally degrading: the person is regarded as merely an abstract will to produce a certain action, regardless of how the action reflects on him or her, on his or her projects, or the kind of life he or she lives. In contrast, a character-based theory of business provides a better description of the agent's moral experience: a manager does not make decisions based on abstract rules, universal principles, or sophisticated algorithms. Rather, he or she acts considering what sort of person he or she wants to be and what a person of good character would do under similar circumstances (a criterion that does not rule principles out entirely). Virtue ethics is appealing in business precisely because business leadership is a role-modeling function. Good role models are sources and teachers of ethical standards in business.¹⁰

A complete theory of virtue that aspires to become a plausible theory of business practice has, I submit, four major components. These core components can be identified in the answers to the following four questions. First, what is virtue? Second, what makes certain qualities of character virtuous and other qualities of character vicious? Third, what is the relationship between virtue and rightness? (Or, what makes actions right or wrong in business?) Finally, what are the business virtues and corresponding vices? (Or what are the qualities of character that a person should develop to be a good business person?)

i. The Concept of Virtue

What is virtue? The importance of the answer to this question cannot be overemphasized. The conceptualization of virtue has become the battlefield where competing moral theories struggle for the priority of *deontic* or *aretaic* notions. Furthermore, some empirical scholars in business ethics have been trying to identify plausible "measures" and indicators of virtue,¹¹ which demand a better understanding of what virtue is.

Aristotle's view on the genus of virtue, "one of the less contentious in the history of the concept,"¹² has been very influential in business ethics. Aristotle defines a virtue as a state of character that is good for a person to have, as it realizes the human function.¹³ That is, the virtues are excellences of character that benefit their possessor by enabling him or her to flourish as a good human being (to live a characteristically good, *eudaimon*, human life). Character involves higher-order desires and values, beliefs, framing capacities, emotions, and enduring patterns of behavior that are relevant in the domain of morality.¹⁴

Consider the case of Cynthia, an accountant serving as an internal auditor for a big technology firm. She has grown increasingly suspicious of some accounting entries in the company's books that may be evidence of hidden losses by the CEO. She asks for authorization to conduct an independent investigation, which is denied. The only option left for her is to go outside her chain of command. As she deliberates about what to do, she is clear that we should not make accusations that might be wrong and/or cause unnecessary damage to the company's reputations, so she has to be sure her conclusions

are accurate. She does not want to overreact, but she trusts her intuitions, internal audit experience, and fraud training. She is scared—at times she finds herself with her hands shaking and her heart pounding. She knows there is a very real possibility of losing her job. She further knows that her investigation would demand long hours at night, spent looking at the company's financials.

According to Aristotle, the courageous person is “the person who fears the right things, from the right end, in the right way, at the right time, and is correspondingly confident.”¹⁵ A virtue, then, has four distinctive elements, namely, a cognitive,¹⁶ an affective,¹⁷ a conative,¹⁸ and a behavioral¹⁹ component. Hence, attributing the virtue of courage to Cynthia—saying that she is a courageous person—entails the following four claims. First, she has appropriate framing capacities and deliberative skills to perceive correctly and understand the presence of danger. It also assumes that she holds correct beliefs and deliberates carefully about how to respond to frightening conditions (cognitive dimension). Second, she feels the appropriate level of fear, neither more nor less of the right things. Cynthia fears the things that deserve to be feared, and not just any bad thing that may possibly happen (affective dimension). Third, she stands firm against what is painful out of the right motivations and in service of the right ends, not simply because she fears the reproach of her colleagues or expects a reward from the shareholders (conative dimension). Cynthia does not decide whether or not to blow the whistle merely on the basis of her likes and dislikes, or because doing so is pleasant.²⁰ Rather, she does it because she wants to be a courageous person, because she does not want to acquire a bad habit of apathy, because she is committed to assessing her behavior by reference to what enhances the common good, and because the situation seems to call for a brave response.²¹ Fourth, she successfully stands against frightening things; she is disposed to be unperturbed when facing dangers that are not too frightening, and she typically succeeds in responding appropriately to frightening conditions on the basis of the constituent understanding, feelings, and motivations (behavioral dimension). The courageous person does not have to fight himself or herself to do the courageous thing, but we do acknowledge that even a brave person may have fears.

Interestingly, business scholars and psychologists—self-defined as behavioral business ethicists—advocate the study of character and virtue as “legitimate topics of psychological inquiry and informed societal discourse.”²² They intend to use the language and tools of scientific psychology to investigate what they call “character strengths.” An offshoot of the positive psychology tradition, Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) aims to offer psychologists some tools to think about, operationalize, and measure character in business organizations.²³

However, their conceptualization of virtue is radically different from Aristotle's. Psychologists reduce virtue to a behavioral disposition to unfailingly act in a virtuous manner. While virtue ethicists highlight the understanding of virtue as “an inner quality of an agent and of his acts and not an outer feature of his conduct,”²⁴ social scientists reduce virtue to its behavioral aspects, thereby neglecting its inner dimension. A virtue is defined as a single linear trait that bears a one-to-one correspondence with certain

behavior in any situation where it is relevant. So, the cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions of virtue are ultimately reduced to the behavioral component.

One can definitely understand the need for some degree of reductionism in descriptive research, as it makes conducting empirical studies on character strengths easier.²⁵ But psychologists seem to argue that we do not need to provide a conceptual analysis of virtue because trait attributions are made purely on the evidence of behavior. Why? Because the classification of types is based on observable behavioral regularities, which are made for the purpose of predicting future behavior. Then, even if behavior is caused by internal factors, we do not need to know those factors; we can classify people and make predictions without recourse to them. Consequently, the psychologist holds that the only emphasis on explanation should be at the level of behavior, whatever the underlying causes of behavior.²⁶

The debate between normative and empirical scholars about the nature and status of virtue—which takes us back to the divide between normative and descriptive traditions in business ethics—sheds light on three distinctive purposes of virtue attribution, that is, the descriptive, explanatory, and evaluative function of virtue concepts.²⁷

First, virtue attribution provides a simplified way to summarize how a person is different from another person, that is, a way of describing the state of a person's soul. The descriptive function of virtue attribution consists in classifying and categorizing a person's psychological makeup. For example, ascribing the virtue of courage to Cynthia summarizes a history of mental states and actions in the past, while also highlighting individual differences.²⁸

Second, virtue attribution has an explanatory function in the sense that the possession (or lack) of a certain trait explains (partially) the possessor's beliefs, desires, emotions, motivations, and behavior. An explanatory ascription of virtue entails a commitment to the existence of some causal mechanism. One reason that Cynthia feels apprehensive about going to the dentist—one of the reasons that she is constantly putting off a necessary dental appointment—is the virtue of courage, or the lack thereof. Character traits are supposed to be explanatory in the sense that at least sometimes it is correct to explain actions in terms of character traits, and not just in terms of the circumstances.

Third, virtue attribution has an evaluative purpose. A virtue such as courage is an acquired excellence; it is a matter of choice and it is an achievement, something that is admirable in a person. That is what we say when we call Cynthia a courageous person (assuming that her actions are well aligned with her inner states). The value of a virtue is directly attached to Cynthia and only secondarily to her actions. Virtue ascriptions are forms of normative assessment.²⁹

In this regard, the virtues are thick ethical concepts, in which facts and values are entangled.³⁰ When a virtue is used in judgments, it has the feature that the judgment as a whole is both responsive to how the world is and gives the agent reasons for action.³¹ We say that Cynthia blew the whistle on her employer's cover-up of billions in losses because she is courageous, or opportunistic (because, say, she is seeking public acclaim), or greedy (because, say, she expects a big reward in return), or foolhardy. And these are all ways of describing and explaining what she did, as well as ways to assess her character.

ii. Virtues and Goodness

The second question to which a complete theory of virtue in business must respond is: What makes a character trait into a virtue?

The answer to this question in the *eudaimonist* tradition lies in a hierarchical approach to goodness. For Aristotle, a virtue is a character trait that a person needs in order to achieve *eudaimonia*, that is, to flourish or live a better life as a human being. The possession and exercise of the virtues are considered necessary conditions of the agent's flourishing. And it is a necessary condition of a trait being a virtue that it is a constitutive element of the agent's flourishing. By constituting his or her *eudaimonia*, the virtues benefit their possessor.

Due to the early influence of MacIntyre, Solomon, and Hartman, the virtue approach in business is predominantly Aristotelian. It starts by considering the essential nature of human beings, the kinds of creatures we are, and the kinds of lives that we lead (including our professional lives). To live a good life depends crucially on the sort of beings humans are. Humans, according to Aristotle, seek a variety of goods, some of them wanted as means to further goods. These goods can be organized in a hierarchical way such that inferior goods are pursued by their contribution to the achievement of higher goods. Then, goods that are part of business life, such as money, power, and honor, are chosen not intrinsically but for the sake of other superior goods (yet, some make the mistake of choosing money, for example, for its own sake).

For Aristotle, the highest good for a human being is a life of *eudaimonia*. Just as flute players do well when they succeed in performing their function (playing music), the same applies to human beings performing their function, which involves what makes humans unique, namely, their rational soul. The highest human good is a life of rational activity of the soul.

Humans are rational beings who need the company of others to engage in cooperative activity, for example in business organizations. The exercise of our rational and social abilities is what is distinctive of human nature. As humans live in communities with other human beings, they need certain qualities of character for a meaningful interaction with these other people.

The virtues are then the qualities of character that a person needs in order to realize his or her nature as a rational and social being. And the virtues are not merely a means to flourish, but constitute by themselves such an achievement because they are part of who we are. A person cannot experience the joy of being a good parent or a good accountant or a good manager if he or she lacks the qualities of character that make him or her a good parent, a good accountant, or a good manager. Character is, according to *eudaimonist* virtue ethics, a matter of what we enjoy doing.

But one need not be a *eudaimonist* to be a virtue ethicist. There is another variety of virtue ethics, the *non-eudaimonist* version, which offers a different answer to the question of how to tell whether a character trait qualifies as a virtue.³² Non-eudaimonist versions of virtue ethics—holding that there is no strong relationship between

virtue and *eudaimonia* (at least not that of the virtuous agent)—have been advanced by Kierkegaard,³³ Sartre, Hume, Nietzsche,³⁴ utilitarians,³⁵ and intuitionists.³⁶ In the business ethics literature, there are remarkable contributions in the sentimentalist tradition of Hume and Smith³⁷ and in the existentialist tradition.³⁸

Against the Aristotelian hierarchy of ends, non-eudaimonist virtue ethicists claim that the virtues of businesspeople do not necessarily contribute to their goodness as human beings and are not necessarily constitutive of their personal flourishing in the same sense that the virtues of an artist may not contribute to the artist's flourishing as a human being; indeed, such character traits may be socially dysfunctional. According to Slote (2001), it is a sufficient condition for a character trait being a virtue that it is admirable even if it does not serve any further good such as human flourishing because the possession of such admirable traits makes the possessor good enough to be virtuous. In Swanton's pluralistic virtue ethics, "a virtue is a disposition to respond to or acknowledge items in its field or fields in an excellent or good enough way."³⁹ What makes a character trait into a virtue is plural (i.e., not just benefiting the agent or promoting good states of affairs). A virtue is a disposition to respond to items in a virtue's field—such as people, objects, situations, inner states, or actions—that may not necessarily be good for its possessor or constitutive of his or her flourishing, but that make its possessor excellent in responding to what Swanton calls "the demands of the self and the demands of the world."⁴⁰

iii. Virtue and Rightness

The third component of a complete theory of business virtue is concerned with a virtue ethical account of right conduct. What is right and wrong action in virtue ethics?

Most ethical theories have something to say about the virtues. Interest in Kant's virtue theory has redirected philosophers' attention to Kant's Doctrine of Virtue.⁴¹ Utilitarians have developed their consequentialist theories of virtue.⁴² But what makes virtue ethics distinctive is the normative priority of character concepts: a moral theory counts as a form of virtue ethics if and only if it treats *aretaic* notions as primary and *deontic* notions as either derivative⁴³ or dispensable.⁴⁴

Utilitarian and Kantian accounts of virtue define the virtues as dispositions to act in conformity with certain rules of action. Sidgwick famously argues that the virtue of veracity involves "a settled endeavor to produce in the minds of others impressions exactly correspondent to the facts, whatever his motive may be for so doing."⁴⁵ Along the same lines, Driver argues that "character traits are simply another thing that, like action, can be evaluated along consequentialist lines"⁴⁶ and so stipulates that a virtue is "a character trait that produces good consequences for others,"⁴⁷ which is valued "because we recognize its good-producing qualities."⁴⁸

Likewise, deontologists claim that "moral virtues are dispositions to avoid unjustified violations of the moral rules" and that "to have a moral vice is to have a disposition to

unjustifiably violate a moral rule.”⁴⁹ Gewirth summarizes it nicely: “to have a moral virtue is to be disposed to act as moral rules direct.”⁵⁰

The non-virtue ethicist advises us to find and justify fundamental rules and principles so the moral virtues have merely an instrumental role: one ought to develop certain dispositions to reliably act in conformity with such fundamental rules and principles.⁵¹ And this is entirely compatible with the agent doing the right thing by mistake or for the wrong reasons.

A character-based theory of ethics, in contrast, offers a radically different story about the sort of acts that are right. Aristotle’s theory of rightness is illuminating: “actions are called just or temperate when they are the sort that a just or temperate person would do. But the just and temperate person is not the one who [merely] does these actions, but the one who also does them in the way in which just or temperate people do them.”⁵² This passage highlights an important distinction in business ethics between the value of acting from craft knowledge—which is purely instrumental, as a means to the right product—and the value of acting from virtue. Whereas the goodness of production is established by its usefulness for producing the right sort of product, the value of virtue is not simply determined by its efficient production; it has intrinsic value. A virtuous action has a characteristic motive; it is not simply a means to some further good. So while a shoe or a flute can be determined to be good by its own qualities, the qualities of an action are not enough to establish whether it is a virtuous action. An action is honest if and only if it is carried out by an honest person in the way an honest person would do it (i.e., for the right end, about the right people, in the right way, at the right time, etc.). Blowing the whistle on accounting regularities for the wrong reason brings Cynthia no moral credit. Treating workers well only for the purpose of manipulating them later does not reflect excellences of character.

A character-based theory of right conduct defines an action as morally right if and only if it is an action that a virtuous person (acting in character) performs in the circumstances.

Consequently, we are to understand what it means to act virtuously through the study of the nature and inclinations of the virtuous person, not through the observation of seemingly virtuous actions. In other words, we do not define virtuous actions as those that conform to certain moral rules and, then, define a virtuous person as one who reliably and characteristically performs such actions.⁵³ Character is normatively more basic than rules and actions.

This carries important implications for role modeling in business ethics and for the way the virtues are conceptualized—and allegedly measured—in empirical research.

About the first issue, virtue ethics invites us to focus on ethical exemplars: we ask how a virtuous manager, a virtuous auditor, or a virtuous business analyst has acted or would act in a given situation calling for a moral decision. Character education also involves narratives, historical or fictional, for insight into workplace excellence, which ultimately guide decisions about what kind of person (and business person) one wants to be.

Second, taking character seriously entails a commitment to a different methodological approach to identifying and observing virtuous actions. We need to study first

the virtuous person, rather than how his or her actions are in conformity with certain principles, because observing actions does not help to determine how those actions are grounded in character. Psychologists can meaningfully evaluate an action as virtuous only if they have enough prior knowledge of the agent's character. And it will not be a virtuous action because of certain features of the action, but rather because the action bespeaks good character.⁵⁴

iv. Role Virtues in Business

The final component of a character-based theory of business is a list of business virtues. Which qualities of character should be fostered in human beings playing business roles? What are the traits that make a good business person?

The exercise of roles—from personal roles to professional and business roles—creates special moral demands because roles are socially important (they serve the purpose of the institutions in which they are inserted) and psychologically significant (they contribute to the formation of our identity and moral development). Playing roles changes our moral space in the sense that we learn to be good and find role models in the context of the family and the social, business, and political institutions we inhabit.

Business ethics is, among other things, about the special permissions, requirements, and prohibitions the exercise of business roles entails. And virtue ethicists in business have good reasons to consider the special qualities of character that business roles demand. It seems pretty clear that the character traits that make a good doctor are at least partially different from the character traits that make a good soldier or a good politician. What are the excellences of character in the field of business?

The answer to this question depends on how we understand the nature of the practice of business and the purpose of business. Virtue scholars in business emphasize the “purposiveness (or ‘teleology’) that defines every human enterprise, including business.”⁵⁵ According to Solomon, the goal of business is neither profits nor competition, but rather the good life: “the purpose of business is to promote prosperity, to provide essential and desirable goods, to make life easier.”⁵⁶ From this premise, business virtues are defined as “the traits of character that make mutual knowledge or understanding possible.”⁵⁷

Solomon (1992) proposes four basic business virtues: namely, honesty, fairness, trust, and toughness.⁵⁸ Hartman (1996) adds practical wisdom. Murphy (1999) further adds integrity, respect, and empathy to Solomon's list. Positive psychologists have identified twenty-four “measurable character strengths,” which are grouped into six “core virtues,” namely, wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence.⁵⁹ And empirical business scholars have similarly compiled the excellences in business into twenty-four associated business virtues organized along six virtue dimensions, namely, integrity, empathy, warmth, conscientiousness, courage, and zeal.⁶⁰

There are a number of problems with these lists of virtues. First, charges of circularity arise because the proponents (e.g., Solomon) seem to suggest that our nature or the characteristic function of human beings is what they have assumed to be the virtues in

the first place. Second, the catalogs of virtues and character strengths previously discussed imply that business virtues are not different from, but rather an application of, more general (or ordinary) virtues to the business context because commercial activities are part of social life, and so the virtues of ordinary life simply apply to business activities (or, we can say that the business virtues are derived from more general or ordinary virtues). In other words, the assumption is that the excellences of character that make a person a good business person overlap with the character traits that make him or her a good person as a human being. Yet, several commentators argue that competitive markets are hostile to character development. A critical examination of these claims is provided in the next section.

Another polemic about the list of business virtues is the possibility of ascribing character concepts to collective entities such as business firms. The claim that a good organization—like the good community—makes virtue and the good life coincide is relatively uncontroversial, as there is convincing evidence that corporate culture can support or threaten the cultivation of virtue.⁶¹ After all, as Aristotle says, good citizens of good states are good people, but good citizens of bad states are not (and cannot be) good people.⁶²

But some authors defend the more radical claim that a business corporation has its own moral character and can cultivate, retain, and lose the virtues, as any human being can. Moore speaks of the organization as having a virtuous or vicious character: “A virtuous corporate character is the seat of the virtues necessary for a corporation to engage in practices with excellence, focusing on those internal goods thereby obtainable, while warding off threats from its own inordinate pursuit of external goods and from the corrupting power of other institutions with which it engages.”⁶³ Adopting MacIntyre’s definition of virtue as “dispositions not only to act in particular ways, but also to feel in particular ways,” Moore argues that corporations can develop such emotional dispositions. Along similar lines, business scholars propose the idea of “organizational virtuousness,”⁶⁴ and political philosophers explain the conditions for the kind of collective entities—including business firms—that would be capable of exhibiting *akrasia*.⁶⁵

For the reasons articulated in the examination of the notion of virtue (section II.i.), it seems that we can only accept the idea of collective character in a metaphorical way. Would Aristotle say that a state can be virtuous or vicious? Maybe he would say that a state, perhaps even an organization, can be virtuous by analogy. But taking character seriously entails resisting the idea of extending *aretaic* concepts to entities that cannot be praised or blamed for the character traits they are said to possess. While we ought to think about what we might reasonably want our interests to be, or what we would choose to prefer if we could choose thoughtfully and rationally, the idea of a nation or a business firm deliberating about its second-order desires does not make any sense. The analogue to a second-order desire would be something like an ideal. So, for example, a nation or a company might have certain ideals that it does not always live up to. In any event, we can legitimately blame (or praise) only the members of the firm for the corporate activities and practices that promote or impair character development in the organization, as they are the ones who possess the psychological attributes that virtues and vices entail.

III. OBJECTIONS, CHALLENGES, AND REPLIES

Several objections have been raised against character-based business ethics. Here I shall focus on three of the most serious and sketch the lines along which virtue ethicists might proceed in formulating a reply.

i. Market Virtues, Private Vices

The first objection holds that the virtue approach is incompatible with market institutions and the capitalist firm because they inhibit the development of virtue. In contrast to Solomon's assumption that business is a cooperative activity, the objection stresses the adversarial nature of business roles and the for-profit nature of the capitalist firm.

Plato famously argues that commerce corrupts the soul and that money alters our evaluations of right and wrong. Marx believes that business virtues spring from a capitalist system that is inherently immoral, which cannot exist without exploitation and alienation. Sennett (1998) describes how money and business practices corrode moral character. And Cohen explains why the market is intrinsically repugnant, namely, because greed and fear are repugnant motives, and so it is not a good idea to run a society on the basis of such motives: "It is the genius of the market that it (1) recruits low-grade motives to (2) desirable ends; but (3) it also produces undesirable effects, including significant unjust inequality."⁶⁶

What makes things worse is that the champions of the virtue approach in business ethics, Aristotle and MacIntyre, are hostile to business. Aristotle harshly criticized the business world of his day. His analysis of just exchange and the just price of a house or a shoe,⁶⁷ his critical examination of commerce (*kapelike*) vis-à-vis natural property acquisition (*chrematistike*),⁶⁸ his objections against lending money at interest,⁶⁹ and his story about Thales de Miletus's speculation in the market of olive presses⁷⁰ all lead to the contention that profit and commerce are inimical to moral virtue.

For similar reasons, MacIntyre dismisses business ethics because capitalism and markets corrupt practices and favor the acquisition of external over internal goods. A practice in MacIntyre is a "coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity,"⁷¹ which is performed according to standards of excellence, thereby creating goods internal to the practice. The problem is that "much modern industrial productive and service work is organized so as to exclude the features distinctive of a practice."⁷² He is afraid that if the pursuit of external goods becomes dominant in a society, virtue will suffer "first attrition and then perhaps something near total effacement."⁷³

In response to the objection, Miller (2013) argues that Aristotle's harsh criticisms of commerce, banking, and commodity speculation of his time are not only wrong, but also inconsistent with the Stagirite's virtue theory. Miller suggests that fair financial

exchange can be based on mutual need that would make the payment of interest permissible and that a case can be made that Thales is not an exploiter but rather someone providing a valuable social service.

Furthermore, Moore (2005) challenges the MacIntyrean skepticism about business virtues, articulating an account of business as a practice (in MacIntyre's own terms) but acknowledging that, as other practices, business can be undermined by institutions. So, the special role of management is to protect the practice of business from the capitalist form of institutions, while making sure that they provide the firm with the external goods that are necessary for the firm to compete successfully.

More generally, Solomon (1999) insists that Aristotle is overly pessimistic about the possibility of virtue in business: a successful company can be a good community that encourages motivation and fosters excellences of character that do not appear in other contexts. And Hartman (2013) argues that the adversarial nature of business does not by itself undermine virtue.

Still, one may argue that these replies miss the point, as Aristotle is posing a more fundamental challenge. Solomon assumes that business has a purpose—to promote prosperity—but many may reject the idea of a single purpose and/or the particular purpose that Solomon has in mind. Economist Milton Friedman (1970), for one, contends that—in the adversarial context of competitive markets—the (only) purpose of business is to increase its profits. While most of the business virtues in Solomon's catalog are fully compatible with the virtues of the good person, it is based on a non-adversarial conception of business, which emphasizes cooperation over competition. Friedman thinks about capitalist institutions and the business firm in competitive terms, which is compatible with the cultivation of bad character traits to succeed in business roles.

Aristotle seems to side with Friedman rather than with Solomon and Hartman when he describes how a person practicing business may be bad as a human being because the function of commerce is “unnatural.” Commerce leads to the unlimited accumulation of money, which is inconsistent with the human function of rationality. Artisans, merchants, shopkeepers, and all those involved in the production of wealth cannot develop good character traits or flourish as human beings.⁷⁴

Some business executives and empirical scholars apparently agree with Aristotle and Friedman. John Moulton, the maverick of the private equity industry, lists the character traits that made him successful in a 2010 interview with the *Financial Times*: “Determination, curiosity and insensitivity—it lets you sleep when others can't.”⁷⁵

Management guru Jeffrey Pfeffer (2015) argues that even though transparency is considered a business virtue, the ability to lie can be very useful for getting ahead, that breached agreements are a customary part of business, that immodesty is a frequent path to success, and that most successful corporate leaders have mastered the art of being inauthentic.

Psychologists are equally skeptical about what success in business roles demands. Board and Fritzon (2005) compared personality disorder traits across hospitalized criminals, psychiatric patients, and senior business manager samples and found that

a number of psychopathic attributes—from superficial charm to egocentricity to persuasiveness to lack of empathy to restricted focus—were more common in business leaders than in disturbed criminals. The key difference is that corporate officers are encouraged to exhibit these qualities in social rather than antisocial contexts.⁷⁶ Furnham, Trickey, and Hyde (2012) found that “dark side” traits might be advantageous in business occupations.⁷⁷ Dutton (2012) reports that CEOs ranked highest on the Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale, followed by lawyers, TV and radio workers, salespeople, surgeons, and journalists.⁷⁸ And Owen and Davidson (2009) describe the existence of a Hubris Syndrome, an acquired personality disorder that arises in political and business leaders because of the effects of power on their brains.⁷⁹ In sum, what the evidence apparently suggests is that the qualities that characterize the psychopathic criminal mind are very close to the set of traits that are often best rewarded in the business world.

One could defend Solomon and Hartman by reframing the objection as merely an objection about the character traits that prevail in capitalist firms as a matter of fact.⁸⁰ So, even if Solomon and Hartman offer a poor description of how business is conducted and even if it is the case that there is a plurality of business purposes, one could redescribe “the natural purpose of business” as the legitimating function of the activity, that is, the single purpose that justifies business as a social institution, such as the realization of certain ethical values and the cultivation of excellences such as loyalty, honesty, and care for the interests of all involved.

Alternatively, one could reply that Aristotle’s objections against commerce and profit-seeking are not only a poor description of business institutions but also a wrong application of his own principles. Aristotle holds, rightly, that human beings are unique in possessing a rational faculty and so capable of ruling themselves and possessing the virtues. Arguably, he applies his principle defectively when he considers that some human beings are not capable of self-rule because their rationality is either impaired (woman) or completely lacking (slaves).⁸¹ As Miller (2013) explains, even if Aristotle’s general principles are reasonable, the way he applies (some of) them is objectionable.

Finally, the claim that a good business person cannot be good *qua* human being (or, conversely, that a virtuous person cannot possibly succeed in the business world) is less problematic for the non-eudaimonist accounts of virtue explored in section II.ii., which do not expect the virtues of a business person (*qua* business person) to be the same as the virtues of a person (*qua* human being). In Swanton’s pluralistic virtue ethics, how to be a good business person is not derived from the purpose of business as a whole because “the ethics of the part cannot be derived from the ethics of the whole of which it is a part.”⁸² Accordingly, we need to distinguish the goal of the firm from the goal of the individual working for the firm. One may argue that we cannot determine the virtue of a business person by looking at the end of business.⁸³ Therefore, ordinary virtues such as generosity or care may be incompatible with business roles in capitalist firms if they entail helping the opposite side to win.

ii. Lack of Decision-Making Guidelines

A second objection to character-based business ethics is that it does not provide moral guidance for action. Ethical issues in business are often framed as dilemmas about what to do, and virtue ethics does not provide action-guiding principles. It does advise one to do “what a virtuous agent would characteristically (i.e., acting in character) do in the circumstances.”⁸⁴ But that is, according to the objection, too vague to be able to tell us what to do. And it often provides bad advice and wrong evaluations to non-virtuous agents, who should not always do what a virtuous person would do in the circumstances.⁸⁵ Moreover, it has the problem of how we are to identify the virtuous person without being parochial.

This is regarded as a major weakness of an ethical theory in business schools and in the corporate world. Managers often face complex situations involving deep conflicts of values, clashing responsibilities, ambiguous standards, factual uncertainties, aggressive stakeholders, and intense time pressures. The claim is that business decisions such as blowing the whistle, bribing foreign public officials, or firing loyal and competent employees in the context of a crisis call for a decision procedure that gives managers specific instructions for how to act, which are supposed to be applicable to everyone in the same way. We allegedly search for a systematic method to deliver answers about the right thing to do.

Furthermore, the assumption that we all can flourish—or achieve some non-eudaimonist ideal—through a life of virtue fails to acknowledge the fact that our interests may conflict and that there may be conflicting virtues, as when we are asked to reveal sensitive confidential information to a colleague who is also a friend. A distinctive feature of economic life is scarcity, which is a source of conflicts for goods that are in limited supply. One of the alleged tasks of a business ethics theory is to provide a framework to manage such conflicts. Yet, virtue ethics does not offer a theory of conflict resolution, but only some rules of thumb to facilitate the use of practical wisdom.

In response to the objection, we can say that *aretaic* concepts do tell us what to do. We should do what is generous, avoid unjust actions, not be dishonest, and so on. This is what Hursthouse proposes as virtue rules, or ‘v-rules.’⁸⁶ But the admonition to act virtuously does not by itself provide, according to the objection, much help. Business executives expect from a moral theory more than a criterion of how to live well; it should provide accurate decision-making procedures that tell them clearly what to do in certain circumstances. Neither can the appeal to intelligence or practical wisdom convince business people, since wisdom is not something that can be fully characterized in terms of rules or principles.

The virtue ethical criterion of right action must be explanatory, so the virtuous person should be identified independently of his or her performing the right action. To avoid circularity, we can use Annas’s (2011) analogy between learning to be good from moral exemplars and the acquisition of a practical skill. In the process of learning, a beginner passes from the state of being a learner to the state of being an expert. For example, the beginner builder needs to learn by picking a role model and mimicking what the role

model does. Gradually, the beginner learns to build better and engages in this practice in a way that is less dependent on the examples of the role model and expresses more understanding of his or her own. Now consider the case of Sebastian, a young manager. Like the builder, a manager progresses from piecemeal understanding of the practice of business to a more unified and explanatory understanding of his own.

How does this help to address the problem of the theory's lack of practical guidance in business decision-making? Resembling the builder, Sebastian begins by doing what he is taught is the right thing to do, roughly emulating the actions that Mary, a virtuous manager in the company, does. As Sebastian progresses in virtue, he does these things as a good business person does them, for the right reasons, out of the right motives, at the right time, with respect to the right people, and with greater understanding of what virtue requires in his role. Eventually, he gets better at doing the virtuous action.

Mary, the experienced manager acting as a role model, does not intend to produce in Sebastian a clone-like disciple who mimics all she does, but rather a pupil who will become an expert himself, something that Sebastian can only achieve if he acquires his own understanding of the subject. How does Sebastian identify the virtuous manager? In the same way we identify a good builder. At first he just accepts the manager's (or the builder's) credentials, but as he becomes more experienced and knowledgeable he may challenge the expert's advice. Sebastian may fail to find the fully virtuous person, but will be guided by tutors who are more experienced and virtuous than he is and so help him improve his practical reasoning and decision-making skills.

Sebastian does not need a theory to tell him what to do. He does not want such a business ethics theory. The absence of a moral algorithm is indeed a strength, more than a problem of character-based business ethics, because the right action cannot be codified into a set of principles; we can seek only the degree of precision that the nature of the subject admits of.⁸⁷ It takes managers years of experience to develop a reliable ability to see what is salient. A virtuous manager like Mary has developed through habituation similar skills to grasp the ethically salient features of a situation—that others fail to see—and to act on them. Sebastian has good reasons for trusting her intuitions; he learns by watching Mary—what she says and does—and by checking how her choices turn out.

While we must concede that there is some degree of indeterminacy in the character-based account of rightness, we should stress that its rivals in normative business ethics do not fare any better. Indeed, one can confidently argue that utilitarianism,⁸⁸ Kantian theory,⁸⁹ contractualism,⁹⁰ and libertarianism⁹¹ are even less successful than virtue ethics in guiding managerial action. Applying principles and rules in business decision-making is not an exercise of logic but a matter of judgment.

iii. Lack of Character

The third objection to character-based business ethics holds that it is untenable because it encourages the cultivation of traits that, as a matter of fact, do not exist or do not explain behavior. The objection is built upon the literature in experimental social

psychology that allegedly proves (1) that people are so inconsistent in their behavior that it is not worthwhile to classify them in terms of character traits,⁹² and (2) that what really explains and predicts people's behavior is the immediate social situation, rather than the agent's personality.⁹³

Situationism, which is roughly an empirically grounded objection to virtue ethics, uses experimental studies in social psychology, ranging from the infamous studies on obedience by Milgram to the Stanford experimental prison by Zimbardo, to make the case that the power of mood, conformity, imitation, and other social expectations outweighs the influence of personality differences in determining human behavior in organizations.⁹⁴ Whether someone will behave, say, generously in response to a stranger's request for help on the street will depend on the agent's degree of hurriedness, regardless of how generous he or she is according to personality measures.⁹⁵ Whether a subject obeys orders to administer electric shocks of up to 450 volts to a person known to be innocent does not depend, according to situationism, on the person being compassionate or cruel, but rather on situational variables such as whether he or she receives the orders by phone or in person, whether he or she can see the victim, and so on.⁹⁶

Paraphrasing Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, it does not make much sense to think about "the man and his circumstances" if the only thing that matters to explain human behavior are "the circumstances." We can distinguish at least two versions of situationism. The strongest version⁹⁷ holds that character traits of the sort assumed by virtue ethics are unlikely to exist, that the environment makes the most significant contribution to explain and predict people's behavior, and that we too often succumb to the fundamental attribution error (that is, our tendency to explain behavior by reference to the virtues). A more qualified version of situationism⁹⁸ does not deny the existence of traits or their correlations with behavior, but it holds that such traits are so narrow that they cannot qualify as what virtue ethicists call the virtues and, even if they are global, they are possessed by so few people that their influence on behavior is negligible. According to this second version, there is no reason to expect the fearless firefighter who breaks into a burning house to save a child to be just as brave when he contemplates a visit to the urologist (and that would count as evidence against character-based business ethics).

Social psychologists have determined that the effect of character on behavior is minimal: a correlation of 0.40 represents the upper limit to which we can predict human behavior using personality measures.⁹⁹ It follows, according to the situationists, that character traits of the sort postulated by virtue ethicists as the virtues have minor predictive and explanatory value and that the factors that really govern behavior are simply overlooked by character-based theories. As situationists in business ethics conclude, "there is no point advising companies to cultivate virtuous character traits among their employees if no more than a few saints have any chance of achieving them, while for the rest of us the exercise has no detectable influence on behavior."¹⁰⁰

There are at least four distinctive ways to respond to situationism. First, virtue ethics may be freed from any commitment to character. According to that position, virtue

concepts would apply only to actions and mental states occurring at a particular time, rather than to global and stable character traits.¹⁰¹ This sort of “Virtue Ethics without Character Traits,”¹⁰² of course, would not count as a character-based theory of business.

Second, virtue ethicists may resist the claim that a normative theory can be dismissed on the grounds that it does not provide accurate predictions of what most people do (or that it does not offer principles of conduct that are achievable by most people). Character-based business ethics aims to provide an account of the ideal moral life in business organizations that we should aspire to attain, even if we are unsuccessful.¹⁰³ In the end, the virtues might be rare enough to not leave a statistically significant footprint in psychological studies.¹⁰⁴

Third, we can simply challenge the empirical claim that the experimental evidence discredits the existence of character traits or their predictive and explanatory power. The studies cited by the situationist involve, at least, five distinctive methodological problems:¹⁰⁵

- (i) The ecological validity of the studies is controversial, as situational factors are less powerful in natural contexts than they are in experimental contexts. In addition, the standard for measuring causal effects (i.e., random assignment of individuals to treatment and comparison) does not accurately reproduce behavior in business organizations, where there is no random assignment, but rather people selecting themselves into and out of situations.
- (ii) There is a sizable body of literature on dispositional effects in personality psychology and organizational scholarship. For example, recent work has shown that individual differences in moral character significantly predict counterproductive work behaviors (CWB)—such as lying, stealing, abusing colleagues, and other harmful acts—and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB)—such as mentoring, volunteering, expressing gratitude, and other helpful acts.¹⁰⁶
- (iii) The experimental conditions highlighted by situationism may have prevented the expression of virtue because under extreme circumstances, situations usually rule behavior, especially in the lab.
- (iv) The situationist evidence consists entirely of one-shot studies, which are insufficient to assess the state of character of a person. The experiments did not track the behavior of particular individuals across situations on multiple occasions. Correlations between character and behavior necessarily look higher when aggregates of behavior, rather than single instances of behavior, are compared. Hence, longitudinal studies are needed in order to support any empirical claim about the predictive power of traits.
- (v) The inference of individual behavior from the behavior of groups is also disputable because not all individuals in a group behave like the group average. What situationists present as correlations of behavioral consistency are merely relationships between the distributions of a population’s behavior in different situations; however, they do not reflect different behaviors performed by particular individuals.

Situationism holds that the effect of personality on behavior is minimal, but a correlation of 0.40 is bigger than it seems, and indeed it is as high as what situations can explain.¹⁰⁷ While there are possible replies to these objections, they make a good empirically based case against both the stronger and the more qualified versions of situationism. The empirical data support a synthetic theory of behavior according to which both persons and situations and persons *in situations*¹⁰⁸ best explain behavior in business organizations. This conclusion has surely an Aristotelian flavor, since he emphasizes, in discussing the doctrine of the mean, the importance of taking the details of the situation into account.¹⁰⁹

Psychologists argue that after a long “stalemate,”¹¹⁰ the person-situation debate came to an end,¹¹¹ and today there is agreement that both the person and the situation play an important part in influencing people’s behavior. Situational variables are best suited to predict behavior in specific situations, while character traits are more relevant to patterns of behavior: although single behaviors are less predictable, the average level of these distributions should be highly predictable and show consistency over time and across situations.¹¹²

The fourth way to respond to the situationist objection is by highlighting the fundamental disagreement between virtue ethicists and psychologists in their conceptualization of virtue. As explained in section II, virtue ethicists argue that the virtues are more than behavioral dispositions, involving higher-order desires and values, beliefs, framing capacities, emotions, and enduring patterns of behavior that have any bearing on moral matters. Virtue has intellectual, emotional, motivational, and behavioral dimensions that are interrelated but that cannot be reduced or described solely in terms of any of the others. But psychologists hold that virtue entails an expectation of consistent behavioral manifestations of the virtue as a necessary condition of its existence,¹¹³ and define virtue in terms of the qualities of what they take to be the virtuous action. Character attribution is, according to that position, a means of saying that the person will act in a certain way across time and situations.¹¹⁴ Such a reductive account of virtue is defective because for an action to be from a state of character (i.e., for an action to be expressive of virtue) it must bespeak appropriate inner states. Hence, a seemingly virtuous action is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to grant a virtue ascription: not necessary because a virtuous person may fail to act in a virtuous manner,¹¹⁵ and not sufficient because even a non-virtuous agent may do what the virtuous person does.¹¹⁶ While the absence of appropriate behavior may lead to doubts that a person possesses the relevant virtue, the presence of appropriate behavior does not imply that a person does possess the relevant virtue.

Moreover, the experimental data invoked by situationists to discredit virtue ethics do not capture a key distinction between incontinence and vice, on the one hand, and continence and virtue, on the other.¹¹⁷ Virtue and vice mark the endpoints of a spectrum of states of character that includes heroic virtue, ordinary virtue, continence, incontinence, vice, and brutishness. Psychological studies that primarily focus on overt behavior will lack enough information to draw inferences about a subject’s state of character because in observing behavior, the experimenter might readily confuse the *enkratic* or

continent person with the virtuous person, and the weak-willed person with the vicious person.

Finally, reducing virtue to behavior fails to say much about the explanatory power of virtues because the psychologist might readily attribute behavior to a wrong disposition, or might mistakenly attribute to situations what should be attributed to a different, conflicting disposition. Behavior is overdetermined because we have more than one character trait. Those traits may sometimes conflict in a situation, in which case behavioral inconsistency may be the result not of the absence of a trait underlying behavior, but rather, the result of different traits that are manifested in a situation.¹¹⁸ Whereas the virtue of honesty points to telling the upsetting truth, compassion calls for remaining silent or even lying. If so, the virtue of honesty and the virtue of compassion would be observationally equivalent, as when you fail to tell the truth to the Nazi official who asks you for the whereabouts of the Jews you have hidden in your basement.¹¹⁹

IV. CONCLUSION

A character-based theory provides a congenial framework for the practice of business and can offer the resources for a new theory of the firm as we seek to understand and legitimate the conduct of business in and for society. According to this theory, business ethics is primarily about character, rather than actions. Its center is the nature of the human person and the nature of business that is part of humanity. The values that are used to appraise business conduct and success under such a theory must be somehow related to actualizing human nature in the context of the production and exchange of goods and services. This theory of business is only secondarily about the actions that persons do and about the principles and rules they follow in decision-making because business ethics is not an exact science, and relying on principles and rules does not make it any more exact. The purpose of a character-based theory of business is not to provide sophisticated algorithms to guide decision-making, but rather something like a fitness program to run a race.

If it aims to become a plausible alternative, a full theory of virtue has to offer an account of what virtue in business is, it must outline the links between virtue and goodness, it should provide an account of rightness and the virtuous action, and it must help identify the business virtues and corresponding vices.

A character-based theory of business practice entails a shift of research focus in academic business ethics, from political philosophy to managerial ethics; that is, emphasis must be moved from the study of the ways in which theories of justice and democracy evaluate markets and firms to the study of the decision-making processes at the individual and organizational levels that promote and impair human flourishing.

A good organization requires loyalty, honesty, cooperativeness, and concern for the interests of all involved. Rather than a nexus of contracts among different corporate

constituents—as economic theory defines the corporation—a character-based theory of business understands the firm as a community through which humans can excel and flourish. That is the nature and the legitimating purpose of the firm. To some extent, corporate members find their identity and meaning in the organizations in and for which they work. Being part of such communities then becomes important for living a meaningful life. The business virtues are thus not only important to achieve external goods such as profits, but also essential to achieve the internal goods of the practice of business, such as friendship, self-realization, and a sense of belonging.

Consequently, the central issue of business ethics becomes how to live well. And the challenge is how to help those who are affected by the conduct of business, both internal agents and external stakeholders, to live better lives. In his or her role as an ethicist, the virtue scholar is committed to describe forms of the good life in business and to suggest ways to achieve it in the context of the economic institutions that we have and that we should aim to have.¹²⁰

NOTES

1. C. Peterson, and M. E. P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Classification and Handbook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); J. Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* (New York: Basic Books, 2006); K. S. Cameron, and B. Winn, "Virtuousness in Organizations," in *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Organizational Scholarship*, edited by K. S. Cameron and G. M. Spreitzer, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 231–243.
2. L. K. Trevino and K. Nelson, *Managing Business Ethics: Straight Talk about How to Do It Right*, 3rd edition (New York: Wiley, 2003); T. Donaldson and P. Werhane, *Ethical Issues in Business: A Philosophical Approach*, 8th edition (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2008); J. R. Boatright, *Ethics and the Conduct of Business* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2012); M. Velasquez, *Business Ethics, A Teaching and Learning Classroom Edition: Concepts and Cases* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2012).
3. D. G. Arnold, K. E. Goodpaster, and G. R. Weaver, "Past Trends and Future Directions in Business Ethics and Corporate Responsibility Scholarship," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 25(4) (2015): v–xv.
4. R. De George, *A History of Business Ethics* (Santa Clara: Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, University of Santa Clara, 2005).
5. A. Marcoux, "Business Ethics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta (2008). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/ethics-business/>
6. J. Heath, J. Moriarty, and W. Norman, "Business Ethics and (or as) Political Philosophy," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 20(3) (2010): 427–452.
7. R. Solomon, *Ethics and Excellence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); E. M. Hartman, *Organizational Ethics and the Good Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
8. Two clarifications are in order. First, I am thinking of practices as something like typical ways of doing things. Second, practices do not have the same priority as persons. As explained in the following, acts are secondary in moral evaluation.

9. These theses are opposed to the traditional claims that (1) the value of one's qualities of character depends on the value of the actions such qualities characteristically produce, and (2) the concept of rightness is normatively more basic or fundamental than the concept of virtue.
10. R. Audi, "Virtue Ethics as a Resource in Business," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 22(2) (2012): 273–291.
11. Cameron and Winn, "Virtuousness in Organizations"; S. J., Lopez and C. R. Snyder (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
12. L. T. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 102.
13. Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea* (EN), translated by T. H. Irwin, 2nd edition (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1999), 1106a13–14.
14. M. Alzola, "The Possibility of Virtue," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 22 (2012): 377–404.
15. Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, 1115a17–18.
16. Aristotle, *De Anima*, 427b8–428a4; Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, 1114a32–b3, 1141b12–14, 1143b9–15, 1147a18–35.
17. Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, 1105b25–26, 1111b1–5, 1115a8–16, 1125b26–1126a30; Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1378a24–28, 1379b31–32, 1382b33–35.
18. Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, 1104b13–16, 1139b1–5, 1145b915, 1146b10–17, 1150a2–8; Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1368b12–25, 1369a1–4.
19. Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, 1103b30, 1104b1–5, 1105b10–19, 1106b32, 1111b5–6, 1140b6–7, 1150b1–7, 1152a8, 1099a32–1099b6, 1178b6–7, 1179a4–10. See also J. M. Cooper, "Aristotle on the Goods of Fortune," *The Philosophical Review* 94(2) (1985): 173–196.
20. Character is also, as Aristotle says, a matter of what one enjoys, namely, the good things if one is a good person, the bad ones if one is bad. Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, 1104b5ff.
21. E. M. Hartman, *Virtue in Business: Conversations with Aristotle* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
22. Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Classification and Handbook*, 3.
23. I am not arguing that operationalizing and measuring moral character is possible. We should recall Aristotle's warning not to expect too much precision of our subject matter, as I will suggest later. See R. Curren and B. Kotzee, "Can Virtue Be Measured?" *Theory and Research in Education* 12(3) (2014): 266–282; N. E. Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010); and M. Alzola, "Virtuous Persons and Virtuous Actions in Business Ethics and Organizational Research," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 25(3) (2015): 287–318.
24. G. H. Von Wright, *The Varieties of Goodness* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1963).
25. D. Bright, B. Winn, and J. Kanov, "Reconsidering Virtue: Differences of Perspectives in Virtue Ethics and the Positive Social Sciences," *Journal of Business Ethics* 119 (2014): 445–460.
26. See Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Classification and Handbook*. Surely not all psychologists are behaviorists in this way. A psychologist might think of psychological states as theoretical entities that explain behavior without supposing that there is a one-to-one correspondence between some psychological state and some sort of behavior (see W. Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997]). Psychological states may act on one another, as will be discussed later when exploring how virtues may compete in bringing about behavior.

27. Alzola, "The Possibility of Virtue."
28. It might also at the same time explain some action of hers. Whether "Cynthia is courageous" is descriptive or explanatory may depend on whether one is being asked "What is Cynthia like?" or "Why is Cynthia so resolute about going to the dentist?"
29. The business ethics literature is mostly focused on virtue and largely deficient in talking about evil. J. Heath, *Morality, Competition, and the Firm: The Market Failures Approach to Business Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), highlights that a neglected area of the theory is an account of why people act immorally. See also Audi, "Virtue Ethics as a Resource in Business."
30. Hartman, *Organizational Ethics and the Good Life*; H. Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).
31. B. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); J. McDowell, "Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following," in *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 198–220.
32. M. A. Slote, *Morals from Motives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
33. J. Davenport, "Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics: Kierkegaard and Macintyre," in *Kierkegaard after MacIntyre: Essays on Freedom, Narrative, and Virtue*, edited by John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd (Chicago: Open Court, 2001), 265–324.
34. C. Swanton, *The Virtue Ethics of Hume and Nietzsche*, Vol. 3 (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2015).
35. J. Driver, *Uneasy Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
36. W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford University Press, 1930).
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39. C. Swanton, "Can Hume Be Read as a Virtue Ethicist?" *Hume Studies* 33(1) (2007): 209.
40. C. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 194.
41. R. B. Loudon, "Kant's Virtue Ethics," *Philosophy* 61(238) (1986): 473–489; O. O'Neill, "Kant's Virtues," in *How Should One Live? Essays on the Virtues*, edited by R. Crisp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 77–97; C. Dierksmeier, "Kant on Virtue," *Journal of Business Ethics* 113(4) (2013): 597–609.
42. H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1981); B. Hooker, *Ideal Code, Real World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*.
43. E.g., J. D. Wallace, *Virtues and Vices* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978).
44. E.g., D. Solomon, "Internal Objections to Virtue Ethics," in French et al. (1988): 428–441. Solomon, D. (1988). Internal objections to virtue ethics. *Midwest studies in philosophy*, 13(1), 428–441.
45. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 224.
46. Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, 72.
47. Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, 60.
48. Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, vii.
49. B. Gert, *Morality: Its Nature and Justification*, revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 184.
50. A. Gewirth, *Reason and Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 339.
51. G. Harman, "Academics and Institutional Differentiation in Australian Higher Education," *Higher Education Policy* 14 (2001): 325–342.

52. Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, 1105b5ff.
53. Because if a bad person does act A, which is precisely the act that a virtuous person would do under the circumstances, then the act is not morally right.
54. At this point, someone may ask how one can know that Cynthia is virtuous without observing what she does. I suppose one's observation of Cynthia leads one to attribute to her certain states that explain her behavior. So, to use roughly Aristotelian terminology, action is prior in knowledge but posterior in being. One might also know that Cynthia is virtuous by coming to know how she feels; i.e., her emotional reactions, revealed by facial expressions, speech, body language, etc., can bespeak the fine inner states associated with virtue, even if Cynthia does not express how she feels in actions.
55. Solomon, *Ethics and Excellence*, 103.
56. Solomon, *Ethics and Excellence*, 118.
57. Solomon, *Ethics and Excellence*, 208.
58. He also adds friendliness, honor, loyalty, sincerity, courage, reliability, benevolence, sensitivity, helpfulness, cooperativeness, civility, decency, modesty, openness, cheerfulness, amiability, tolerance, reasonableness, tactfulness, wittiness, gracefulness, liveliness, magnanimity, persistence, prudence, resourcefulness, cool-headedness, warmth, and hospitality. In a 1999 piece, Solomon further lists pride, confidence, dependability, effectiveness, ambition, articulateness, competitiveness, contentment, creativeness, determination, entrepreneurship, generosity, graciousness, gratitude, heroism, humility, humor, independence, passion, saintliness, shame, tolerance, and zeal. See R. Solomon, *A Better Way to Think about Business: How Personal Integrity Leads to Corporate Success* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
59. Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Classification and Handbook*.
60. R. Chun, "Ethical Character and Virtue of Organizations: An Empirical Assessment and Strategic Implications," *Journal of Business Ethics* 57(3) (2005): 269–284.
61. Hartman, *Organizational Ethics and the Good Life*; K. Goodpaster, *Conscience and Corporate Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).
62. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1276b15.
63. G. Moore, "Corporate Character: Modern Virtue Ethics and the Virtuous Corporation," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 15(4) (2005): 661.
64. Cameron and Winn, "Virtuousness in Organizations."
65. P. Pettit, "Akrasia, Collective and Individual," in *Weakness of Will and Practical Irrationality*, edited by S. Stroud and C. Tappolet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 68–96.
66. G. A. Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 78.
67. Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, 1133a7–14.
68. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1258b1–2.
69. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1258b2–3.
70. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1259a9–23.
71. A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 187.
72. A. MacIntyre, "Corporate Modernity and Moral Judgment: Are They Mutually Exclusive?" in *Ethics and the Problems of the 21st Century*, edited by K. E. Goodpaster and K. M. Syre (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 286.
73. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 196.
74. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1278a20.
75. Available at: <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/o/32c642f2-11c1-11df-9d45-00144feab49a.html#axzz2oi57lYeH>.

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79. D. Owen and J. Davidson, "Hubris Syndrome: An Acquired Personality Disorder? A Study of US Presidents and UK Prime Ministers over the Last 100 Years," *Brain* 132(5) (2009): 1396–1406. See also I. H. Robertson, *The Winner Effect: The Neuroscience of Success and Failure* (New York: Macmillan, 2012).
80. Or, Solomon and Hartman may reply that the adversarial context does not impair virtue. Think of the questionable character traits of highly successful soldiers. Yet Aristotle does not seem to doubt that a soldier can be truly courageous. Clearly there is an interesting relationship between role-playing and the possibility of virtue in business given the roles that it imposes on people.
81. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1260a12–15.
82. Swanton, "Can Hume Be Read as a Virtue Ethicist?" 219.
83. T. Donaldson and J. P. Walsh, "Toward a Theory of Business," *Research in Organizational Behavior* 35 (2015): 181–207.
84. R. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 28.
85. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*.
86. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 36–39.
87. Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, 1094b24–26.
88. E.g., T. M. Jones and W. Felps, "Stakeholder Happiness Enhancement: A Neo-Utilitarian Objective for the Modern Corporation," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 23 (2013): 349–379.
89. E.g., N. E. Bowie, "A Kantian Approach to Business Ethics," in *A Companion to Business Ethics*, edited by R. E. Frederick (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 3–16.
90. E.g., T. Donaldson and T. W. Dunfee, *Ties That Bind: A Social Contracts Approach to Business Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Press, 1999).
91. E.g., M. Zwolinski, "The Ethics of Price Gouging," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 18(3) (2008): 347–378.
92. E.g., G. Harman, "No Character or Personality," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 13 (2003): 87–94; Heath, *Morality, Competition, and the Firm: The Market Failures Approach to Business Ethics*.
93. E.g., L. Ross and R. E. Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation: Perspectives of Social Psychology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); J. M. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
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96. S. Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

97. G. Harman, "The Nonexistence of Character Traits," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 100 (2000): 223–226; Harman, "No Character or Personality."
98. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*.
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100. Heath, *Morality, Competition, and the Firm: The Market Failures Approach to Business Ethics*, 332.
101. T. Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); J. J. Thomson, "The Right and the Good," *The Journal of Philosophy* 94(6) (1997): 273–298.
102. Harman, "The Nonexistence of Character Traits."
103. E.g., K. A. Appiah, *Experiments in Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).
104. Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, 1109a29.
105. M. Alzola, "Character and Environment: The Status of Virtues in Organizations," *Journal of Business Ethics* 78 (2008): 343–357.
106. T. R. Cohen, A. T. Panter, N. Turan, L. A. Morse, and Y. Kim, "Moral Character in the Workplace," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 107(5) (2014): 943–963.
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114. I. Ajzen, *Attitudes, Personality, and Behavior* (New York: McGraw-Hill International, 2005).
115. Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, 1121a5–7, 1134a6–17.
116. Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, 1117a5–10.
117. Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, 1145a15–1145b14.
118. There is a link between the philosophical debate over the normative priority of character (see section 2.3) and the methodological polemic over the reduction of virtue to actions. We cannot reduce virtue to behavior (the second polemic) if we take character and virtue to have normative priority (the first polemic) because a virtuous action is defined in terms of what a person of good character would do under the circumstances. Hence, taking character seriously entails, I submit, a commitment to a different methodological

approach to identifying and observing virtue. We need to study first the virtuous person, rather than how his or her actions are in conformity with certain principles. See Alzola, "Virtuous Persons and Virtuous Actions in Business Ethics and Organizational Research."

119. Two or more underlying qualities or processes are observationally equivalent when they are indistinguishable on the basis of their observable implications. For instance, two scientific theories are observationally equivalent if their empirically testable predictions are identical, in which case empirical evidence cannot be used to distinguish which one is correct. (See M. Wilson, "The Observational Uniqueness of Some Theories," *The Journal of Philosophy* 77(4) (1980): 208–233. Aristotle acknowledges that observationally equivalent behavior may have divergent causes. In particular, he contrasts intemperance (and its corresponding virtue, temperance) with *akrasia* (and its contrary, continence). He explains that "... we include the incontinent and the intemperate person, and the continent and the temperate person, in the same class, but we do not include any of those who are incontinent in some particular way. It is because incontinence and intemperance are, in a way, about the same pleasures and pains. In fact, they are about the same things, but not in the same way; the intemperate person decides on them, but the incontinent person does not." Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, 1148a12–18.
120. I am grateful to Edwin Hartman, Daryl Koehn, Robert Audi, and Nancy Snow for helpful guidance, comments, and suggestions on a previous draft and to Beth Henzel for invaluable editorial assistance.

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CHAPTER 31

VIRTUE JURISPRUDENCE

CHAPIN CIMINO

I. INTRODUCTION

WHILE the virtue jurisprudence movement is relatively new, Aristotelian philosophy is not new to legal scholarship. For example, Aristotelian philosophy has figured prominently in select subdisciplines in legal philosophy for some time.¹ And, while Aristotelian practical reasoning has long been celebrated in law,² the origins of modern private law have recently been traced to Aristotelian thought.³ Moreover, Aristotelianism has influenced a generation of liberal legal-political theory, including work on judicial review⁴ and civic republicanism.⁵ Aristotelian thought has also left its mark on substantive legal theory, including in criminal law⁶ and legal ethics.⁷

Recently, some scholars have returned to the question of what modern law may have to learn from Aristotle specifically, and virtue ethics generally.⁸ This particular movement is situated in the debate over normative legal theory, yet it has taken on a decidedly practical question: What would happen if we transplanted virtue ethics into normative legal theory? Specifically, this movement asks what law and legal institutions might look like if the end of law were, as in the moral theory of virtue ethics, flourishing.⁹ Pithy definitions of “flourishing” don’t come easily, but Colin Farrelly and Lawrence Solum, who organized some of this work into a generative anthology, captured it as “to enable humans to acquire, maintain and exercise the human excellences or virtues,”¹⁰ which is the conception I follow here.¹¹ This literature has been developed by scholars working within specific areas of law, such as tort, bankruptcy, contract, corporate law and property, among others.¹²

As the literature grows, one can begin to see how the aretaic perspective is contributing to our discourse about law. Here, I highlight three of those contributions. First, virtue jurisprudence can reveal hidden distorting effects of single-value normative legal theories. This contribution is causing scholars to ask whether the meaning of a law may have been changed by a dominant normative value. Second, virtue jurisprudence can illuminate whether and how a particular law helps or hinders an individual’s effort to

realize her own personal flourishing. This contribution is prompting scholars to consider a new kind of autonomy interest and how that interest can be impacted by law: that of following one's own aspiration to particular habits of character. And third, aretaic reasoning allows a legal analyst to consider multiple ends (i.e., competing rights or values) in a way that traditional single-value normative legal theories do not. This contribution identifies a new analytic method for resolving competing rights claims, which are pervasive in law.

That said, there is yet an additional and, as I will argue, ultimately game-changing way to think about this literature: that is, some of the more recent work suggests a "substantive" application of virtue jurisprudence, while other work suggests a "procedural" application. This distinction is subtle, but important. Substantive applications proceed from the premise that, to best promote human flourishing, law can and should embody what we might think of as substantively moral standards. This is probably how many imagine the theory. An example is Avery Katz's analysis of "efficient breach" of contract: Katz argues that contract law should not incentivize what the law calls "efficient breach" (which occurs when a party breaks a contract to make more money elsewhere), because doing so treats promises as casual, and casual promising is substantively undesirable.

By contrast, a procedural application of virtue jurisprudence examines the ways in which law in a particular field is applied, or how a law impacts a person's pursuit of the good life, rather than what substantive standards law should embody. An example is Matthew Bruckner's *The Virtue in Bankruptcy*: Bruckner identifies ways that open-ended standards in bankruptcy law, such as "for cause," allow (indeed, require) bankruptcy courts to consider, and ultimately order, multiple goals in bankruptcy cases. As such, Bruckner's vision of virtue jurisprudence requires courts to tailor means to ends differently in different cases. By contrast, Katz's vision of virtue jurisprudence requires courts to give a particular substantive meaning to a particular legal concept.

The distinction between substantive and procedural virtue jurisprudence is important.¹³ Because substantive applications of virtue jurisprudence seek to reform law to include more "virtuous" standards of behavior, they rightly invite questions about what these substantive standards *are*. Prominent critics asking these questions include Antony Duff,¹⁴ Katrina Wyman,¹⁵ Eric Claeys,¹⁶ and Ekow Yankah.¹⁷ An underlying concern is that virtue jurisprudence may serve as a cover for a particularly illiberal form of legal theory, driving law—in both courts and legislatures—toward a predefined set of particularly restrictive or partisan moral standards.¹⁸ Such a legal theory would be highly inconsistent with value pluralism, which liberal jurisprudence rightly demands the law to permit and even foster.¹⁹

With respect to procedural virtue jurisprudence, however, these concerns are misplaced. Recall that, as identified by Farrelly and Solum, the normative core of virtue jurisprudence is not a single value such as welfare or rights, but instead is the normative process of promoting flourishing. Thus the aim of law is a process—a normative process, to be sure—but not a single value.²⁰ As such, virtue jurisprudence can be much more consistent with liberalism and value pluralism than critics presume. Ultimately, I claim

that, in part because it begins to answer these important critiques, the procedural version is the most fruitful path forward for virtue jurisprudence.²¹

II. REVEALING HIDDEN DISTORTING EFFECTS OF SINGLE-VALUE THEORIES

One contribution that recent virtue jurisprudence scholarship has made to legal theory is to show that single-value theories can have an almost imperceptible distorting effect on the very law they seek to justify or explain. In legal theory, scholars attempt to explain or justify current law according to a single normative value. Consequentialist theories seek to explain law through the value of wealth maximization, while deontic theories seek to explain law through one of several different values, such as autonomy or rights.²² Importantly, however, single-value theories come with a subtle and significant side effect: the process of attempting to justify or explain law according to a single normative value can end up redefining the very meaning of the law that the theory is attempting to explain. Virtue jurisprudence work has illuminated this subtle but important effect. Two examples follow.

i. Tort Law's Negligence Standard

Heidi Li Feldman's analysis of the negligence standard in tort law reveals how the values underlying the two dominant normative legal theories can influence and potentially, over time, change the meaning of current tort law. Feldman has argued that, under the two dominant paradigms in tort law (including law and economics, a form of consequentialism, and some version of Kantian/Rawlsian justice), the negligence standard has been reduced from an evaluative assessment of "the conduct of a reasonable person of ordinary prudence who acts with due care for the safety of others" to simple reasonableness. As a stand-alone metric, reasonableness is substantively informed by the particular value underlying each normative approach. To law and economics scholars, that means efficiency; to a Kantian, it means autonomy; or to a Rawlsian, equality.²³ Once reduced to reasonableness, negligence law almost imperceptibly morphs into a vehicle for producing outputs that substantively mirror the particular value of each theory.

Feldman believes this has been a mistake. She argues that the purpose of a tort negligence inquiry is to identify the reasonable balance in a particular situation between two different priorities: safety and freedom.²⁴ In Aristotelian terms, the analytic method of *balancing* directs the fact-finder to account for both the means and the ends to be achieved by a law. In tort negligence, there are two ends to be achieved: safety (due care) and freedom (ordinary prudence). Those two ends are to be achieved via the conduct of a reasonable person. Crucially, this critical balancing between the dual ends and the

means is foreclosed if scholars (and later, courts) reduce the negligence inquiry to the single metric of reasonableness. Reducing negligence to reasonableness and then defining reasonableness by reference to an analyst's preferred normative value write competing priorities out of the analysis.

Although Feldman's analysis concerns the substantive elements of the tort itself, it is a fundamentally procedural application. Feldman is not suggesting that the negligence standard ought to be reformed to include particular virtues—indeed, her point is that the standard already does include the virtues of prudence and due care. Instead, her application of virtue jurisprudence focuses on the common law's legal method: to balance the competing priorities of safety and freedom in particular cases.

ii. The Bankruptcy Code's Cause Standard

Matthew Bruckner has identified a similar problem in bankruptcy law. In the *Virtue in Bankruptcy*, Bruckner argues that, as bankruptcy scholarship becomes increasingly dominated by "the creditors' rights model"—a model produced by law-and-economics analysis—the law increasingly risks losing sight of the non-efficiency values that Congress explicitly intended to matter in bankruptcy adjudication, including "equity, honesty, fairness and justice."²⁵

Specifically, the Bankruptcy Code is written as a series of inherently general laws. Inherently general laws call for a different analytic process than do strict legal rules. Strict legal rules are designed to constrain discretion, while inherently general laws do the opposite: they grant discretion to decision-makers. Bankruptcy courts are required to exercise this discretion to equitably apply the Code's general provisions. Bruckner argues that the legal method of virtue jurisprudence—practical reasoning and consideration of multiple ends—better allows bankruptcy courts to exercise this discretion than does the dominant model of analysis, the consequentialist creditor's rights model.

Bruckner argues that the creditor's rights model actually cramps judicial discretion by limiting the analysis to solely economic factors, such as maximizing the value of the estate. The model excludes consideration of equitable factors, such as how reorganization would affect non-creditor interests, like those of a company's employees.²⁶ Yet accounting for these equitable factors is especially important in bankruptcy because bankruptcy is a court of equity, and Congress has specifically directed bankruptcy courts to consider equitable values.

A concrete example of the narrowing effect of the creditor's rights model is in the Code's "cause" standard. As Bruckner writes, a typical example of the cause standard in the Code is the direction to courts to "grant relief if 'cause' exists . . . [yet] 'cause' is rarely defined by the Bankruptcy Code."²⁷ Intentionally undefined, cause does not embody any particular substantive requirement or steer decision-making to any particular outcome. The creditor's rights model, however, infuses that standard with one particular value, wealth maximization, and steers decision-making accordingly. Over time, the analytic model begins to fundamentally alter the content of the cause standard itself.

Taking the virtue jurisprudence analysis one step further, Bruckner also argues that the cause standard requires a bankruptcy court to consider the ends to be achieved by the requested grant of relief and the means by which the relief should be effected.²⁸ For example, the Code grants the court discretion to appoint a bankruptcy trustee to manage a debtor's estate "if the court determines that cause exists or because appointment 'is in the interests of creditors, equity security holders, or other interests of the estate.'"²⁹ In this way, the Code directs the judge to evaluate the panoply of ends to be served in the adjudication, and also to evaluate whether the appointment of a trustee is the best means of achieving those multiple ends. Bruckner says that a virtue jurisprudence application of the cause standard would direct the court to make decisions not according to a particular substantive metric, as does the creditor's rights model, but instead according to a more inclusive analytic process. In this way, in Bruckner's vision of virtue jurisprudence, bankruptcy courts still consider the goal of maximizing the value of the estate, but they must also evaluate multiple other ends, or goals, that are implicated in any particular case.

III. ILLUMINATING LAW'S INDIRECT IMPACT ON INDIVIDUAL FLOURISHING

Another contribution that aretaic theory has made to legal scholarship is to illuminate a particular autonomy interest that has previously been largely invisible to scholars and courts: the interest each of us has in pursuing the good life through our personal commitments to particular habits of character. While consequentialist and deontological legal theorists have certainly recognized and debated the value of autonomy generally, these conversations have not addressed this particular aspect of autonomy. Once it is surfaced, however, unexpected common ground between virtue jurisprudence and liberalism arises as both aretaic and liberal legal theorists are concerned that law not inappropriately limit one's exercise of autonomy. Two examples illustrate this contribution.

i. The Problems of "Cap and Trade" and Mandatory Disclosures

One example of a law that could inappropriately limit a person's pursuit of the good life is that of the proposed "cap and trade" policies—environmental protection policies designed to regulate carbon emissions. In *Uncommon Goods*, Jeffrey Skopek argues from an aretaic perspective that, if passed, cap and trade regulations would likely end up limiting, not promoting, environmentalists' efforts to flourish.³⁰

To illustrate, Skopek examines the critiques of cap and trade made by the dominant legal theories. The deontic criticism sees the "right to pollute" as morally objectionable,

like invidious discrimination, and as such, not one that should be sold on a market. The consequentialist criticism is that a market for carbon offsets will eventually encourage more pollution because it will de-stigmatize the problem of pollution, making it as socially acceptable as any other commodity. Skopek suggests that both critiques are valuable, yet each misses an important problem, which is that the cap and trade system does not value the kind of ethical relationship that environmentalists want to have to the environment.³¹ Having this kind of relationship to the environment is necessary for an environmentalist to flourish.

As Skopek develops the argument, being a person who values the environment produces in that person the virtues of avoiding wastefulness and a kind of temperance. An environmentalist's efforts to personally cultivate these virtues, which are necessary to her vision of the good life, are undermined by a system of cap and trade. As Skopek describes it, the carbon market may well produce an effect not unlike the one described by Feldman in tort and Bruckner in bankruptcy: of "reorient[ing] the ethic that motivated [environmental] commitments in the first place."³²

Skopek's work is substantive in that he criticizes cap and trade's impact on the development of certain virtues. However, the work is procedural to the extent that it reveals law's effect on individual efforts toward flourishing. Importantly, Skopek does not propose a substantively moral standard of conduct to be enacted into law to counterbalance the effects of cap and trade. Instead, Skopek's concern is that cap and trade hinders an interested individual's voluntary development of certain virtues. Thus his concern differs in important ways from the sort of proposal that causes liberal critics to worry: one that decides for the individual which virtues she should cultivate. By contrast, Skopek's approach to cap and trade reveals common ground between liberalism and virtue jurisprudence: promoting, not limiting, the individual's own effort to realize a good life.

ii. Mandatory Disclosure Rules

A second example of this contribution is Matthew Edwards's work on mandatory disclosure rules. Though such rules have become ubiquitous—requiring up-front disclosure of risks inherent in nearly any kind of consumer transaction, from medical procedures to securities purchases—they remain highly unpopular with both consequentialist and deontic legal scholars alike. Because the reasons for their unpopularity differ, legal scholars have yet to find a proposal for law reform they can agree on. Meanwhile, notwithstanding these trenchant critiques, mandatory disclosure rules remain pervasive.

In *The Virtue of Mandatory Disclosure*, Edwards reveals an important missing piece of the debate. Consequentialist theories, through a law-and-economics lens, evaluate mandatory disclosure rules by a cost-benefit analysis, arguing for the need to reduce both the administrative burdens and costs of disclosure. Deontic theories evaluate the rules in terms of consumer rights to information, arguing for the setting of substantive standards that ensure the disclosures have bite.³³ Like Skopek, Edwards sees an aretaic critique. He argues that mandatory disclosure rules should be evaluated by assessing how the rules help or hinder consumers in their own efforts to realize certain virtues.

Edwards worries about virtues such as temperance, frugality, prudence, or *phronesis* (practical wisdom).³⁴ Like Skopek's proposal, Edwards's proposal is substantive to the extent that he is concerned with how a law impacts a consumer's aspiration to particular habits of character. The key word is *aspires*: like Skopek, Edwards does not propose that disclosure rules require or cause virtuous behavior. Instead, he proposes that the analysis of these rules include another variable, which is their impact on an individual's ability to attain particular habits of character.

Edwards anticipates the value pluralism objection. To that end, he suggests that there are some categories of human choices where law's influence is simply more controversial than in others. For example, he identifies as highly controversial those categories that impact fundamental personal rights, such as religious or sexual choices. Others, which don't, such as making prudent financial decisions, are less controversial.³⁵

Surely this is correct. When liberal critics object to virtue jurisprudence, it could be that what they are actually objecting to is a vision of a legal system in which law regulates its citizens' most personal choices, such as sexuality or religion, according to a single (non-pluralist) moral value. Yet, I would argue that this is a concern that liberals and virtue theorists share. Like liberalism, virtue jurisprudence affirms that law is powerless in the realm of personal belief.³⁶ Similarly, both liberalism and virtue jurisprudence stress how important it is for a state to accommodate a plurality of values and ways of living.³⁷

IV. MULTIPLE VALUES, DUAL ENDS, AND ORDERING PROBLEMS

A third contribution made by this literature is that of the multiple means-ends analytic method. Specifically, one particularly challenging problem in law is what to do when a single legal question implicates multiple values, yet the applicable rule contains no decision-making metric for choosing between them. Single-value legal theories approach this problem by directing the analyst to apply the value most consistent with that theory's substantive norm. By contrast, the normative value underlying virtue jurisprudence is a process: to help people "to acquire, maintain, and exercise human excellences."³⁸ A process-based normative framework is fundamentally different from a substantive value framework. That is not to say, however, that virtue jurisprudence does not recognize a normative good. It is to say that virtue jurisprudence does not define the realm of legally recognizable good according to a single normative value.

i. Process and the Weighing of Multiple Ends

The idea that the normative aim of law could be a process—enabling flourishing—is very different from the idea that the normative aim of law is a destination—fairness, welfare, efficiency, autonomy. In this sense, the normative center of virtue jurisprudence

is at once both more comprehensive and more pluralist than liberalism. Indeed, as I have argued in earlier work, the analytic method of virtue jurisprudence directs the legal analyst to consider not only multiple possible means toward a single end, but multiple ends as well.³⁹

By that, I mean the following. Ultimately, to an Aristotelian, there is only one ultimate human end: the process of flourishing itself. That said, there are multiple ways to live a life of flourishing, and each of these ways, which we usually equate with “means,” may also be, at the same time, an “end,” meaning a goal. An example might be acquiring wealth: acquiring wealth can a worthy end if, as a goal, it serves as a means to the ultimate end of flourishing. Yet, acquiring wealth cannot, to be consistent with flourishing, be an *ultimate* end—a goal in itself. Thus, while the goal of acquiring wealth can be, as one of many goals of a human life, one means toward the end of flourishing, it can never be the ultimate goal.

Aristotelian reasoning recognizes that many single values could be a right choice when in service of the ultimate end of flourishing, but none can be the ultimate end in itself. Monistic legal theories are the opposite. For example, contract legal theorists might value either wealth maximization or promise-keeping. An Aristotelian, by contrast, would recognize that wealth maximization could serve flourishing, and so could promise-keeping. Which is best depends on the circumstances. In short, Aristotelian legal reasoning requires the analyst to consider multiple ends before preferring one over the other.⁴⁰ Monistic legal theories do not. To illustrate, I offer an example from property law scholarship.

ii. Competing Values in Property Law

One scholar who has addressed virtue theory’s potential to order competing values is Eduardo Peñalver. In *Land Values*, Peñalver argues that a landowner may value his land for reasons including, but not limited to, its market value. Through the lens of virtue jurisprudence, Peñalver makes the case that property law should accommodate those values in addition to accommodating wealth maximization.⁴¹ That said, there is a weakness to Peñalver’s proposal, which is that he suggests that law embody substantively “virtuous” standards. As will be developed here, Peñalver’s insight that law ought to, and can, account for multiple values is correct, but the substantive proposal he makes invites the liberalism critique.

To illustrate how the multiple-value aspiration might be operationalized in property law, Peñalver points to a case called *State v. Shack*.⁴² There, a landowner-farmer employed migrant farmworkers and housed them on his land. The court noted that, while migrant worker labor is economically indispensable, as a group, migrants are particularly disadvantaged, “rootless and isolated . . . without political power.”⁴³ Despite their dependence and isolation, the landowner refused to allow representatives from a nonprofit workers’ advocacy group to visit the workers at their residence.⁴⁴ The landowner claimed an absolute right to privacy on his own land, which he claimed was violated by the advocacy group’s “trespass.”

The legal issue in the case was whether the workers' allowing the advocacy group's visit at their residence was an illegal trespass, or whether the workers' dignity interest put the group's visit beyond the reach of the trespass statute. In Peñalver's words, the land in *State v. Shack* held dual values. Yet in traditional property law, there is only one value: the autonomy of the landowner. The court rejected the traditional argument:

Property rights serve human values. They are recognized to that end, and are limited by it. Title to real property cannot include dominion over the destiny of persons the owner permits to come upon the premises. Their well-being must remain the paramount concern of a system of law. Indeed the needs of the occupants may be so imperative and their strength so weak, that the law will deny the occupants the power to contract away what is deemed essential to their health, welfare, or dignity.⁴⁵

Finding that the visit at issue was not illegal trespass, the court stressed that the owner could at any time enforce his rights by no longer housing the workers on his property. As long as the owner housed the workers on his farm, however, his right to exclude trespassers did not include the right to exclude isolated migrant workers' invited visitors. The court's decision to prefer the workers' interests over the landowner's is unusual in property law and has been criticized by property law scholars.⁴⁶

Peñalver extrapolates from the court's decision, however, that the state *ought* to have authority to override landowner preferences in three situations. These include when an owner's use (1) becomes "unsustainable"; (2) threatens "irreversible or catastrophic future consequences"; or (3) as in *State v. Shack*, violates another's autonomy.⁴⁷ Through the lens of virtue jurisprudence, Peñalver suggests that, in order to give the state this authority, property law could be reformed to (1) "command[] owners to act in accordance with virtue"; (2) abide by "legally enforced moral norms"; and (3) "mandate[e] virtuous conduct."⁴⁸

At this point, Peñalver's proposal becomes vulnerable to the liberalism critique. Substantive proposals cause critics to worry that, for example, virtue jurisprudence "may become a cover for virtue politics."⁴⁹ There is some bite to this concern, because how courts define open-ended standards in law is a critical concern in our liberal democratic polity.

That said, imagine that instead of proposing new law requiring virtuous behavior, Peñalver proposed that courts adjust their analytic method in order to honestly account for both of the land's values when analyzing the trespass statute. Instead of automatically preferring the owner's autonomy interest, which is the dominant normative value in traditional property law, a court applying a dual means-ends analysis to the statute would consider the statute's aims in light of both values presented by the case. In *State v. Shack*, these were first, the landowner's autonomy interest, and second, the residents' dignity interest. The issue for the court was whether the means at issue in the case—application of the trespass statute—made sense in light of these two values (only).⁵⁰ The court found that in this situation, the owner's autonomy interest must yield.

Notably, the analysis does not mean that a visitor's right will always defeat a landowner's right, thereby politically upending traditional property law, or reinterpreting it

in accord with some substantive moral or virtuous standard. Instead, an aretaic analysis means that a court would consider both values (ends) presented by the facts, as well as the effect and purpose of the statute (the means), and order the competing rights accordingly. Indeed, one might say this is exactly what the court in *State v. Shack* did, only not naming it as such. Explicitly naming it would bring the analysis to light, further reducing concerns that aretaic jurisprudence may “mask” or “cover” illiberal politics.⁵¹ Thus, the property law example of land’s dual values nicely illustrates the potential concerns left by a substantive application of virtue jurisprudence, and how a process-based application might assuage them.

V. TOWARD A PROCESS CONCEPTION OF VIRTUE JURISPRUDENCE

As noted, the idea of virtue jurisprudence as being normatively grounded in a process—enabling flourishing—is subtle. Yet, it deserves attention because it answers at least some liberal concerns about virtue jurisprudence.

Virtue jurisprudence critics Antony Duff and Katrina Wyman have argued that enacting moral standards into law defeats the very idea of virtue as the process of actively choosing the right thing to do at the right time for the right reason.⁵² I agree: the state compelling substantively “good” behavior is not consistent with either Aristotle’s ideal of flourishing or his vision of the state’s role in encouraging flourishing. To Aristotle, to become virtuous, a person must actively exercise his capacity to deliberate well about what he should do in a particular situation (what end to choose) and how he should do it (by what means). This suggests that law should aim to help individuals pursue this capacity, not hinder it. Yet, the primary role for the state in this process according to Aristotle was education, not law. So what role for law in contemporary aretaic legal theory?

To imagine a process-based normative role for law, consider Avery Katz’s aretaic approach to efficient breach.⁵³ Efficient breach is the idea that a promisor, if after entering a contract with a promisee (P¹), discovers that her promise is worth more to another (P²), should be *legally incentivized* to breach her contract with P¹ in favor of the new, more profitable deal with P². Economist lawyers argue that as long as the promisor fully compensates P¹ for her loss, P¹ should be indifferent to the breach. The breach would then make both the promisor and P² better off, and it would leave P¹ no worse off, thus increasing the total size of the societal pie. In this view, a contractual promise should be interpreted not as an absolute promise to perform, but a qualified promise, or an “option”—to perform, or, to pay damages if performance becomes inefficient. Against this idea, non-economist lawyers argue that it is simply wrong—normatively unacceptable—to suggest that contract law should ever incentivize breach.⁵⁴

Katz sees a different criticism. From the virtue jurisprudence perspective, he argues that efficient breach is objectionable because it fails to comport with the ethical vision of who we as a society want to be: people for whom promises (even economic promises) signify real commitment.⁵⁵ When economic promises are not treated as real commitments, Katz argues, contract law establishes a problematic substantive norm.⁵⁶ Katz's criticism is a substantive application of virtue jurisprudence: in order to not undermine societal commitment to non-casual promising, law ought to embody a particular substantive value.

Rethinking the efficient breach critique from a process-based conception of virtue jurisprudence is instructive. From that perspective, one idea about the role of law is that law must take care not to inappropriately limit a person's commitment to particular habits of character. Thus, an Aristotelian legal analyst might ask whether the law "condoning" or "incentivizing" efficient breach in a particular case would inappropriately limit the pursuit of the habit of meaningful promise-keeping.⁵⁷ (Seana Shiffrin has made a similar argument.⁵⁸)

To do this, the court might ask if the particular contract is the sort where the option interpretation, which incentivizes efficient breach, would substantially undermine the original point of the agreement. Some kinds of contracts would fit this category, others not. For example, consider the sort of corporate contract where what is being exchanged is not an identified good or service but something more ephemeral, such as risk allocation (as in insurance). There, the "option" interpretation seems less likely to undermine the original point of the agreement. In others, such as service-provider-to-consumer transactions, it seems more so.⁵⁹ Where an agreement would be substantially undermined by the option interpretation, enforcing that interpretation seems more offensive to the injured party's pursuit of a good life than where the agreement would not be substantially undermined.⁶⁰ This kind of approach allows for more nuanced evaluation of efficient breach than its current proponents (law and economists) and critics (largely deontologists) seemingly imagine.

As a second and final example, consider a process-based response to virtue jurisprudence critic Ekow Yankah. Yankah believes that, at least in theory, flourishing and liberalism may have compatible spaces, because autonomy and freedom of choice are necessary to develop habits of character that make one virtuous.⁶¹ Yet Yankah's critique is that, in practice, flourishing and liberalism are more likely to conflict. To illustrate his critique, Yankah considers prostitution. Yankah assumes that an aretaic legal analysis of prostitution would find it incompatible with the agent's "personal flourishing," and so would prohibit it.⁶² Yankah reminds us, however, that as long as the prostitute's choice was truly voluntary and "victimless," any prohibition would violate the prostitute's autonomy. Since Yankah assumed flourishing would require prohibiting prostitution, he believes that this example shows how aretaic theory and liberalism, while compatible in theory, are incompatible in fact.⁶³

However, a closer look suggests a different aretaic analysis of prostitution. In the closest example we have to an actual virtue jurisprudence world—Athens in Aristotle's time—prostitution was not prohibited.⁶⁴ Assuming that the Athenians had some notion

of flourishing (though they were not legal theorists⁶⁵), Yankah's conclusion that flourishing would require prohibiting prostitution is questionable.

That said, Athenian law did prohibit serving in particular public offices if one had been previously engaged with a prostitute.⁶⁶ The Athenians must have thought they needed to protect certain public offices from possible collateral effects of prostitution (presumably, improper influence). This suggests that, from an aretaic perspective, there are two different possible concerns with prostitution: one substantive (its impact on moral character), and the other procedural (the integrity of public deliberation). The choice to regulate the latter—and not the former—shows process-based virtue jurisprudence in action: we are free to make our own choices, and the state may put in place procedural safeguards to contain the consequences of our inevitably imperfect choices.

VI. CONCLUSION

In the *Politics*, Aristotle inquired into the qualities of a state that make it durable—which protect its people from the constant threat of revolution. He found that durable states were those in which the citizens were happy and flourished. By contrast, states subject to revolution were marked by class warfare and political alienation. As such, Aristotle appreciated that peace and stability required political inclusiveness and a feeling of friendship and political equality among citizens, especially among those whose interests were most opposed, the rich and the poor.⁶⁷

Importantly, friendship and equality require discourse. This led Aristotle to observe that the city needs philosophy, but not *a* philosophy.⁶⁸ Philosophy in this sense meant mutual engagement, questioning, discussion. By contrast, *a* philosophy signified the end of questioning, and the end of discourse. A philosophy—the end of discourse—was the seed of tyranny. Aristotle understood that the end of discourse signaled the beginning of instability.⁶⁹

As virtue jurisprudence continues to unfold, scholars and critics alike might heed this warning: law needs theory, but perhaps not *a* theory. In other words, for law to remain stable and durable, legal analysts ought to ask more, rather than fewer, questions. Process-based virtue jurisprudence allows (indeed, requires) a legal analyst to ask more questions than do single value theories of law. For example, procedural virtue jurisprudence prompts an analyst to consider how a single-value legal theory may be reshaping the very law that theory seeks to explain, and how a particular law might inappropriately limit the exercise of individual choice necessary to flourishing. Procedural virtue jurisprudence also broadens the scope of a legal analyst's inquiry to include multiple relevant ends (and their attendant means), rather than restricting the inquiry to a single value. In sum, the literature to date shows that process-based virtue jurisprudence values individual choice, accounts for competing values, and ultimately promotes inquiry and discourse. As such, it is also the most promising path forward.

NOTES

1. See, e.g., M. Nussbaum, "Aristotle, Politics, and Human Capabilities: A Response to Antony, Arenson, Charlesworth, and Mulgan," *Ethics* (2000): 111; M. Nussbaum, "Mill between Aristotle and Bentham," *Daedalus* 133 (2004): 60; M. Nussbaum, "Human Functioning and Social Justice: In Defense of Aristotelian Essentialism," *Political Theory* 20 (1992): 202.
2. L. Solum, "The Virtues and Vices of a Judge: An Aristotelian Guide to Judicial Selection," *Southern California Law Review* 61 (1998): 1735; S. Sherry, "The Sleep of Reason," *Georgetown Law Journal* 84 (1996): 453.
3. J. Gordley, "The Moral Foundations of Private Law," *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 47 (2002): 1.
4. R. West, "In the Interest of the Governed: A Utilitarian Justification of Judicial Review," *Georgia Law Review* 18 (1984): 469.
5. See, e.g., M. Galston, "Taking Aristotle Seriously," *California Law Review* 82 (1994): 329–399; see also S. Sherry, "Civic Virtue and the Feminine Voice in Constitutional Adjudication," *Virginia Law Review* 82 (1986): 543.
6. K. Huigens, "Virtue and Criminal Liability," *Buffalo Criminal Law Review* 1 (1998): 431.
7. H. L. Feldman, "Codes and Virtues: Can Good Lawyers Be Good Ethical Deliberators?" *Southern California Law Review* 69 (1995): 885.
8. See, e.g., R. O. Brooks and J. B. Murphy, *Aristotle and Modern Law* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003).
9. C. Farrelly and L. B. Solum, "An Introduction to Aretaic Theories of Law," in *Virtue Jurisprudence*, edited by C. Farrelly and L. B. Solum (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1–23.
10. C. Farrelly and L. B. Solum, "An Introduction to Aretaic Theories of Law," 2; ("virtue jurisprudence is naturally inclined to the view that the law should enable and sustain the material and social conditions that would enable each and every individual to achieve the highest level of human functioning that is consistent with a similar level of functioning for all"). A more recent anthology which built on Farrelly and Solum is A. Amaya and H. L. Ho, *Law, Virtue and Justice* (Oxford and Portland, OR: Hart Publishing, 2013).
11. Importantly, enabling flourishing does *not* mean that the role of law, or of the state, is to perfect citizens' souls (as in the later natural law tradition). In Aristotle's view, a perfect man would no longer be a man; he would be a god. As this is not possible, men must learn to rule themselves and each other in light of their permanent state of imperfection. See M. Davis, *The Politics of Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 7–8. Thus the "primary task of politics most of the time, according to Aristotle, is not to perfect men's souls but to preserve actual imperfect regimes against the bad habits and destructive tendencies fostered by the way of life to which their regime is devoted." P. Berkowitz, *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 11.
12. H. L. Feldman, "Prudence, Benevolence, and Negligence: Virtue Ethics and Tort Law," in *Virtue Jurisprudence*, edited by C. Farrelly and L. B. Solum (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 51–87; M. Bruckner, "The Virtue in Bankruptcy," *Loyola University of Chicago Law Journal* 45 (2013): 233–285; C. Cimino, "Virtue and Contract," *Oregon Law Review* 88 (2009): 703–744; R. Columbo, "Toward a Nexus of Virtue," *Washington & Lee Law Review* 69 (2012): 3–84; E. M. Peñalver, "Land Virtues," *Cornell Law Review* 94 (2009): 821–888. Others include, e.g., A. M. Sulentic, "Happiness and ERISA: Reflections

- on the Lessons of Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics for Sponsors of Employee Benefit Plans," *Employee Rights & Employee Policy Journal* 59 (2001): 7–54; D. W. Opderbeck, "A Virtue-Centered Approach to the Biotechnology Commons (or, the Virtuous Penguin)," *Maine Law Review* 59 (2007): 315–337.
13. Miriam Galston has also observed a distinction between "process" and "substantive" orientations of virtue jurisprudence. M. Galston, "The Middle Way: What Contemporary Legal Theorists Can Learn from Aristotle," reprinted in *Aristotle and Modern Politics*, edited by Aristide Tessitore (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002). There, Galston identifies (and worries about) "contemporary middle way" liberal legal theories that are committed to an absence of "external substantive standards to guide the legal reasoner." By contrast, I identify "a middle way" jurisprudence which, following Nussbaum, posits that flourishing is both a procedural *and* normative notion. This means that a process-based virtue jurisprudence, which takes the aim of law as promoting flourishing, legal reasoning is and should be guided by the normative concept of a "good life."
 14. A. Duff, "Virtue, Vice and Criminal Liability," in *Virtue Jurisprudence*, edited by C. Farrelly and L. B. Solum (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 193–213.
 15. K. Wyman, "Should Property Scholars Embrace Virtue Ethics? A Skeptical Comment," *Cornell Law Review* 94 (2009): 991–1007.
 16. E. R. Claey's, "Virtue and Rights in American Property Law," *Cornell Law Review* 94 (2009): 889–947.
 17. E. N. Yankah, "Virtue's Domain," *University of Illinois Law Review* (2009): 1167–1212.
 18. Claey's questions whether it is possible to endorse virtue jurisprudence without confronting the possibility of "virtue politics." Claey's, "Virtue and Rights in American Property Law," 923. Claey's worries that, while specific applications of virtue jurisprudence may not be politically dangerous in isolation, the theory as a whole requires systematic consideration of the connection between the theory and liberal politics. Claey's, "Virtue and Rights in American Property Law," 927.
 19. Thanks to Heidi Li Feldman for helping me see and frame this point.
 20. Though this is a much bigger subject, suffice it to say that "a good life" by Aristotelian definition does have some determinate meaning, as flourishing is a normative state. Thus, some habits of character or intellect cannot be a part of that life. For example, the Benthamite norm of "pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain" is not consistent with an Aristotelian good life. According to Martha Nussbaum, "[B]y [Aristotle's] account, pleasure is just not the right thing to focus on in a normative account of the good life for a human being. Some pleasures are bad; evil people take pleasure in their evil behavior. Happiness, by contrast, is a normative notion: since it is constitutive of what we understand as 'the human good life,' or 'a flourishing life for a human being,' we cannot include evil pleasures in it." Martha Nussbaum, "Mill between Aristotle and Bentham," 60, 63–64.
 21. I will use the terms "procedural" and "process-based" applications of virtue jurisprudence interchangeably in this chapter.
 22. A good example of this competition is L. Kaplow and S. Shavell, *Fairness vs. Welfare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).
 23. Feldman, "Prudence, Benevolence, and Negligence: Virtue Ethics and Tort Law," 54.
 24. Feldman, "Prudence, Benevolence, and Negligence: Virtue Ethics and Tort Law," 54.
 25. Bruckner, "The Virtue in Bankruptcy," 235.
 26. Bruckner, "The Virtue in Bankruptcy," 245.
 27. Bruckner, "The Virtue in Bankruptcy," 267.

28. Bruckner, "The Virtue in Bankruptcy," 267.
29. Bruckner, "The Virtue in Bankruptcy," 267.
30. J. Skopek, "Uncommon Goods: On the Environmental Virtues and Voluntary Carbon Offsets," *Harvard Law Review* 123 (2010): 2065–2087.
31. Skopek, "Uncommon Goods: On the Environmental Virtues and Voluntary Carbon Offsets," 2068.
32. Skopek, "Uncommon Goods: On the Environmental Virtues and Voluntary Carbon Offsets," 2086.
33. M. Edwards, "The Virtue of Mandatory Disclosure," *Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics & Public Policy* 28 (2014): 47–77.
34. Edwards, "The Virtue of Mandatory Disclosure," 58–62.
35. Edwards, "The Virtue of Mandatory Disclosure," 73–76.
36. That Aristotle did not believe that the state could or should *compel* moral beliefs or behavior seems to be underappreciated by modern legal scholars. Indeed, Aristotle believed that the state could only (and therefore should only) educate its youth to habits of good character such that as adults, they would do "best" "willingly." To this point, Michael Davis has written, "The goal of rule is always that the thing or person should do what is good. But what is good for men is that they should do what is good willingly. Otherwise, they become slaves—mere instruments. The polis therefore points in two directions. As the sovereign human association, it is the one that aims at the highest good for me. It aims at happiness understood as doing what is best for you. As the comprehensive human association, it aims at happiness understood as freedom." Davis, *The Politics of Philosophy*. (commenting on the *Politics*, Book I).
37. In the *Politics*, when discussing the attributes of a well-ordered state, Aristotle repeats this idea, saying, "Is it not obvious that a state may at length attain such a degree of unity as to be no longer a state?—since the nature of the state is to be a plurality, and in tending to greater unity, from being a state, it becomes a family, and from being family, to an individual So we ought not attain this greatest unity even if we could, for it would be the destruction of the state. Again, a state is not made up only of so many men, but of different kinds of men; for similar do not constitute a state. It is not like a military alliance." Aristotle, "Politics," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, edited by J. Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), Book II 1261a16–25. And again that "[t]he state, as I was saying, is a plurality, which should be united and made into a community by education . . ." Aristotle, "Politics," Book II, 1263b36–37.
38. Martha Nussbaum captures both Aristotle's appreciation for the difficulty in "pinning down" the nature of happiness, but also the agreed-upon "formal characteristics of happiness": final, meaning inclusive of all that has intrinsic value; self-sufficient, meaning that nothing could be added to increase its value; active, since it is "living well and doing well"; generally available, since by definition, as the "final end for man," it can't be something that only a few can enjoy; and finally, relatively stable, meaning not subject to loss by chance or fortune (which in my view is also related to the characteristic of self-sufficiency). Nussbaum, "Mill between Aristotle and Bentham," 63–64.
39. Cimino, *Virtue and Contract*, 703.
40. Michael Davis has written eloquently that much of the *Politics* is the working out of the seemingly impossible combination of two apparently irreconcilable values: equality and order. Davis, *The Politics of Philosophy*, 19.
41. Peñalver, "Land Virtues," 867.

42. Peñalver, "Land Virtues," 883–884 (discussing *State v. Shack*, 277 A.2d 369 (N.J. 1971)).
43. *State v. Shack*, 277 A.2d at 372.
44. Peñalver, "Land Virtues," 372–373.
45. Peñalver, "Land Virtues," 372.
46. See, e.g., Claeys, "Virtue and Rights in American Property Law," 940–941 ("*Shack* departs substantially from foundational principles of trespass That *Shack* has not often been followed suggests to me that other courts doubt its holding 'fits' basic trespass principles.>").
47. Peñalver, "Land Virtues," 868–869. He also reserves a catch-all: "or (most broadly) the relationship between land-use decisions and other aspects of human flourishing."
48. Peñalver, "Land Virtues," 871–872. He argues that these laws could "accomplish three important goals": enforcing certain "moral obligations" protects those who can't protect themselves from "owners' immoral decisions"; constraining "the behavior of nonvirtuous owners and, over time, teach[ing] them to act virtuously of their own accord"; and "clarify[ing] social obligations and coordinat[ing] collective virtuous actions."
49. Claeys, "Virtue and Rights in American Property Law," 923.
50. Law's determinacy and equity and the rule of law is an entirely different subject, one I leave to the legal philosophers. See L. B. Solum, "A Virtue-Centered Account of Equity and the Rule of Law," in *Virtue Jurisprudence*, edited by C. Farrelly and L. B. Solum (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 142. As to the boundary-effect of contextualizing the facts in this particular case, see J. Singer, "Normative Methods for Lawyers," *University of California Law Review* 56 (2009): 899. Singer does not mention virtue jurisprudence, but notes the dual autonomy interests in *Shack*, and discusses the tradition of reasoning by "situation-sense" (Llewellyn) as a way of meaningfully evaluating competing rights claims presented in that case. Earlier in the article, however, Singer does invoke Aristotle's warning at the beginning of the *Ethics* to not expect more precision than a subject will bear. Singer, "Normative Methods for Lawyers," 930–931. I have invoked that same reference. Cimino, "Virtue and Contract," 743.
51. See, e.g., D. Kochan, "The Mask of Virtue: Theories of Aretaic Legislation from a Public Choice Perspective," *St. Louis University Law Review* 58 (2014): 295–354.
52. Wyman, "Should Property Scholars Embrace Virtue Ethics? A Skeptical Comment," 1003; A. Duff, "Virtue, Vice and Criminal Liability," In *Virtue Jurisprudence*, edited by C. Farrelly and L. B. Solum (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 193–213.
53. A. Katz, "Virtue Ethics and Efficient Breach," *Suffolk Law Review* 45 (2012): 777–798.
54. See, e.g., J. H. Perillo, "Misreading Oliver Wendell Holmes on Efficient Breach and Tortious Interference," *Fordham Law Review* 68 (2000): 1088.
55. Katz, "Virtue Ethics and Efficient Breach," 792.
56. Katz argues that the norm condones contracts "casually entered into and casually abandoned—in which contractual partners are treated instrumentally and superficially." Katz, "Virtue Ethics and Efficient Breach," 792.
57. "Condoning" or "incentivizing" efficient breach would, in practice, simply mean that a court would award money damages against the breaching party according to a particular, limited but "perfectly compensatory" formula, but that's beyond the scope of this chapter.
58. S. Shiffrin, "The Divergence of Promise and Contract," *Harvard Law Review* 120 (2007): 708–752 (arguing that in contract, "law should accommodate the needs of moral agency").
59. These examples are Shiffrin's. S. Shiffrin, "Could Breach of Contract Be Immoral?" *Michigan Law Review* 107 (2009): 1551–1568 (contrasting contracts where the "goods and

- services are the ends at least one party seeks” with “middlemen” contracts, such as insurance, where the agreement’s “primary purpose is to allocate risk”).
60. Seana Shiffrin makes a very similar point. See Shiffrin, “The Divergence of Promise and Contract,” 709 (“the law’s content should be compatible with the conditions necessary for the moral agent to flourish”).
 61. Yankah, *Virtue’s Domain*.
 62. Historians tell us that law in fourth-century B.C.E. Athens recognized wrongs against the state, not against the self. See, e.g., D. P. Maio, “Politeia and Adjudication in Fourth Century B.C. Athens,” in *Aristotle and Modern Law*, edited by R. O. Brooks and J. B. Murphy (Ashgate, 2003), 5.
 63. Yankah, *Virtue’s Domain*, 1195–1196. Somewhat confusingly, Yankah starts from the premise that “I take it a robust aretaic theory of law would find [the prostitute] deeply troubling” He then notes that there may be good reasons for an aretaic theory not to criminalize prostitution, tentatively concluding, “. . . there is no need to assume that an aretaic theory would necessarily outlaw prostitution” Yet, he ultimately concludes, “I take it an aretaic theory should be ready to prohibit [the prostitute’s] actions [A]retaic theories must treat human flourishing as primary. Even if moral fault is not identical to legal fault, and aretaic theory is committed to elevating human flourishing over autonomy where they conflict.”
 64. A. Lanni, “The Expressive Effect of Athenian Prostitution Law,” *Classical Antiquity* 29 (2010): 45–67. (“Athenian law did not prohibit prostitution. In fact, the state condoned this practice by taxing prostitutes and treating contracts for sexual services just like any other enforceable contract. But two separate laws, probably passed in the mid-late fifth century, prohibited citizens from engaging in political activity once they had prostituted themselves”).
 65. M. Finley, *Democracy Ancient and Modern* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1973).
 66. Lanni, “The Expressive Effect of Athenian Prostitution Law,” 55.
 67. Aristotle, “Politics,” Book IV 1295b35–1296a9 (discussing how a large middle class contributes to political stability).
 68. Davis, *The Politics of Philosophy*, 8.
 69. Davis, *The Politics of Philosophy*.

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CHAPTER 32

VIRTUE ETHICS AND EDUCATION

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I. PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION AND VIRTUE ETHICS

If one dates the modern revival of virtue ethics to the publication of Elizabeth Anscombe's seminal paper "Modern Moral Philosophy," it would seem that the nativity of modern analytical philosophy of education (in the wake, in Britain, of such philosophers as Wittgenstein, Ryle, and Austin) was hot on its heels.¹ In fact, notwithstanding parallel developments in the United States and elsewhere, R. S. Peters, the great architect of the post-World War II British philosophy of education—also born in the same year of 1919 as Anscombe—was reshaping educational philosophy and theory as a respectable branch of modern philosophy prior to his timely appointment as professor of Philosophy of Education at the London Institute of Education in 1962. From this viewpoint, modern virtue ethics and philosophy of education are much of an age and have both been subject to wide and diverse development for over half a century.

Despite this—and notwithstanding that R. S. Peters was a distinguished and much published philosopher of psychology, also greatly interested in the educational and other development of moral and intellectual virtues—it would take some time for the new philosophy of education and the new virtue ethics to cross paths. Still, to whatever extent one might find this circumstance regrettable, it is not perhaps so surprising. On the one hand, while professional mainstream philosophers are not exactly known (with some honorable exceptions) for their overwhelming enthusiasm for the messy practicalities of educational and other professional practice, more focused professional study of such practices is often slow to catch up with state-of-the-art developments in those pure theoretical disciplines on which it might draw for theoretical support. Thus, while recent analytical educational philosophy has drawn on insights from mainstream

epistemology, philosophical psychology, ethics, and social and political philosophy, these disciplines have inevitably been one or more steps ahead of the game.

Hence, it would appear that large-scale interest in virtue ethics on the part of modern educational philosophers was not much in evidence before the publication of Alasdair MacIntyre's rather virtue-ethically maverick work *After Virtue* in 1981. However, it is also true to say that this work (as well as its two large sequels) has continued to have enormous impact on a more recent generation of educational philosophers, to the extent, indeed, that virtue ethics seems—with some exceptions—for many present-day philosophers of education to be more or less synonymous with the name of MacIntyre.² While, as we shall see, this leaves something to be desired, it is also understandable in the light of both the overall drift of educational philosophers' interests and recent developments in educational philosophy. In short, given the nature of education as—at least in the form of public schooling—a *social* practice, educational philosophers have been much drawn to philosophical perspectives such as MacIntyre's that place emphasis on the socially constructed character of human institutions and practices and the prospect of conceiving moral life and development in such terms. On the other hand, this development is less than optimal—not, to be sure, because MacIntyre's views are of no educational interest—but insofar as it has led to neglect of other virtue ethical perspectives, not least of those at some odds with such a social constructivist view.

In any event, regardless of the relatively late attention to the topic on the part of latter-day educational philosophers, it would seem that virtue ethics is one field of moral philosophy that is directly applicable to practical human concerns in general and to professional enterprises such as education in particular. In this regard, aside from the growth of an extensive literature devoted to the application of virtue ethics to a range of more standard problems of ethical theory and moral practice—such as abortion, racial relations, and environmental issues—recent attention has also been devoted to its potential for clarifying various forms of professional and vocational practice.³ Moreover, while the domain of education and teaching has been slow to attract its share of this attention, significant attempts have been made by educational philosophers not only to show how a virtue ethical approach might be usefully employed for better understanding of key aspects of education, but also to engage the interests of mainstream philosophers in this normatively significant realm of human practice.⁴ In the latter regard, an edited collection on virtue ethics and moral education has included contributions by distinguished mainstream virtue ethicists and educational philosophers in more or less equal numbers.⁵

In the sections to follow, we shall therefore devote rather closer attention to the main dimensions of educational thought and practice on which such recent interest in virtue ethics has focused. First, as already noted, much recent work of this nature has focused on moral education, and in the next section we shall consider the case for a broader virtue ethical understanding of the aims of education and schooling and the more particular prospect of conceiving moral education in terms of the cultivation of virtuous character. In the section following this, we shall turn to the case for a virtue ethical perspective on the practice of teaching and/or the professional role and responsibilities of

career teachers. In a concluding section, however, we shall say something about more recent interest of educational philosophers in the virtues that Aristotle distinguished from the moral variety as *epistemic* virtues, with particular regard to their significance for the professional development of teachers, as well as for education more generally.

II. VIRTUE ETHICS AND THE BROADER MORAL AIMS AND CONCERNS OF EDUCATION

The educational enterprise is liable to broader—more personally developmental—and narrower construal, and the great philosophers of Greek antiquity seem to have understood it in a broad sense. Thus, Socrates would appear to have held—according to Plato’s *Gorgias*—that the key question for philosophy is also the fundamentally *educational* question of how one should live one’s life.⁶ Against the Sophists who argued that the most important skill that anyone might learn is rhetoric or the art of persuasion—as this best conduces to the promotion of material or other self-interest—Socrates held that true human flourishing is a matter of the cultivation of moral virtue as exhibited, perhaps especially, in the virtue of justice. On the Socratic view, however, virtue in all its forms requires the knowledge of *wisdom*, and Socrates appears much concerned in such Platonic dialogues as *Meno* and *Protagoras* to explore the status of such knowledge and the question of whether or how it might be taught.⁷

Assuming that some distinction between more “Socratic” earlier dialogues and later more Platonic ones is sustainable, the interest of Socrates’ great pupil Plato in a more personally developmental view of education is no less apparent in later dialogues. Thus, in the *Republic*, he explicitly argues that any proper cultivation or education of the soul requires promotion of both the broader sensibilities (acquired through literary and other academic study) conducive to the civilized virtues of wisdom and justice and the more executive virtues of “spirit” that stiffen the moral will or backbone.⁸ Plato maintains that full human development means acquisition of a range of human virtues requiring a broad school curriculum—ranging over literature, music, and physical education—on all of which he has much to say. Likewise, while offering a somewhat different account and taxonomy of virtues from either of his philosophical predecessors, Plato’s greatest pupil Aristotle (1941) seems no less persuaded in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Politics*, *Poetics*, and elsewhere, not just of the importance of the cultivation of moral and other virtues for individual flourishing, but of such development for any civilized social and political association.⁹ Indeed, all three Greek philosophers clearly agree that the educational cultivation of virtue is of no less public than private or personal significance.

By contrast, it seems that modern-day education—or at least the educational provision of contemporary public schooling—has taken a rather narrower and/or more instrumental or utilitarian perspective. Indeed, there would seem to be—not least perhaps in the economically developed liberal democracies of the Western Hemisphere—a

rather unfortunate coincidence of reasons for this. On the one hand, the ruling ethical and political ideal of liberal democracy is clearly that of live-and-let-live tolerance toward the views of others whose beliefs and values one may not share—at least to the extent that these are not at odds with some democratic consensus concerning general public safety and the common social good. Thus liberal democracy inclines to fairly sharp distinction between rules of public morality and personal moral values and to consequent location of the latter in the private sphere. In this light, while all individuals are required—as citizens of the *polis*—to conform to basic rules of civilized association, it could only be illiberal intrusion into the private sphere to require their conformity to any given set of religious, political, or other beliefs, values, or character traits. Thus, so long as I obey the law of the land, my religious or political beliefs—in which I may also want to bring up my children—are my own affair. But now, if religious and other perspectives belong in the private domain, it may appear tantamount to illiberal indoctrination to promote any such perspectives in public or state schools. There can be little doubt that some such sentiment has greatly undermined latter-day educational confidence in any promotion of allegedly value-laden virtues in the common school.¹⁰

At the same time, it seems that effective political management of modern developed societies has come to be judged mainly by the success of the economy in ensuring increasing levels of material prosperity. But now, insofar as state schooling is funded from public taxation, the political custodians of national economies have to justify educational spending to taxpaying citizens. From this perspective, spending on public or state education is most readily defended on the grounds that the knowledge and skills that schools transmit to pupils directly contribute to greater economic prosperity. In this regard, policymakers are inevitably drawn to more narrowly instrumental or utilitarian justifications of schools as sites for the promotion of professionally or vocationally useful knowledge and skills. While it should also be admitted that such more instrumental or utilitarian trends do not entirely ignore the moral and social aspects of human development—as indicated, for example, by recent British educational emphases on personal and social education, citizenship and “spiritual” education—such initiatives are all too often driven by public and media anxieties over pupil behavior, levels of civic participation on the part of the young, and so on, of a more utilitarian kind: in short, the emphasis here is usually more on social conformity and control than on the cultivation of virtues of moral character for their intrinsic educational worth.

While, as one might expect, most latter-day educational philosophers have been more sympathetic to the broader personally formative aspects of education, the general drift of recent analytical work on moral education has yet tended toward a predominantly Kantian or deontological conception of moral development as the development of skills of moral reasoning that might be taught in much the same way as other school subjects. However, while it is clear that such influential British philosophers of moral education as Richard Peters (1981) and John Wilson (1967, 1990) inclined in this direction, by far the most influential theorist in this field of the latter half of the twentieth century was the Harvard psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg (1984), who pioneered an empirically grounded account of moral growth focused on the development of moral cognition via

age-related stages fairly clearly derived from Kant (1967) via Piaget (1997). While it is probably also true to say that Kohlberg's day is now past—since even his surviving “neo-Kohlbergian” heirs seem to have moved beyond the primary focus on moral cognition of their intellectual mentor—the immense influence and significance of Kohlberg's work merits appreciation.¹¹ First, Kohlberg stoutly defended the view that moral life and association is a form of *rational agency* and not just a matter of socially or otherwise conditioned response; second, he was a committed *moral objectivist* who firmly rejected relativism and believed that moral rights and wrongs could be discerned by appropriate use of reason.

Arguably, the main trouble with Kohlberg's account is the identification of moral deliberation not just with cognition, but with a particular (Kantian) conception of moral reason that is not clearly connected to the affective and/or motivational dimensions of moral response: briefly, it does not seem to follow either logically or empirically that right conduct always or inevitably follows from right judgment. While this problem with Kohlberg was fairly apparent from early days, it came into sharp relief with the so-called care-ethical critique of Kohlberg of the 1980s. In particular, Kohlberg's student Carol Gilligan (1982) argued—again appealing to empirical evidence—that female research subjects did not respond to Kohlbergian dilemmas in the same way as Kohlberg's male subjects: instead of drawing on rules or principles of right or duty, they appeared to respond more from feelings of sympathy and compassion toward the plight of characters in Kohlberg's dilemmas. For young females, the question was not that of what it might be rational to do, but that of what would be caring or compassionate.

Whether or not Gilligan and her later followers were right to distinguish sharply between male and female moral responses, they did highlight the importance for moral life of other than cognitive features of moral response. There is surely more to moral life and association than thought and/or deliberation about what is right: indeed, we could have little interest in (for example) justice or benevolence unless we also cared or were moved by concern for the plight of our fellow beings. In this regard, as moral sentimentalists have commonly argued, it might be said that actions are generally prompted more by feelings than reason. But now, the observation that Kohlbergian moral judgements *might* not necessarily lead to associated behavior may take us—especially if we suspect (with Kantians and others) that feelings are a none too reliable basis for consistent moral conduct—in rather another ethical direction from care ethicists. Roughly, this alternative route was pursued in the 1980s by (American) character education critics of Kohlberg who argued that moral principles—Kohlbergian or other—need to be reinforced by training in appropriate behavior.¹² Irrespective of any rational grasp of moral principles, young people need appropriate moral discipline and the moral character formed under such discipline.

While these three perspectives on moral development and education—the (core) Kohlbergian, the care ethical, and the character educational—point in rather different directions, with different implications for how we might approach the moral education of young people, it also seems that each enshrines an element of truth about the nature of human moral life and response. In short, while the Kohlbergian account insists on the

place of reason and deliberation, the care ethicist affirms the place of affect, feeling, and/or emotion, and the character educationalist emphasizes the practical and dispositional dimensions of moral development as exhibited in good character. However, the trouble is that it is not only unclear on these separate accounts how such elements might be connected, but that each of them seems to emphasize one aspect of moral life to the virtual exclusion of others. For example, Kohlbergian developmental theory explicitly draws on a Kantian ethics that regards feelings and emotions as essentially irrelevant to moral judgment, and there would also appear to be some resistance to moral principle—at least of a Kohlbergian variety—in care ethics, if not also in some simpler forms of American character education. It is precisely at this point that Aristotelian virtue ethics appears to come into its own as an account of moral development and education that more obviously relates and integrates these different aspects of moral life and experience.

Without too much presently redundant rehearsal of Aristotelian virtue ethics, it is clear that it does aspire to an integrated conception of moral experience as involving rational or cognitive, affective or emotional, and dispositional or proactive dimensions. As with a Kantian or Kohlbergian account, there is a clear role for reason, judgment, and deliberation in moral experience and therefore something apt for (intellectual) understanding (rather than mere habituation). For Aristotle, the virtue primarily concerned with discerning the ends of moral life—namely, *phronesis* or practical wisdom—is clearly identified as an intellectual virtue.¹³ However, it is no less clear that what is distinctive about *phronesis*—by contrast with other intellectual virtues—is that it is not primarily concerned with the discernment of truth, but with the right direction of the non-rational affective and appetitive parts of the soul. As the present author has elsewhere put this, Aristotelian virtues may be considered more or less equivalent to states of emotion, feeling, or appetite, ordered in accordance with some deliberative ideal of practical wisdom.¹⁴ So, unlike the moral judgment of Kant's categorical imperative, Aristotelian moral wisdom is directly concerned with the moral cultivation or refinement of affective or emotional life—precisely, to the end of developing the kind of character capable of moving us to morally appropriate conduct.

In this light, moral life and experience are more than grasping universal principles (of either duty or utility) and require appreciation of the complex ways in which the various elements of human character are implicated in the struggle to achieve what Aristotle calls *eudaimonia* or a flourishing life. At the very least, this opens up a wider range of ways in which the regular school curriculum might contribute to teaching and learning about moral life and character—especially, perhaps, through literature, arts, and humanities—that are not so obviously available via Kohlbergian contemplation of abstract moral dilemmas. Indeed, the potential of imaginative fiction for refinement of the affective or emotional elements of character—through emotional engagement with the trials and tribulations of characters in tragedy and epic poetry—is something that appears to have been clearly anticipated by Aristotle himself in his *Poetics*. There, unlike Plato, who seems to have feared that the arts might deprave and corrupt through depictions of people behaving badly, Aristotle evidently appreciated their potential for insight into the affective springs of human agency and for appreciation of what can go wrong

in human affairs through vicious excess or deficit of natural passions. On this view, in depicting Medea's murder of her own children, Euripides aims not to encourage imitation of Medea but to assist greater appreciation of the pressures to which human agents may be prey under certain adverse circumstances and to engage our moral sympathy for their plight.

From an educational perspective, exploration of good and bad characters in stories can be regarded as a kind of modeling. This is, of course, what Plato mistrusted about it: that we might actually take bad characters in stories as examples to imitate. To be sure, this may sometimes happen: there is always a danger that we might be confirmed in "our pleasant vices" by discovering that they are shared by this or that fictional character. However, Aristotle seems closer to the more commonsense view that the more usual goal of good narrative literature is to explore the complexities of human nature and association and their implications for a morally and/or otherwise flourishing life: precisely, to appreciate something of the difference between good and bad human character.¹⁵ Thus, if the literary curriculum for young people is well chosen—and also taught well—there is a good case for regarding it as a rich resource for deep insight into moral life and experience. Indeed, if there is a problem about literary character exemplification, it might well also apply to the kind of parental or educational modeling of conduct of which Aristotle clearly approves in general. While it is true that adult examples of good character may indeed have a morally significant formative effect on children and young people—which is strong reason, as we shall see in the next section, for requiring good character on the part of would-be teachers—it cannot be ruled out that pupils might (perhaps during morally contrary adolescence) be swayed by the example of bad, rather than good, role models. Despite this, however, it still seems better sense to suppose that exposing young people to good literary and other role models is generally sound educational strategy.

To date, then, we have seen that virtue ethics may provide a better theoretical basis for moral education than its cognitive developmental, care ethical, and character training rivals insofar as it offers a fuller view of moral experience and of the ways in which morally significant cognition, affect, and disposition contribute to moral character—and may also to that extent draw on a wider range of resources for educational exploration of character virtues and vices. In addition, the received Aristotelian approach to conceiving moral life and experience in terms of character cultivation may seem to fare no less well than modern rationalist accounts of moral life—such as the ethics of duty and utility—in providing an objective grounding for both moral theory and moral education. Indeed, an Aristotelian conception of virtue generally purports to be founded on something like an "empirical" scientific (biological or anthropological) account of what does or does not objectively conduce to human well-being or flourishing. On this view, it is a more or less factual claim that a life of courage, temperance, honesty, justice, and so on, is more conducive to flourishing than one of cowardice, gluttony, deceit, and lack of concern for others. Moreover, this "naturalistic" view of virtue has been endorsed by many modern virtue ethicists, as well as by some virtue ethical educationalists.¹⁶

That said, this section should not be concluded without some recognition that such naturalistic virtue ethics is not the only game in town. As already noted, it seems that the contemporary virtue ethicist who has had the greatest influence on recent educational philosophers and theorists is Alasdair MacIntyre (1981, 1988, 1992). As the present author has observed elsewhere, MacIntyre's virtue ethical credentials are far from straightforward.¹⁷ While he has certainly located himself in the tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas, he also explicitly rejects what he refers to as the "metaphysical biology" of this tradition and clearly draws—true to his roots as a former Marxist—on the nineteenth-century idealism of Hegel and others. In this spirit, MacIntyre interprets the teleology or purposiveness of virtue in social-theoretical terms and makes much of the "rival" and/or incommensurable character of different moral traditions. With regard to moral education, indeed, he has explicitly argued—at some odds with either Aristotle or Kohlberg—that insofar as there are rival moral traditions there can be no common moral education for all pupils and that the children of diverse traditions are best educated in separate schools.¹⁸ While it is the present view that any such potentially socially divisive conclusion should be resisted in the name of something closer to naturalistic Aristotelian virtue ethics, it may also be that the reality of discernibly diverse conceptions and traditions of virtue is a problem with which virtue ethics—and any educational approach allegedly based on it—seriously needs to contend. All the same, given presently limited space and purposes, we must now leave the topic of moral education to turn to the issue of the potential or implications of virtue ethics for reflection upon educational professionalism and the occupational role of the teacher.

III. VIRTUE ETHICS AND THE TEACHER

Whether or not the occupation of teaching is a "profession" (whatever that means), it is nevertheless implicated in a range of "professional" complexities that are not quite so conspicuous in the case of other simpler human trades or services. For one thing, unlike such more routine skills or trades as road sweeping, bricklaying, or assembly line work, teaching involves appreciation and mastery of advanced forms of knowledge and understanding and the flexible exercise in role of context-sensitive deliberation and judgment. For another thing, however, like many other occupations dedicated to serving or promoting the well-being or welfare of others—such as medical practice, nursing, social work, religious ministry, and counseling—teaching clearly involves responsibilities regarding the right, fair, or decent treatment of clients (in this case pupils) of a broadly moral character. While it may not be entirely out of place or untoward to think in terms of a "professional ethics" of road sweeping or office cleaning, this term would seem to carry more weight in the cases of medical practice, social work, or teaching, which do seem freighted with larger other-regarding obligations. The question for this section is

that of how virtue ethics—or ideas of general virtue ethical provenance——might help us to a clearer understanding of teacher professionalism in general or the professional ethics of teaching more especially.

Much recent educational theoretical work in this vein has focused on the broader question of understanding the general professional expertise of teachers. Indeed, a significant problem to which such work has responded has been recent official or centralist policy promotion of technicist models of professional practice that have sought to reduce teaching to the mastery of a repertoire of behaviorally conceived teaching skills or “competences” for the purposes of teacher training.¹⁹ In this regard, one highly influential critique of such technicism has proceeded by way of significant revival of Aristotle’s conception of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, and of some exploration of major modern philosophical developments of this idea in various philosophical traditions.²⁰ While focusing more on the broader performative dimensions of teaching, such appeal to Aristotelian practical deliberation has nevertheless successfully highlighted the professional complexity of professional educational practice. On this view, good teaching is not a matter of the mechanical exercise of general off-the-peg procedures or skills and requires context-sensitive judgment concerning when and where to adopt this or that particular classroom procedure, with what precise present purposes, and toward which particular pupils. From this perspective, so the argument goes, while it may be good practice in some occupations to observe strict routines or follow rules to the letter, teaching—and many other, in particular, “people professions”—are not at all like this and require flexible and sensitive “phronetic” adaptation to ever changing circumstances.

While, to be sure, such attempts to construe professional deliberation in terms of Aristotle’s *phronesis* have often fallen short of anything we should call a distinctive virtue theory of teacher professionalism, it should be said—as already previously indicated—that much of the recent drift toward a more “phronetic” conception of the professional practice of teachers has been directly inspired by the virtue ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre (a conspicuous influence on Dunne). Indeed, what seems to have particularly attracted latter-day educational philosophers and theorists to MacIntyre’s brand of virtue ethics is its distinctly social-theoretical—indeed social constructivist—conception of virtue, not least the idea that virtues are located in and defined by the social practices of various “rival” cultural traditions. But such dependence on MacIntyre is not unproblematic. For one thing, much ink has been spilled by recent philosophers of education in trying to show that teaching may be coherently regarded as a virtue-sustaining practice—when, rather ironically, MacIntyre himself has explicitly argued that teaching does not (unlike, say, medicine, music, architecture, engineering, and/or football) conform to his model of social practices as substantive human activities in their own right with their own distinctively internal goods and ends.²¹ Briefly, his point seems to be that teaching cannot be considered a practice in this sense, but only as a means to the promotion of such practices. Still, it is the present view that this debate is something of a red herring and might well be avoided simply by rejecting MacIntyre’s generally unhelpful social-theoretical definition of virtues.

However, another unhelpful though influential educational philosophical approach to conceiving educational professionalism drawing on MacIntyre—though also on other more “postmodern” sources—takes a distinctly anti-foundational and a-theoretical view of the expertise of the teacher.²² Taking an extreme “particularist” view of practical deliberation, it claims that there can be no generally applicable or context-independent—particularly rule- or evidence-based—theoretical knowledge of good teaching and that what therefore counts here or there as professionally good or bad pedagogy is relative to the “internal” standards of locally situated practices. Indeed, this rests on the more general claim—again evidently influenced by MacIntyre—that insofar as concepts of education are rival or “contested,” what is liable to be regarded as good education or teaching in this context may be utterly at odds with what is so regarded in another. Still, while this conception of the professional practice of education and teaching is clearly influenced by a contemporary brand of virtue ethics—though it may also represent something of a distortion of MacIntyre’s thought—it has also been criticized as highly counterintuitive and implausible by the present writer and others.²³

In any case, such “phronetic” perspectives on teacher expertise can only be regarded as fairly radical departures from the Aristotelian virtue ethical mainstream—and as therefore falling short of any very distinctive virtue ethical account of the professional practice of teaching. Indeed, from an Aristotelian viewpoint, the main trouble with such an extended account of *phronesis* to cover any and all professional teacher judgments and deliberations is that it precisely fails to distinguish, as Aristotle clearly does, between *phronesis* as the ruling virtue of *moral* engagement and/or association from *techné* as the form of expertise of this or that skilled occupation or mode of production (and Dunne, for one, quite deliberately blurs this distinction). For example, it does not clearly distinguish moral judgments that teachers may need to make about how to treat a child fairly from the more strategic judgments that may be required to decide whether or not to include a practical exercise in some particular lesson. This is the key point at which a MacIntyrean “phronetic” conception of deliberation and of virtue—as determined by the rules of good conduct of socioculturally defined practices—seriously departs from Aristotle’s. For Aristotle, the virtue or virtues engendered by the deliberations of practical wisdom are constitutive of good or exemplary moral lives irrespective of professional or occupational role. In short, people require Aristotelian moral wisdom and the virtues of courage, temperance, honesty, and justice to live well as human agents, irrespective of whether they earn their livings as refuse collectors, footballers, architects, teachers, nurses, doctors, or lawyers.

Yet further, the neo-MacIntyrean conception of *phronesis* of recent social theorists in general and theorists of professionalism in particular rather falls short not only of a virtue ethics of profession, but also of anything that we might reasonably regard as a distinctive “professional ethics.” The ancient Greek physician Hippocrates was perhaps the first to appreciate the moral dimensions of some human occupations: that a good doctor is more than just an effective healer, but one who also recognizes moral obligations toward patients. So, while builders or hairdressers might yet be considered good at what they do regardless of whether they cheated or otherwise exploited clients—indeed, it

might well be considered one mark of a good auto salesman that he successfully cheated clients—one could hardly be considered a good doctor if one cheated, exploited, or abused patients. But what here seems true of medical practice would appear no less so of other human occupations, especially those—such as nursing, social work, religious ministry, and teaching—inherently concerned with service to others. So we might expect the practitioners of such occupations to be committed to certain professional principles or values of honesty, fairness, and benevolence.

Thus, closer to the present day, it has become common practice to develop codes of professional ethics—as typified by the aptly named Hippocratic oath sworn by entrants to the medical profession—that attempt to articulate the rules of good conduct toward clients (patients, pupils, and so on) above and beyond any other theoretical or practical knowledge that professional practitioners might need for technically competent practice. The ethical principles embodied in such codes of professional ethics have invariably also been “deontologically” conceived: that is, they have taken the form of “universal” or generally applicable rules for morally fair and decent conduct that are not dependent on personal or local intuitions. From this perspective, one trouble with the phronetic conceptions of teacher professionalism that we have lately traced to the influence of MacIntyre is that they do not mark any clear distinction between the technical and moral dimensions of professional practice—precisely, between the concerns of Aristotle’s *phronesis* and *technē*. But second, as also seen, they also incline to a radically “particularist” conception of professional deliberation that—at least in some cases—refuses to recognize any general or universal cross-contextual theoretical or moral rules or principles. At this point, indeed, it should be noted that Aristotle’s virtue ethics is much closer to the deontology of received professional ethics than to such views: for while Aristotle certainly held that the deliberations of *phronesis* require sensitivity and adaptation to local context—and, to this extent, Aristotle is often cited as the main authority for modern ethical particularism—it should be no less clear that he did endorse universal principles (holding some conduct to be absolutely wrong) and that Aristotelian virtues do clearly express the general form of objectively good or virtuous conduct.²⁴

That said, it might still be asked why we should prefer an Aristotelian virtue ethics of teacher or other professionalism to a deontological professional ethics. Indeed, whereas the latter would only require professional practitioners to behave appropriately *in role*—as doctors, nurses, social workers, teachers, and so on—the former more demandingly requires them to exhibit the moral characters of virtuous agents as such. But does it follow that good doctors, nurses or teachers would also have to be morally virtuous people? To be sure, there is a fairly appealing “liberal” argument to the effect that just so long as doctors, nurses, and teachers are morally principled in role, they may be “entitled” to be as immoral, vicious, or unjust as they like in their private or personal lives. Why could not someone be a perfectly honest, just, and fair doctor, lawyer, nurse, or teacher by day and a persistently faithless husband, wife-beater, disloyal friend, tax evader, card sharp, or drug addict (though not, of course, to the point of professional dysfunction) by night? In short, the case for a virtue ethics of professionalism in general, or of teacher

professionalism in particular, would seem to turn crucially on showing that one personally requires to have some measure of Aristotelian virtue—that is, some of the qualities that we would normally associate with everyday good moral character—in order also to be a good provider of this or that service.

Generally, to be sure, the possession of Aristotelian virtues of wisdom, honesty, justice, temperance, courage, and kindness or fellow feeling could hardly go amiss in any occupation or profession. Thus, while we might consider people to be good builders, joiners, or auto mechanics more on the grounds that they are good at what they do, than because they are good or nice people, it is evident that most of us will invariably seek out the services of tradespersons whom we can respect or with whom we can easily deal, rather than those to whom we cannot relate—and it should be said that many, if not most, tradespersons will be people of such character. The present question, however, is that of whether there are cases in which one could *not* properly provide some professional service without possessing some or all of the Aristotelian virtues. This is not obviously true of joinery or auto sales, where one could give excellent service without any very conspicuous level of personal virtue—or even, indeed, of medical practice, where so long as one observed what was professionally required in the way of good conduct, one might yet be fairly personally disreputable. Might this not be true of any or all human professions or occupations?

While the present view is that there are indeed many occupations or professions of which this is not the case, it is much to the main concerns of this chapter that there are few occupations of which this is more conspicuously true than teaching. For while one might well choose a personally vicious or disreputable builder to build one's garage—on the grounds that he is technically the best available builder—it is surely clear that few would willingly entrust the education of their children to personally vicious and disreputable teachers. Moreover, this is not just on the grounds of the harm that might befall them in such hands—though this consideration might well be a weighty enough one—but because anything much worth calling education is in itself a matter of personal formation in such key Aristotelian virtues as honesty, fairness, self-control, courage, kindness, and so on. Indeed, if—as Aristotle himself maintains—moral virtues are much taught or “caught” by example, a good teacher, *qua* Socratic educator in how best to live, must have some measure of the virtues to exemplify.²⁵ The only ways to avoid this conclusion—neither of them very plausible, desirable, or admirable—are by restricting general education to the transmission of knowledge in some narrow sense of information or skills, or by allowing that a teacher might (hypocritically) pretend to virtuous character in the classroom, while professing little or no commitment to it in other contexts. The more plausible and persuasive position—consistent with what we would normally take the aims of school education to be—would hold that teachers without some measure of virtuous character could hardly be considered good at their job.

What we here claim to be true of teaching would also seem to apply to other human occupations—perhaps particularly to what might be termed the “people professions.” Indeed, if there is any occupation of which it might be more true than of teaching that it requires some cultivation of the virtues of moral character, it is probably the priesthood

or religious ministry, in which professional lapses are more likely to be judged in terms of personal moral failure than (technical) inefficiency. Another instance might also be social work, in which capacities for personal judgment, self-control, or for relating to others obviously weigh heavily—though this might also be said of such humbler service roles as hotel reception. Yet another example might be that of the judiciary, in which we might also expect good and fair practice to be grounded in good and fair character. At all events, there seems to be a strong case for saying that what it means to be a good teacher, priest, minister, social worker, or judge is to be of good personal character to the extent of exhibiting or aspiring to some measure of the Aristotelian virtues of honesty, fairness, decency, self-control, courage (or commitment), and concern for others.

IV. THE EPISTEMIC VIRTUES OF GOOD TEACHING

Having said this, a person might well be a fine moral example to others, but still not much of a teacher. The obvious reason for this is that while in the broader educational context, good teaching may well involve helping to shape the characters of others through example, it is also no less concerned with the business of helping others to acquire the various kinds of academic knowledge and practical skills that are the key professional concern of teaching. Still, this is not obviously reducible to simply possessing the required knowledge and skills. Thus, it is conceivable that someone engaged as a teacher might well be liked and respected as a person by pupils—and also have the wide knowledge of a subject or skill acquired from a first-class university education—but nevertheless lack the capacities to teach very well what she is employed to teach. To be sure, some of these capacities may come under the heading of so-called teaching skills, and helping prospective teachers to acquire such pedagogical techniques has long been the standard fare of schools of teacher training. For example, failure to speak loudly or clearly may inhibit or undermine the ability of a trainee teacher to communicate knowledge effectively, or she may also need some assistance to understand how to organize the content of her lessons in a perspicuous or learner-friendly way. Even so, it is yet possible that a teacher might be well liked by pupils and a technically competent communicator of knowledge, but still lack capacities associated with the best conceivable teachers. Perhaps the teacher in question was compelled by others to follow his or her university career and then entered teaching because no other career was readily available.

It seems to be considerations of this sort that have drawn recent philosophers of education to some interest in the capacities that Aristotle distinguished from moral virtues as ‘epistemic virtues.’²⁶ Unlike the moral virtues (governed by the intellectual virtue of *phronesis*) of main concern in this volume, the epistemic virtues are not directly concerned with the formation of moral character, but with the discernment or discovery of truth. Epistemic virtues would include such attitudes or capacities as appetite for

knowledge, intellectual curiosity, respect for truth, open-mindedness, scholarly rigor, academic scruple, and so forth. While capacities such as respect for truth or (perhaps more simply) honesty might also be considered moral virtues in some contexts, they are by no means necessarily so, and a Dr. Faustus driven by the rigorous search for truth might well be an utterly morally unscrupulous person.²⁷ Still, given that it is surely a large part of the teacher's role to inspire love of his or her subject in others and to help them grasp the value of truth or excellence in academic inquiry or practical performance, it seems no less clear that a morally virtuous agent who lacked such qualities would not count as much of a teacher no matter how much knowledge or skill he possessed. It is in this light that a recent work of educational philosophy focused on the pedagogical significance of epistemic virtues has highlighted the professional significance for teachers of what it calls "epistemic presence" in the classroom.²⁸

In any event, despite what one might still regard as the rather slow uptake of interest in the topic on the part of latter-day educational philosophers, the case is undoubtedly strong for regarding virtue ethics as helpful for any full understanding of educational practice—not just in relation to the wider moral education and character formation of pupils, but also regarding the development of the sort of attitudes and virtues needed by teachers to assist such formation and to prosecute the key pedagogical task of inspiring pupils with a love of learning for its own sake. In this regard, it is not just that recent tendencies to conceive education and schooling in narrowly instrumental terms of the transmission of economically useful knowledge and skills have neglected the wider character developmental dimensions of education, but that no less recent attempts to reduce the occupation of teaching to a list of skill-based competences have failed to do justice to not only the intellectual, but also the affective and motivational aspects and demands of good school and classroom practice. Good teaching—or being a good teacher—is more than just possessing knowledge and the skills for the mechanical transmission of such knowledge, but of appropriate attitudes toward knowledge, capacities for positive human association, and some measure of morally virtuous character, in the absence of which no instruction or pupil learning could be very educationally meaningful.

In sum, teaching—especially in the contexts of contemporary schooling—is a professionally complex activity requiring a wide and diverse range of personal qualities, abilities, and capacities. To be sure, the most obvious professional requirements of teachers are some knowledge of what is to be taught—perhaps broader general knowledge in the case of primary teachers and more specialized knowledge in the case of secondary teachers—and some technical competence regarding the teaching of it. But it would clearly miss much to conceive good teachers and teaching merely in terms of competent communication of secondhand knowledge. Such teachers are also those who value knowledge and appreciate its significance for the broader moral and other personal formation of young people, and who therefore require singular qualities of personal relationship to both what is taught and those to whom it is taught. To be a good teacher—certainly *qua* educator—is to be not just an effective knowledge transmitter, but a particular kind of person capable of distinctive personal relationships and

passions. As we have tried to show, the value of virtue ethics lies in the insights that it can afford—more, perhaps, than any other science or discipline—into these distinctive relationships and passions.

NOTES

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2. A.C. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); A. C. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992); for example, D. Carr, *Educating the Virtues* (London: Routledge, 1991). D. Carr, "After Kohlberg: Some Implications of an Ethics of Virtue for the Theory and Practice of Moral Education," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 15 (1996): 353–370; J. Steutel, "The Virtue Approach to Moral Education: Some Conceptual Clarifications," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 31 (1997): 395–407; R. Curren, *Aristotle on the Necessity of Public Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000); R. Curren, "Aristotle's Educational Politics and the Aristotelian Renaissance in Philosophy of Education," *Oxford Review of Education* 36 (2010): 543–559; K. Kristjánsson, "Ten Myths about Character, Virtue and Virtue Education—and Three Well-Founded Misgivings," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 61 (2013): 269–287; K. Kristjánsson, "The Pros and Cons of Aristotelianism in Contemporary Moral Education," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 48 (2014): 48–68; K. Kristjánsson, *Aristotelian Character Education* (London: Routledge, 2015).
3. R. L. Walker, and P. J. Ivanhoe (eds.), *Working Virtue: Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
4. Carr, *Educating the Virtues*; Carr, "After Kohlberg: Some Implications of an Ethics of Virtue for the Theory and Practice of Moral Education"; D. Carr, "Rival Conceptions of Practice in Education and Teaching," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 37 (2003b): 253–266; D. Carr, "Character in teaching," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 55 (2007): 369–389; Steutel, "The virtue approach to moral education: some conceptual clarifications"; M.H. Halstead and T. H. McLaughlin (eds.), *Education in Morality* (London: Routledge, 1999); R. Curren, *Aristotle on the Necessity of Public Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000); R. Curren, "Aristotle's Educational Politics and the Aristotelian Renaissance in Philosophy of Education," *Oxford Review of Education* 36 (2010): 543–559; A. C. MacIntyre and J. Dunne, "Alasdair MacIntyre on Education: In Dialogue with Joseph Dunne," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 36 (2002): 1–19; J. Dunne and P. Hogan (eds.), *Education as a Practice: Upholding the Integrity of Teaching and Learning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005); K. Kristjánsson, *Aristotle, Emotions and Education* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007); K. Kristjánsson, "Ten Myths about Character, Virtue and Virtue Education—and Three Well Founded Misgivings"; K. Kristjánsson, "The Pros and Cons of Aristotelianism in Contemporary Moral Education"; K. Kristjánsson, *Aristotelian Character Education*; W. Sanderse, *Character Education: A Neo-Aristotelian Approach to the Philosophy, Psychology and Education of Virtue* (Delft: Eburon, 2012); W. Sanderse, "An Aristotelian Model of Moral Development," *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, published online, September 22, 2014, doi: 10.1111/1467-9752.12109; C. Higgins, *The Good Life of Teaching: An Ethics of Professional Practice* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); S. Cooke and D. Carr, "Virtue,

- Practical Wisdom and Character in Teaching," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 62 (2014): 91–110.
5. D. Carr and J. Steutel (eds.), *Virtue Ethics and Moral Education* (London: Routledge, 1999).
 6. Plato, "Gorgias, Meno, Protagoras and Republic," in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, edited by E. Hamilton and H. Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961).
 7. Plato, "Gorgias, Meno, Protagoras and Republic."
 8. Plato, "Gorgias, Meno, Protagoras and Republic."
 9. Curren, *Aristotle on the Necessity of Public Education*; Curren, "Aristotle's Educational Politics and the Aristotelian Renaissance in Philosophy of Education."
 10. Carr, *Educating the Virtues*; Kristjánsson, "Ten Myths about Character, Virtue and Virtue Education—and Three Well Founded Misgivings."
 11. See, for example, D. K. Lapsley and F. C. Power (eds.), *Character Psychology and Character Education* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).
 12. For example, T. Lickona, *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992); T. Lickona, "Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education," *Journal of Moral Education* 25 (1996): 93–100; K. Ryan, "The Ten Commandments of Character Education," *School Administrator* (September 1995); K. Ryan, and K. Bohlin, *Building Character in Schools: Practical Ways to Bring Moral Instruction to Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).
 13. Aristotle, *Metaphysics, Nicomachean Ethics and Poetics*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, edited by R. McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 1026–1027.
 14. D. Carr, "Virtue, Mixed Emotion and Moral Ambivalence," *Philosophy* 84 (2009): 31–46.
 15. In this vein, see K. Bohlin, *Teaching Character Education through Literature* (London and New York: Routledge/Falmer, 2005); D. Carr and T. Harrison, *Educating Character through Stories* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2014).
 16. See, especially, Carr, *Educating the Virtues*; Carr, "After Kohlberg: Some Implications of an Ethics of Virtue for the Theory and Practice of Moral Education"; Kristjánsson, *Aristotle, Emotions and Education*; Kristjánsson, *Aristotelian Character Education*.
 17. Carr, "After Kohlberg: Some Implications of an Ethics of Virtue for the Theory and Practice of Moral Education"; Carr, "Rival Conceptions of Practice in Education and Teaching."
 18. A. C. MacIntyre, "How to Appear Virtuous without Actually Being So," in *Education in Morality*, edited by J. M. Halstead and T. H. McLaughlin (London: Routledge, 1999).
 19. For specific criticism of competence approaches, see D. Carr, *Professionalism and Ethics in Teaching* (London: Routledge, 2000).
 20. J. Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground: Practical Judgement and the Lure of Technique* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993).
 21. Dunne and Hogan, *Education as a Practice: Upholding the Integrity of Teaching and Learning*; Higgins, *The Good Life of Teaching: An Ethics of Professional Practice*.
 22. W. Carr, "Professing Education in a Post-Modern Age," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 31(1997): 309–327; W. Carr, "Education without Theory," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 54 (2006): 136–159.
 23. Kristjánsson, *Aristotle, Emotions and Education*; D. Carr, "Education, Contestation and Confusions of Sense and Concept," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 58 (2010): 89–104; Cooke and Carr, "Virtue, Practical Wisdom and Character in Teaching."
 24. Aristotle, "Metaphysics, Nicomachean Ethics and Poetics," 959; see D. Carr, "Character and Moral Choice in the Cultivation of Virtue," *Philosophy* 78 (2003a): 219–232.
 25. Carr, *Professionalism and Ethics in Teaching*; Carr, "Character in Teaching."

26. See H. Sockett, *Knowledge and Virtue in Teaching and Learning: The Primacy of Disposition* (New York: Routledge, 2012); J. MacAllister, "Virtue Epistemology and the Philosophy of Education," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 46 (2012): 251–270; B. Kotzee (ed.), *Education and the Growth of Knowledge: Perspectives from Social and Virtue Epistemology*, Special Issue of *Journal of Philosophy of Education* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).
27. See D. Carr, "The Human and Educational Significance of Honesty as an Epistemic and Moral Virtue," *Educational Theory* 64 (2014): 1–14.
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CHAPTER 33

ENVIRONMENTAL VIRTUE ETHICS

JASON KAWALL

IN an influential paper, Thomas Hill has us consider a new neighbor who moves into a home, cuts down a beautiful avocado tree, and covers the rest of a stunning garden with asphalt.¹ Even if no sentient animals are harmed, and the owner is pleased with the change, many of us will find these actions deeply problematic. But why? According to Hill, regardless of any possible rights of trees, or other (supposed) intrinsic values in nature, such a person demonstrates an arrogance and lack of proper humility. This arrogance might be grounded in an ignorance of the nature of the entities he destroys or an excessive self-importance that renders him unable to see the non-human world as worthwhile. Hill suggests that we need to consider the character of the neighbor: What kind of person would do such a thing?

Hill's paper is rightly regarded as playing an important role in the development of contemporary environmental virtue ethics. He presents a compelling case that many questions and issues within environmental ethics are best approached in terms of character traits, rather than rights, utility, or other familiar moral notions. And even when these latter notions are of primary importance, considerations of virtue and vice seem relevant as we determine how best to negotiate these norms and values. Still, why else might environmental virtue ethics (EVE) be particularly attractive to those working in environmental philosophy?

I. WHY ENVIRONMENTAL VIRTUE ETHICS

First, most environmental ethicists would hold that current lifestyles of the globally wealthy are—with few exceptions—unsustainable in the face of mounting environmental problems. While consideration of institutions and social structures will obviously

be of tremendous importance, effectively addressing these issues will also require careful consideration of human character traits, habits, and ways of life.² We will need to develop different attitudes and habits—paying attention to environmental issues that we now ignore, becoming politically active, consuming less, and so on. The exploration of such issues of virtue, attitude, habit, and human flourishing—and understanding the institutions and social structures that can support them—finds a natural home in a virtue-oriented ethics.

Second, as Louke van Wensveen (2000) and others have noted, much environmental writing invokes a rich vocabulary of virtue and vice. Van Wensveen provides a list of 189 virtue and 174 vice terms that have been used in published works in environmental ethics since 1970. Such an extensive list suggests that environmental concerns lend themselves particularly well to exploration in terms of virtues and vices; it further suggests a depth and nuance to our vocabulary of virtues and vices. Relatedly, we find extensive use of virtue and vice terminology in earlier environmental writings, including the works of Rachel Carson, Aldo Leopold, and Henry David Thoreau, among others.

Third, many environmental ethicists are attracted to the naturalism of recent neo-Aristotelian approaches to virtue ethics. Here the virtues are treated as traits that both foster and (partially) constitute human flourishing. Rosalind Hursthouse explains that

‘ethical naturalism’ is usually thought of as not only basing ethics in some ways on considerations of human nature, but also as taking human beings to be part of the natural, biological order of living things. [. . .] our ethical evaluations of ourselves ought to exhibit at least a recognizably similar structure to what we find in the botanists’ and ethologists’ evaluations of other living things.³

Such an approach, with an emphasis on humans as evolved, embodied beings, and understanding ethical evaluations as continuous with ethological evaluations, nicely captures a much-needed sense that humans are a part of nature. We can expect such an approach to encourage humility and a recognition of our place in wider communities of life.

Finally, environmentalists often stress that an engagement with the world around us can enrich our lives profoundly. Rachel Carson writes that “[t]he lasting pleasures of contact with the natural world are not reserved for scientists but are available to anyone who will place himself under the influence of the earth, sea, sky and their amazing life.”⁴ Virtues of wonder, open-mindedness, and curiosity enable us to appreciate and take delight in the natural world. Similarly, Ronald Sandler argues that the environment provides

aesthetic goods, recreational goods, and a location to exercise and develop physically, intellectually, morally, and spiritually [. . .]. The natural environment provides the opportunity for intellectual challenge and reward, but those benefits come only to those who are disposed first to wonder and then to try to understand.⁵

EVE is well positioned to capture the insight that a good environmental life is not simply a matter of denial and burdens, but instead an active life where moral, epistemic, and aesthetic virtues enable our appreciation of and engagement with nature, contributing to our flourishing as individuals.

II. IDENTIFYING ENVIRONMENTAL VIRTUES AND VICES

How are we to identify environmental virtues and vices? Sandler distinguishes three main approaches.⁶ First, we can identify environmental virtues through the actions, attitudes, and ways of life of individuals we have identified as environmental exemplars. Thus we might look to the traits and lives of Henry David Thoreau, Rachel Carson, or Aldo Leopold.⁷

A second approach is to examine traits traditionally recognized as virtues (or vices) and to consider whether and how they might be appropriately extended to environmental entities or contexts. Thus we have discussions of benevolence and forgiveness as environmental virtues.⁸ Departing from Sandler, we can also include here efforts to work back from various environmental goods to identify novel or overlooked virtues that consist (at least in part) in the appropriate attitudes, actions, and responses toward these goods. Here we might include virtues of respect for nature, or reverence for life.⁹

Third, rather than resting with intuitive judgments about particular exemplars or character traits, many environmental virtue ethicists embrace versions of the neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism discussed earlier. Here the virtues are identified with those traits required for an individual to lead a flourishing life for members of its species; this provides a guide and standard for assessing whether or not a given trait is a virtue (or person an exemplar). Thus, on Hursthouse's (1999) influential account, humans are virtuous to the extent that they possess dispositions (of emotion, desire, and action) that allow them to effectively and rationally pursue their own survival, the good functioning and continuance of their communities/species, and a characteristically pleasant life without undue suffering.

Sandler argues that a key omission here is that there may be non-eudaimonistic goods (i.e., ones that do not directly contribute to the flourishing of humans) that are still worthy of human attention and concern; these may include such things as the well-being of non-human animals. Sandler also introduces three further components of a flourishing human life that arise through our rationality beyond those suggested by Hursthouse—autonomy, the accumulation of knowledge, and meaningfulness. He thus modifies Hursthouse's account to the following:

A human being is ethically good (i.e., virtuous) insofar as she is well fitted with respect to her (i) emotions, (ii) desires), and (iii) actions (from reason and

inclination); whether she is thus well fitted is determined by whether these aspects well serve (1) her survival, (2) the continuance of the species, (3) her characteristic freedom from pain and characteristic enjoyment, (4) the good functioning of her social group, (5) her autonomy, (6) the accumulation of knowledge, (7) a meaningful life, and (8) the realization of any noneudaimonistic ends (grounded in noneudaimonistic goods or values)—in the way characteristic of human beings (i.e., in a way that can rightly be seen as good).¹⁰

Sandler argues that we can use his account to help to refine and test our intuitive judgments about putative exemplars or virtues.

More generally, all three approaches to identifying environmental virtues can be applied together, allowing us to engage in a form of reflective equilibrium. If we see a particular individual as an environmental exemplar, we might in turn refine our account of human flourishing to ensure that it captures the attractive features of the individual. By identifying particular virtues, we may come to recognize certain individuals who possess these traits as environmental exemplars, and again may refine our account of human flourishing, and so on.

III. ENVIRONMENTAL VIRTUES

Much work in EVE has focused on analyzing environmental virtues and their applications. Following Sandler again, we can distinguish three varieties of environmental virtue. (1) *Environmentally responsive virtues* are virtues that involve responsiveness to various environmental entities, including such virtues as respect for nature, benevolence, wonder, and reverence for life. (2) *Environmentally justified virtues* are any that are justified (as virtues) at least in part by environmental considerations. For example, temperance and simplicity are environmentally justified virtues insofar as they help to reduce our need for resources and reduce our impacts on the natural world. (3) *Environmentally productive virtues* are virtues that promote or maintain environmental goods or values. Courage, perseverance, and cooperativeness could all be environmentally productive virtues—consider a committed, effective environmental activist.¹¹ We can consider two representative environmental virtues: humility and courage.

i. Humility

Humility is an environmentally justified virtue—it encourages beneficial relationships with environmental entities, unthwarted by arrogance or egoism. It may also be an environmentally responsive virtue, with a recognition of the value and power of the non-human world. Hursthouse writes that

[p]roper humility is the virtue traditionally opposed to the vice of arrogance, the undue assumption of dignity, authority, power, or knowledge, and a constantly recurring theme in environmental ethics [. . .] has been that we should, indeed, must, recognize, and in recognizing, perforce, abandon our undue assumption of dignity, authority, power, and knowledge—our arrogance in short—in relation to nature.¹²

More generally, a proper humility is often seen as fundamental to environmental virtue, in encouraging us to be open to the worth and value of the non-human world, from individual living beings, to entire bioregions.¹³ Humility also leads to an appropriate caution in our interventions in the natural world: “Our power over nature, we have discovered, is much more limited than we supposed when we first got modern science going, mostly because, as we discovered rather recently, our knowledge and understanding of the biosphere is in its infancy.”¹⁴

Matthew Pianalto characterizes ecological humility in terms of a set of dispositions:

1. acknowledgment and acceptance that one is part of nature and essentially dependent upon it;
2. openness to learning from nature, and to an appreciation of intrinsic values in nature (viz., to seeing entities in nature as having features worthy of attitudes of awe, reverence, love, respect, aesthetic appreciation, etc.);
3. motivation to adopt ways of living that are not merely sustainable (from the perspective of human interests), but which minimize the impact on the natural world in order to preserve natural intrinsic value; thus, willingness to change and adapt, and to allow entities in nature freedom from unnecessary interference.¹⁵

While Pianalto explicitly attributes intrinsic value to various entities in nature, Hursthouse hesitates to do so. She worries that doing so raises epistemic questions (how do we become aware of such value?) and ultimately requires a theory of intrinsic value, its bases, and so forth. Furthermore, she notes that environmentally sensitive individuals care for both animate and inanimate natural entities, while many environmental ethicists attribute intrinsic value only to living things. Instead, Hursthouse believes it is sufficient and simpler to note that our lives are richer and more flourishing when we value and concern ourselves with natural entities; we have good reasons to respond in these ways, regardless of any prior intrinsic value.¹⁶

ii. Courage

Courage, qua environmental virtue, is best understood as an environmentally productive virtue, one that promotes or maintains environmental goods or values. Rachel Fredericks (2014) distinguishes between physical courage—which involves overcoming

physical dangers (whether for moral reasons or not)—and moral courage, which involves being morally motivated, standing up to others as persons or agents, and risking interpersonal punishments. These punishments could range from imprisonment, to a loss of friendship, or humiliation, or other social costs. Fredericks characterizes *environmentally* morally courageous individuals as standing up to the risk of interpersonal punishment for the sake of promoting environmental goods or rights, or standing against environmental harms or wrongs. Furthermore, the individual's stand must be grounded in a recognition of these environmental goods or harms; the connection cannot be merely accidental.¹⁷

Fredericks argues that such courage can help us to act even when we worry that our actions will fail or be ineffectual; we need courage to carry on despite long odds—a common problem in facing environmental issues. Second, many of the virtues commonly discussed in environmental virtue ethics are somewhat passive—such traits as humility, wonder, or reverence. Fredericks believes we must also recognize and strive to develop active environmental virtues, ones that guide effective actions to defend and promote environmental goods (rather than merely having an appropriate appreciation of such goods). Finally, individuals who change their lifestyles, participate in political activities, and so on, will need courage in facing peer pressure from friends and neighbors who do not yet understand or approve, in staying committed to long-term campaigns, in standing up to intimidation at protests, and so on.

Fredericks further argues that it is important to publicly recognize environmental courage. Such recognition will help us to understand that involvement in an environmental movement will often be challenging and will require strength; this awareness can reassure those who are struggling, and prepare those who are just starting. Furthermore, recognizing environmental courage allows us to address stereotypes according to which environmentalists are seen as feminine and weak, while courage is coded as strong, male, and heterosexual.¹⁸ Recognizing the courage of those involved in environmentalism can help to undermine problematic stereotypes; it can also help to encourage individuals who might otherwise reject environmental concerns due to such stereotypes.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL VICES

As with virtue ethics in general, not as much has been written about environmental vices as about virtues. Still, there is a significant and growing literature, discussing such environmental vices as apathy and resignation, greed, and complacency.¹⁹ Van Wensveen and Wenz provide initial discussions of the seven deadly sins of traditional Christian theology, understood as environmental vices.²⁰ Here we can focus on the vices of arrogance and inattention.

i. Arrogance

Arrogance is often considered a common and pernicious environmental vice, one that prevents us from fully and genuinely appreciating the non-human world, or even those humans outside of the communities with which we identify. This in turn leads to exploitation and domination. Tiberius and Walker characterize an arrogant person as one who believes himself to be

a better person according to the general standards governing what counts as a successful human specimen.

His perceived status as a more excellent human being shapes his relations with others. Since he is superior to others, he does not regard others as having anything to offer him, nor does he believe they have the ability to enrich his life. [. . .] He therefore establishes hierarchical and nonreciprocal relationships with his fellow human beings.²¹

This is a plausible account of ordinary arrogance, but in discussions of environmental ethics, the arrogance at stake seems rather different. It is not that an individual believes *himself* to be better than other humans and non-humans. It is rather (in many instances) an arrogance grounded in the individual's belief that humans are superior to other living things, which leads him to regard the rest of the natural world as having little to offer. For example, Cafaro draws attention to "the arrogance of 'anthropocentrism,' the vain and selfish view that human beings alone are worthy of respect, whereas everything else in the world, including several million other species of life, only has value if it is useful to humans."²² This human superiority is then taken to justify the exploitation and domination of the non-human world.²³

Rather than seeing oneself as superior, one sees a particular group to which one belongs as superior, and this belief shapes one's attitudes and behaviors toward those outside of the preferred group. We might understand many, perhaps most, instances of racism or sexism as being grounded not in a belief in the individual's own particular superiority, but rather his belief that he is a member of a superior group. We can thus modify Tiberius and Walker's account to capture this "group arrogance":

Group arrogance occurs when an individual believes his group (race, species, gender, etc.) to be superior to others, and this (supposed) superiority shapes his relations with others. Since his group is superior to others, he regards them as having little or nothing to offer him or his group. He therefore establishes hierarchical and non-reciprocal relationships, potentially ones of domination or exploitation, with those outside of his group.

Human arrogance is a form of group arrogance of particular importance to environmental ethics, but other forms are also relevant. For example, Cafaro describes an American oil contractor working in Nigeria who accepts and endorses extraordinary

injustices against local environmental protestors, and whose attitudes clearly reflect a racist arrogance.²⁴

ii. Inattention

Kathie Jenni (2006) explores what she refers to as “vices of inattention,” focusing on the case of animal suffering on factory farms. She notes that many people genuinely care about animal welfare, yet they take no stand against factory farms—they do not lobby for improved legislation, they do not change their eating patterns, and so on. While in some cases this will be due to hypocrisy, weakness of will, or other factors, Jenni argues that we should also recognize the role played by vices of inattention. These involve

[a] failure to attend to morally important aspects of our lives. I refer here to a range of moral failings, from simply not noticing the circumstances of our actions to more active and systematic strategies of self-deception; from an unmotivated lack of focus, which I call “simple” inattention, to purposeful and self-manipulative uses of selective attention and wilful ignorance.²⁵

She suggests that cruel practices on factory farms continue largely “because of obliviousness and inattention on the part of the general public—ordinary citizens who support the practices by purchasing their products and who could effect change through consumer pressure.”²⁶

Jenni notes that even among those who do become aware of a moral issue in which they are complicit, it is all too common for them to drift back into inattention, to a lack of concern. Why does this happen?

Most people’s lives are full of hassles and distractions; of worries about family and finances. We live fragmented and harried lives, so that it is hard to retain our moral focus even when we don’t have self-interested motives for losing it. And of course we often *have* self-interested motives: it’s hard to change our habits. It is hard to acknowledge that one is surrounded by and complicit in brutality.²⁷

As a result of our inattention, we remain complicit in ongoing harms to those whom we might have tried to help, and our autonomy and integrity are undermined as we act out of ignorance and in conflict with authentically held moral commitments.

Jenni suggests that we need to develop an ongoing attention to morally significant matters. This cannot be an overwhelming, constant attention to all possible morally significant matters—this is clearly beyond our mental capacities, and even if possible could leave us depressed and overwhelmed. Instead, “we need to attend (at least) to seeming violations of our moral values in which we are personally implicated, which we have some power to affect, and to which we may have been directed by indications that something is amiss.”²⁸

Still, even this seems far too demanding in a world of human trafficking, ongoing violence, mass extinction, environmental injustices against (typically) minority

communities, and *many* other violations of our moral values. We are often capable of acting at least as effectively as we can in Jenni's focal case of factory farms, and thus need to further consider how to prioritize our investigations and actions. For example, the scope of a violation, our ability to affect a situation, the amount of attention an issue is already receiving, and other such factors might be taken into consideration, allowing us to focus our efforts more effectively.²⁹

V. CRITIQUES OF ENVIRONMENTAL VIRTUE ETHICS

i. Situationism

EVE of course faces a number of objections; these are often particular instances of more general worries concerning virtue ethics. For example, Kasperbauer (2014) revisits familiar situationist worries and applies them to EVE by drawing upon studies that focus on "green" behaviors. Broadly, he argues that work in social psychology has shown that our environmental behaviors are often highly influenced by seemingly minor situational features, and are not primarily the result of underlying, stable character traits. EVE proponents must either show that virtues do in fact reliably lead to good environmental behaviors (explaining away the apparently conflicting empirical evidence), or grant that virtues—such as they are—do not reliably lead to good behavior, and that we must turn to other moral norms or institutions in order to effectively address environmental issues.

Kasperbauer discusses and rejects Robert Adams's (2006) response to situationist worries, but does not engage with most of the wide range of responses that such worries have evoked (beyond a passing footnote). Here we can focus on one particular point. We should question whether the individuals whose environmental behaviors are so easily swayed by trivial circumstantial factors are in fact environmentally virtuous. Certainly most of us have received far less training in environmental virtue as children than we have in "ordinary" interpersonal virtues. We may also wonder about the depth of any environmental commitments of the individuals involved (environmental concerns are often treated as secondary, peripheral interests) and their levels of relevant environmental knowledge. We have good reason to expect *environmental* virtue to be particularly rare, and thus to question whether the studies cited by Kasperbauer in fact tell us anything about environmental virtues or virtuous agents.

ii. Social Structures and Institutions

Jeremy Bendik-Keymer (2012) raises an important challenge to the adequacy of EVE as a complete environmental ethic. He argues that with respect to such environmental

problems as the current sixth mass extinction event or climate change, a focus on individual character and virtue is insufficient. Instead we need to look at broad social, institutional, and other factors that shape and constrain the possibilities for individuals and their expression of virtue.

Bendik-Keymer has us imagine a single parent who works, volunteers for local organizations, gives to various charities, and so on, but who pays little or no attention to the sixth mass extinction (though she cares about other species and living things). Bendik-Keymer argues that this individual is surely a morally decent person—yet she still acts in ways that will contribute to further extinctions (e.g., by buying products using soya grown on farmland cleared from rainforests). The problem here is not a lack of virtue. Rather, given the institutions and circumstances in which she finds herself (along with limited human cognitive and emotional capacities), she cannot reasonably be expected to be sensitive to all major environmental issues:

Perhaps, then, we should look at the difficulty of living in a bureaucratically organized world whose economic and political systems are highly ill-adapted to the sorts of challenges posed by the sixth mass extinction, and climate change [. . .]. And perhaps we should look at the shortcomings of our nature under our second nature.³⁰

To claim that such a person is not decent, or is blameworthy for her way of life, is to be far too demanding and moralistic; instead, we have a good person who is simply constrained by her circumstances. To effectively and justly address large-scale problems, we need to focus on social, institutional factors while recognizing our cognitive and other limitations.

Many proponents of EVE would grant this point, arguing that EVE is simply one part of a complete environmental ethic—that aspect dealing with matters of character and virtue. They could readily allow that this will need to be supplemented by a moral examination of the institutions and social structures in which we find ourselves. But this is not to dismiss the need for considerations of character. As Cafaro writes,

To some degree our political, economic, and technological systems present us with environmentally unsustainable choices or strongly incline us in those directions [. . .]. Still, as consumers and citizens we usually have real choices, and we often choose the environmentally worse ones. No one forces us to buy big SUVs, build three-car garages, or let our bicycles rust. [. . .] Our poor environmental behavior stems, in part, from particular character defects or vices.³¹

With respect to Bendik-Keymer's single parent, we might add the following. We can agree that she is decent—likely better than most of us—but even so, there may be room for her to improve. Perhaps she could volunteer a little less at the local theater, but become more involved in action to address climate change, as the latter is of such great global importance. Of course, many factors might need to be balanced in deciding

where to devote one's attention and efforts—the scale of an issue, one's ability to help address it, one's own interests, and so on.³² But even decent people will have realistic room for improvement, and given the gravity of the environmental problems we face, it seems likely that most decent, globally wealthy people ought to be doing more to address such issues.

More fundamentally, Bendik-Keymer is correct that we need to address social, political, and economic circumstances, and recognize human limitations. But as we do so, questions of character and virtue re-emerge. Political change and legislative action will not simply arise out of nowhere; individuals ultimately drive change in institutions. As Brian Treanor explains, “addressing environmental crises will require people with public virtues, especially political virtues, and the mettle to act on these virtues.”³³ We need to consider the traits that enable people to be effective activists in advocating for social change.

In exploring the virtues of activists, EVE proponents would do well to engage with such works as Lisa Tessman's (2005). Tessman examines how living in oppressive conditions can restrict the flourishing of individuals and limit their possibilities for virtue, necessitating ‘burdened virtues’ that allow for survival or resisting oppression, but which do not contribute to the well-being of their possessors. In the face of environmental injustices, often deeply problematic institutions and social structures, and potentially devastating climate change in decades to come, there may be much that can be learned from cases of oppression—and activism in the face of oppression—for those facing difficult circumstances more generally.³⁴

We should also consider the virtues that allow us to be good citizens, beyond being good activists—those that enable us to produce and sustain good policy and institutions. Here we might look to participatory virtues, “those important to a person's readiness to participate well in collective decision making,”³⁵ or political virtues, characterized by Treanor as involving intellectual engagement with the issues facing one's community, and actively seeking the flourishing of this community.³⁶

Similarly, institutional decision-makers (both private and public) require virtues. Presidents, mayors, board members, and others need to make wise judgments. Simply having the results of studies, or pools of information, does not yet lead to good policy. Decision-makers need wisdom, patience, and intellectual virtues to determine what ought to be done in circumstances of limited knowledge and resources; they need courage to follow through on difficult decisions, and so on.

Finally, we can evaluate institutions themselves in terms of how well they enable us to act virtuously—can they facilitate easier access to reliable mass transportation, renewable energy, and so on? More fundamentally, how might various institutions encourage education and values that support our flourishing both as individuals, and as a community? Thus, even if Bendik-Keymer is correct to focus on social, economic, and other structures, the virtues—and environmental virtues in particular—will play a key role in understanding and addressing large-scale environmental issues.

iii. Identifying the Virtuous

How do we determine who qualifies as an environmentally virtuous person or what counts as an environmental virtue? For example, on what basis should we hold that Rachel Carson is a genuine environmental exemplar, rather than the climate change-denying American senator James Inhofe? After all, the latter is regarded by many as a virtuous leader who embraces a wise balance between the needs of nature and those of industry. Such epistemic worries in identifying the virtues and the virtuous are familiar, but take on a particular force when applied to EVE.

As noted earlier, most people around the world are not raised to be especially environmentally virtuous, and this likely has an adverse effect on our ability to identify environmental virtues and exemplars. Of course many individuals receive some encouragement toward respecting nature, avoiding cruelty to animals, and so on. And some will be raised with lessons in activism, simplicity, and so on. But overall, our attempts to raise environmentally virtuous children pale in comparison with our efforts to inculcate familiar forms of honesty, justice, perseverance, and so forth. As such, while most of us have some training in honesty that can help us to identify honest people and actions, we are far less likely to have extensive grounding in benevolence as extended to non-humans (for example), and so will be less reliable in identifying right actions and virtuous individuals in such 'environmental' contexts.

Relatedly, parents and teachers, given their own lack of training in environmental virtue (and environmental knowledge, more generally) may be less effective in their efforts to inculcate such virtues in children. As a result, we should expect environmentally virtuous agents to be rarer than "traditionally" virtuous agents. As Hursthouse notes, this lack of environmental exemplars makes determining how we ought to act or lead our lives more difficult:

Virtue ethicists seek answers to questions about what we should do and how we should live by considering what someone else who really possessed virtue to a high degree would characteristically do, and how they would live. And we have little idea of the answers to such questions in the context of environmental ethics because we have so few exemplars of the relevant virtues, real or fictional, if any.³⁷

Our comparative lack of environmental virtue (and exemplars) compounds our epistemic problems in identifying and inculcating these same virtues.

Furthermore, environmental exemplars might manifest traditional virtues in unusual ways, may possess unfamiliar environmental virtues, and may question and undermine the status quo, such that there is greater disagreement over who counts as an environmental exemplar. Are activists who protest animal testing (even in medical research) exhibiting courage and benevolence, or sentimental vices that thwart the advance of medicine? Would environmentally virtuous agents endorse greater use of nuclear power as a low-emissions, efficient energy source? Disagreement seems likely in such cases, given the unfamiliar and often challenging actions of (possible) environmental exemplars. Indeed, given that environmental exemplars might challenge our ways of life and familiar values in radical ways, we may be prone to various forms of bias in assessing

them—unjustifiedly reassuring ourselves that we are decent people, and that these individuals are instead extremists or fools.³⁸

Sandler argues that having a theory of what makes traits virtues can help to address many of these worries.³⁹ For example, Sandler can appeal to his own theory (discussed earlier) to argue that Rachel Carson is virtuous and James Inhofe is not, because the latter ignores the knowledge of climate scientists, undermines the future functioning of his communities, and fails to realize various non-eudaimonistic ends.

Similarly, Brian Treanor argues that narratives can help us to overcome extreme normative ethical relativism or nihilism.⁴⁰ We find certain narratives have broad cross-cultural appeal, suggesting at least some universality to human needs and values. Furthermore, narratives can make abstract questions and values concrete, and help us to understand virtues as embodied in characters, fictional or not. They also allow us to take on a wider range of experiences—we get to see the world through the eyes of others, to experience situations and possibilities that we would never encounter in our own lives. “To understand simplicity, we tell the story of Henry David Thoreau; to understand attention and observation, we tell the story of Aldo Leopold.”⁴¹ Such narratives can contribute to our moral understanding and powers of discernment, thereby improving our ability to identify the environmental virtues and the virtuous.

But it is not clear that responses like those of Sandler and Treanor can adequately address our epistemic worries. Even if we embrace Sandler’s account of an ethically good human, we could well remain biased as we evaluate various lives—particularly ones that throw into doubt our own current ways of life. We may also lack adequate empirical knowledge to adjudicate between various proposed environmental exemplars. There are many details at stake in such cases, and we may well have difficulties in determining who is in fact environmentally virtuous, in part due to our difficulties in even recognizing what actions such virtues should encourage.

With respect to Treanor’s appeal to narratives as epistemic aids, note that we can be similarly biased or ignorant as we evaluate various narratives. Given a lack of adequate environmental virtue and knowledge, we may be too quick to embrace narratives that conform to our own misguided values. We might endorse narratives of a wide-scale return to a pristine nature that may, in fact, be neither realistic nor desirable, or embrace stories of miraculous technological solutions that reassure us in our faith that human ingenuity and growth will always prevail. There is also some risk that we will confuse aesthetically pleasing narratives with what is morally appropriate.⁴² Given our comparative lack of environmental virtue and knowledge, and biases of various kinds, we have good reason to fear that we will be poor readers of environmental narratives.

iv. Deepening Epistemic Worries

As EVE develops, there is a need to further engage with non-Western traditions of environmental virtue⁴³—and this cannot be a shallow cherry-picking of ideas. We should aim at genuine discussions across cultures, with individuals from a variety of traditions exchanging ideas. Yet at the same time we need to allow for genuine questioning of

moral traditions. Perhaps traits considered to be virtues (and in particular, thick expressions of these virtues) that were viable and appropriate under quite different circumstances are no longer environmentally virtuous, given a population of over seven billion humans, species loss, and climate change. There is a delicate balance required between being open-minded and maintaining a rigorous, critical eye when examining ways of life and traditions of virtue, including one's own.⁴⁴ Biases and a lack of environmental virtue and knowledge may hinder our efforts.

Allen Thompson suggests that we may need to find new thick expressions of current environmental virtues, or even recognize entirely new virtues as we face radical environmental changes that render current ways of life untenable:

novel forms of human goodness may emerge, or existing forms may undergo a radical transformation, as we adapt to life in a world where "natural" environments have been significantly transformed by human activities. [...] at least some environmental virtues of the future—the virtues of those living an ecologically sustainable form of life—may be quite different from the environmental virtues of today.⁴⁵

Epistemic worries again arise. As Thompson notes, we may not now be in a position to properly imagine what new virtues or expressions of virtue might emerge in the future. But how will even future humans know whether they have discovered appropriate new expressions of virtues (or new virtues), or are instead veering into vice as they attempt to adapt to an unfamiliar, radically changing world?

Finally, consider again van Wensveen's (2000) lists of 189 virtue and 174 vice terms. While we initially might take these extensive lists as demonstrating depth and nuance in our vocabulary of virtues and vices, difficult questions also arise. For example, do we in fact have 189 distinct environmental virtues? And if not, how many are there, and on what basis do we distinguish them? If we further engage in cross-cultural discussions of virtue, these lists may well expand significantly, further compounding the problem.⁴⁶ How are we to identify and inculcate environmental virtues if we do not know what they are, how many there are, if they are compatible, and so on? Once again, given our limited environmental knowledge, generally low levels of environmental virtue, and our tendencies to bias and flawed reasoning, it seems there is much scope for error.

VI. LOOKING AHEAD: ENVIRONMENTAL VIRTUE ETHICS AND PSYCHOLOGY

EVE has much to gain from an ongoing, deep engagement with social psychology, environmental psychology, and related fields. Of course, work in ecology, biology, climatology, and related disciplines will remain highly relevant to those working in EVE; it is an *environmental* discipline. But psychology may offer particularly valuable insights for EVE as a *virtue ethics*. Beyond attention to ecosystem services and similar contributions to human well-being, we would do well to consider how engagement with the natural

world contributes to our psychological flourishing. For example, there are many studies suggesting cognitive and emotional benefits to such things as walking in (or otherwise experiencing) nature.⁴⁷ Relatedly, further consideration of the relationship between materialistic values, wealth, consumption, and well-being will be important as virtue ethicists strive to arrive at plausible, attractive models for flourishing, virtuous lives in sustainable societies.⁴⁸ Appeals to such research may play a key role in convincing globally wealthy people that environmentally sustainable lives need not be ones of thwarted desires and self-denial.

Psychology and other social sciences will help us in finding ways for institutions to support individuals in developing and manifesting environmental virtues. While a virtuous person might make the right choices given her circumstances, institutions play a key role in improving these circumstances, in ensuring that better options are available. We might explore the potential of institutional “nudges” to encourage better, greener behavior and attitudes, though it could be that deeper institutional and societal changes will ultimately be needed.⁴⁹ We might also consider ways in which social structures of various kinds (from networks of friends to more formal institutions) can help to provide circumstances that reinforce virtuous behavior, in addition to providing better options.⁵⁰

Finally, lessons from psychology can play an important role in helping to overcome, at least to some extent, the epistemic worries facing EVE. Learning more about common biases in acquiring and assessing evidence, including confirmation bias and backfire effects, may lead to improved strategies for overcoming such biases.⁵¹ Similarly, exercises and studies in mindfulness and attention might help us to overcome the vices of inattention discussed by Jenni (2003). Such work seems promising in finding methods for improving our intellectual habits and character—which, in turn, can improve our moral discernment and understanding.⁵²

The epistemic problems faced by EVE are not entirely unique. We face multiple wicked environmental problems across a range of scales (from local to global); any plausible moral theory will encounter significant difficulties in arriving at prescriptions that are epistemically well-founded. But EVE, given its emphasis on virtues and vices, may face certain distinct epistemic problems. In drawing upon relevant empirical work, we may have our best opportunity for overcoming intellectual biases and vices, identifying and inculcating environmental virtues, and setting in motion the social and institutional changes that will be needed if we are to navigate the myriad environmental problems ahead.⁵³

NOTES

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3. R. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 206; see also P. Foot, *Natural Goodness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

4. R. Carson, *The Sense of Wonder* (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), 93; cited in R. Sandler, *Character and Environment: A Virtue-Oriented Approach to Environmental Ethics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 152.
5. Sandler, *Character and Environment: A Virtue-Oriented Approach to Environmental Ethics*, 50.
6. Sandler, *Character and Environment: A Virtue-Oriented Approach to Environmental Ethics*, chap. 1.
7. P. Cafaro, *Thoreau's Living Ethics: Walden and the Pursuit of Virtue* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); P. Cafaro, "Thoreau, Leopold, and Carson: Toward an Environmental Virtue Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 23 (2001): 3–17; B. Shaw, "A Virtue Ethics Approach to Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic," *Environmental Ethics* 19 (1997): 53–67.
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9. R. Hursthouse, "Environmental Virtue Ethics," in *Working Virtue: Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems*, edited by R. L. Walker and P. J. Ivanhoe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 155–172; J. Kawall, "Reverence for Life as a Viable Environmental Virtue," *Environmental Ethics* 25 (2003): 339–358.
10. Sandler, *Character and Environment: A Virtue-Oriented Approach to Environmental Ethics*, 28.
11. Note that a given virtue could be both environmentally responsive and productive, or justified, and so on. See Sandler, *Character and Environment: A Virtue-Oriented Approach to Environmental Ethics*, 42–43; R. Sandler, "A Theory of Environmental Virtue," *Environmental Ethics* 28 (2006): 247–264.
12. Hursthouse, "Environmental Virtue Ethics," 157.
13. See, for example, Hill, "Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments"; Frasz, "Environmental Virtue Ethics: A New Direction for Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 15 (1993): 259–274; L. Gerber, "Standing Humbly Before Nature," *Ethics and the Environment* 7 (2002): 39–53; I. A. Smith, "The Role of Humility and Intrinsic Goods in Preserving Endangered Species," *Environmental Ethics* 32 (2010): 165–182.
14. Hursthouse, "Environmental Virtue Ethics," 158.
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16. Hursthouse, "Environmental Virtue Ethics," 164–165.
17. R. Fredericks, "Courage as an Environmental Virtue," *Environmental Ethics* 36 (2014): 347.
18. Fredericks, "Courage as an Environmental Virtue," 352–353; L. V. Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues: The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Ethics* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books (Prometheus Press) 2000), chap. 8.
19. P. Cafaro, "Gluttony, Arrogance, Greed, and Apathy: An Exploration of Environmental Vice," in *Environmental Virtue Ethics*, edited by R. Sandler and P. Cafaro (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 135–158; P. Wenz, "Synergistic Environmental Virtues: Consumerism and Human Flourishing," in *Environmental Virtue Ethics*, edited by R. Sandler and P. Cafaro (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield), 197–213; J. Kawall, "Rethinking Greed," in *Ethical Adaptation to Climate Change: Human Virtues of the Future*,

- edited by J. Bendik-Keymer and A. Thompson (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), 223–239; J. Kawall, “On Complacency,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 43 (2006): 343–355; M. D. Doan, “Climate Change and Complacency,” *Hypatia* 29 (2014): 634–650.
20. Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues: The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Ethics*, chap. 6; and Wenz, “Synergistic Environmental Virtues: Consumerism and Human Flourishing.”
 21. V. Tiberius and J. D. Walker, “Arrogance,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (1998): 382.
 22. Cafaro, “Gluttony, Arrogance, Greed, and Apathy: An Exploration of Environmental Vice,” 144; see also Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues: The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Ethics*, 98.
 23. For more on this, see the ecofeminist philosopher Karen Warren’s (2000) discussion of the logic of domination; K. J. Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).
 24. Cafaro, “Gluttony, Arrogance, Greed, and Apathy: An Exploration of Environmental Vice,” 144–145.
 25. K. Jenni, “Vices of Inattention,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 20 (2003): 279.
 26. Jenni, “Vices of Inattention,” 280.
 27. Jenni, “Vices of Inattention,” 281.
 28. Jenni, “Vices of Inattention,” 289.
 29. See also J. Kawall, “The Epistemic Demands of Environmental Virtue,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 23 (2010): 109–128.
 30. J. Bendik-Keymer, “The Sixth Mass Extinction Is Caused by Us,” in *Ethical Adaptation to Climate Change: Human Virtues of the Future*, edited by J. Bendik-Keymer and A. Thompson (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), 273.
 31. Cafaro, “Gluttony, Arrogance, Greed, and Apathy: An Exploration of Environmental Vice,” 135.
 32. See Kawall, “The Epistemic Demands of Environmental Virtue.”
 33. B. Treanor, “Environmentalism and Public Virtue,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 23 (2010): 21.
 34. See also, for example, N. Snow, “Virtue and the Oppression of African Americans,” *Public Affairs Quarterly* 18 (2004): 57–74; N. Snow, “Virtue and the Oppression of Women,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 32 (2002): 33–61; Thompson 2012’s discussion of radical hope, A. Thompson, “The Virtue of Responsibility for the Global Climate,” in *Ethical Adaptation to Climate Change: Human Virtues of the Future*, edited by J. Bendik-Keymer and A. Thompson (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), 203–222; and Norlock 2014 on forgiveness as an environmental virtue, K. J. Norlock, “Forgiveness, Pessimism, and Environmental Citizenship,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 23 (2010): 29–42.
 35. M. Ferkany and K. P. Whyte, “The Importance of Participatory Virtues in the Future of Environmental Education,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 25 (2012): 426.
 36. Treanor, “Environmentalism and Public Virtue,” 18.
 37. Hursthouse, “Environmental Virtue Ethics,” 168.
 38. See Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues: The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Ethics*, chap. 5; and Jenni, “Vices of Inattention.”
 39. Sandler, *Character and Environment: A Virtue-Oriented Approach to Environmental Ethics*, chap. 1.
 40. B. Treanor, “Phronesis Without a Phronimos: Narrative Environmental Virtue Ethics,” *Environmental Ethics* 30 (2008): 361–379; B. Treanor, *Emplotting Virtue: A Narrative*

Approach to Environmental Virtue Ethics (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014).

41. Treanor, "Phronesis Without a Phronimos: Narrative Environmental Virtue Ethics," 376.
42. See K. McShane, "Some Challenges for Narrative Accounts of Value," *Ethics & the Environment* 17 (2012): 45–69.
43. Some such work is already being done—see, for example, John Patterson's (1994) paper on Maori environmental virtues or the extensive literature on Buddhism and the environment. J. Patterson, "Maori Environmental Virtues," *Environmental Ethics* 16 (1994): 397–409.
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45. Thompson, "The Virtue of Responsibility for the Global Climate," 204.
46. Daniel Russell refers to this general problem—of identifying and distinguishing particular, distinct virtues—as the "Enumeration Problem." D. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), chap. 5.
47. E.g., M. G. Berman, J. Jonides, and S. Kaplan, "The Cognitive Benefits of Interacting with Nature," *Psychological Science* 19 (2008): 1207–1212; G. N. Bratman, G. C. Daily, B. J. Levy, and J. J. Gross, "The Benefits of Nature Experience: Improved Affect and Cognition," *Landscape and Urban Planning* 138 (2015): 41–50.
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49. See C. R. Sunstein, and L.A. Reisch, "Green by Default," *Kyklos* 66 (2013): 398–402.
50. See M. Merritt, "Virtue Ethics and Situationist Personality Psychology," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 3 (2000): 365–383; M. Nye and T. Hargreaves, "Exploring the Social Dynamics of Proenvironmental Behavior Change," *Journal of Industrial Ecology* 14 (2010): 137–149.
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52. See also M. Ferkany and K. P. Whyte, "Environmental Education, Wicked Problems and Virtue," *Philosophy of Education* (2011): 331–339.
53. I would like to thank Monica Kawall, Claire Sigsworth, and Vlad Vladikoff for helpful comments and suggestions.

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CHAPTER 34

SEXUAL ETHICS

RAJA HALWANI

PABLO and Kareem are close colleagues. Every now and then, they have lunch together, and if one has a party or gathering, he invites the other. They often open up to and are warm toward each other (they're not quite friends, but nearly). Kareem has been dating Vera for a while, though they don't live together. Pablo has always found Vera sexually desirable, and she, too, finds him sexually desirable. As it happens, Kareem and Vera are going through a rough patch, which has made them both emotionally vulnerable. At a party at Kareem's house to celebrate his recent promotion, while Pablo is going to the upstairs bathroom, he runs into Vera coming out. It looked as if she were crying. He asks her what is wrong, at which point she pulls him into the bedroom and pours her heart out to him. He comforts her and hugs her. Both realize that, if they wanted to, they could have, then and there, some sort of sexual encounter with each other—if not intercourse, at least kissing and heavy petting.

Such action would be wrong. Even if we thought that (depending on the nature of the rough patch between Kareem and Vera) Vera is entitled to some sexual outlet at some point, it should not be then and there, and probably not with Pablo. This much is uncontroversial. Also uncontroversial is the claim that if Pablo and Vera were to have sex, the severity of its wrongness would vary depending on the details. For instance, the wrongness is quite severe from the start given that the sexual encounter would breach the loyalty between the parties. The wrongness would be compounded were they to have intercourse as opposed to something less serious. It would be further compounded by doing it at Kareem's house or during the celebration of Kareem's promotion. All these factors would add to the wrongness of the breach of loyalty.

Here's another way to compound the wrongness: Suppose that Pablo, being competitive and easily jealous, is upset by Kareem's promotion, so he thinks that "scoring" with Vera is a fantastic way to get back at him. It doesn't matter to Pablo that Kareem might never know about him and Vera; all it matters is that he scores—a triumph over Kareem that will get Pablo through the next couple of months at work. Such a motive on Pablo's part makes the act even more wrong. His previous motive (or "end," as we'll see later) of obtaining sexual pleasure from having sex with Vera is bad enough. Vengeance makes it worse.

I will use this example on and off throughout the chapter.¹ For now, I must register the crucial and, I recognize, controversial point, that concepts such as “disloyal” and “loyal” are not necessarily vice and virtue terms. Consider: a basic claim about Pablo’s action is that it is wrong. A richer one is that it is exploitive, disloyal, disrespectful, vengeful, and impulsive.² An even richer one is that it is wrong *because* it is all these things. We don’t need to know anything about Pablo’s virtues and vices in order to describe his action in these ways; all we need are descriptions of the action and the context. Now, “virtue” and “vice” refer to character traits. Given that actions can be exploitive, disloyal, and so on, independently of the character traits of their perpetrators, then a loyal person is someone who regularly and reliably engages in loyal actions. This indicates that it is somewhat misleading to claim that terms such as “exploitive,” “disloyal,” and “vengeful” are vice terms (or that “loyal,” “beneficial,” etc., are virtue terms). This is because their referents are more basic than that: whether a trait is a virtue or a vice depends (partially) on what type of actions its possessor engages in. This in turn indicates that in discussing the ethics of *actions* we don’t need to bring in the language of virtues and vices; all we need are the preceding thick moral concepts. And this supports the point that concepts such as “disloyal” and “loyal” are not necessarily vice and virtue terms. If so, then any claim to the effect that virtue and vice terms enrich our moral discussion of *actions* requires much more argument.³

So I won’t argue in this chapter that virtue ethics enriches or nuances a moral discussion of sexual actions. To my mind, a crucial task for the intersection of virtue and sexual ethics is the elaboration and defense of plausible conceptions of the relevant virtues and vices—in this case, temperance and intemperance. What is temperance, and who is the temperate person? Answering this question is my primary task, though at the end I do briefly discuss actions. I shall argue that we can find in Aristotle’s view two broad conceptions of temperance, one relaxed and one stringent. I shall, with a heavy heart, defend the latter (on non-historical, non-exegetical grounds). I then discuss what virtuous sexual actions are, concluding with a note on the difficulty of being sexually virtuous.⁴

I adopt a neo-Aristotelian view of the virtuous and the non-virtuous: virtuous people discern what is right and act on it with the proper motives, desires, and emotions, as the context requires, while non-virtuous people err in these respects. Virtuous people not only act for the sake of what is right (the noble, the fine), but also get right all the factors involved in any given case (whereas non-virtuous people err in one or more of these ways). Recall Aristotle’s view of acting virtuously: “having [these feelings and actions] at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way.”⁵ A virtuous person would get all these right in regards to sex; note here on how many dimensions Pablo or Vera can err.

I. TEMPERANCE: ITS POTENTIAL ELEMENTS

According to Aristotle, temperance is the virtue concerned with pleasures, specifically bodily pleasures, but its scope is specifically the pleasures of touch and taste; they are

those “shared with the other animals, and so appear slavish and bestial”; the pleasures of sight, hearing and smell, though they can be excessive, are not the subject of temperance.⁶ Indeed, Aristotle adds that taste has little to do with it, even in the case of food, giving the example of a glutton who wished for a long neck so as to feel even more the *touch* of the food as it goes down his throat.⁷

It is an interesting question why Aristotle confines temperance to taste and touch. It might be because they are part of our brute biological nature (hence Aristotle’s “shared with the other animals”).⁸ But this is implausible, as animals do not seem to enjoy food for its touch. They exhibit preferences for some foods and not others, as Aristotle himself notes, and he later emphasizes appetites that vary from one individual to another, without excluding them from the purview of temperance.⁹ Luckily, we do not need to decide this issue, as temperance about *sexual* pleasure seems to be clearly anchored in touch. People, to satisfy their sexual desires, often want to do so by coming in contact with another person’s body or with their own.¹⁰ Of course, touching is not always through the hand; the mouth, tongue, nose, feet, and one’s whole body play crucial roles in the desire to be in contact with another’s body. Thus, we can say that the domain of sexual temperance and intemperance is bodily pleasure attained mainly through touch.¹¹

Of course, other senses play crucial roles. Often, people’s sexual pleasure is enhanced by smell and taste, and sight is often an essential contributor to sexual pleasure: it causally initiates and sustains sexual desire and action. But touch remains pivotal. One way to think about this is to imagine whether people (in general) would be fully sexually satisfied were they to only be able to smell or see those whom they sexually desire. If the answer is no, then clearly these two senses are not sufficient.¹² We can say that whereas sight and smell (and other senses) might be necessary conditions for the attainment of sexual pleasure, such pleasure is typically attained *through* touch. Without touch, the set up might be there, but not the actual attainment of pleasure.

At this point, we should introduce an obvious yet necessary distinction between sexual pleasure and sexual desire. Usually, one has a sexual desire for a sexual pleasure, though the desire need not always be fulfilled (partially, fully, or at all) were the agent to act on the desire (e.g., bungled sexual acts). It is also possible that one experiences sexual pleasure without acting on sexual desire (e.g., nocturnal emissions, enjoying a sexual act that one has not initially desired). Note that sexual pleasures and sexual desires can be tokens or types. For example, one might have (the type of) sexual desire for sex with blondes, but one might have it today (not tomorrow) or for this blonde but not that one (tokens).

This distinction is important because the discussion of temperance and intemperance has much to do with which pleasures are acceptable to experience and pursue. Those who pursue certain pleasures (as opposed to those who stumble upon them) tend to do so because they desire them, not because they want to experiment or experience feeling them, and so on. This immediately raises the issue of what kind of people they are, morally speaking. And it would seem to be a straightforward path from sexual pleasure to sexual desire in character evaluation: people who desire and pursue the wrong sexual

pleasures seem to be vicious people, at least in that respect. This is exactly the idea that anchors Aristotle's discussion.

Aristotle distinguishes between pleasures that are "natural" to everyone, and those that are "distinctive of different people." He thinks that it is rare to go wrong with respect to the former, and that when this happens it is usually in the direction of excess. His main example is the glutton. He says, "That is why these people are called 'gluttons,' showing that they glut their bellies past what is right; that is how especially slavish people turn out."¹³ Clearly, Aristotle thinks that eating too much is intemperate, not because of some idea of "too much," but because it indicates slavishness to the desires. Recall that Aristotle in Book I rules out a life of pleasure because it is fit only for non-human animals, and people who live it are slavish.¹⁴ Given his view that a good life for human beings should be in accordance with reason, the problem with "too much" is that the person's desires subvert her reason.¹⁵

Aristotle goes on to claim that with respect to pleasures distinctive of different people, the temperate person enjoys the right pleasures, in the right ways, and not to excess.¹⁶ He adds that the temperate person

finds no pleasure in what most pleases the intemperate person, but finds it disagreeable; he finds no pleasure at all in the wrong things. He finds no intense pleasure in any [bodily pleasures], suffers no pain at their absence, and has no appetite for them, or only a moderate appetite, not to the wrong degree or at the wrong time or anything else at all of that sort. If something is pleasant and conducive to health and fitness, he will desire this moderately and in the right way; and he will desire in the same way anything else that is pleasant, if it is no obstacle to health and fitness, does not deviate from the fine, and does not exceed his means.¹⁷

In another passage, Aristotle goes even further, claiming that the temperate person *enjoys abstinence* from pleasure.¹⁸

The preceding paragraph contains the main elements that Aristotle thinks characterize temperance. Before listing them, note that they all depend on the twin notions of right and wrong sexual pleasures. For the purposes of this chapter, I define "wrong sexual pleasure" as "sexual pleasure obtained through a wrong sexual act" and "right sexual pleasure" as "sexual pleasure obtained through a right sexual act." A right sexual act, whether permissible or obligatory, is one done "at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way."¹⁹ Thus, the rightness and wrongness of sexual pleasure derives from the rightness and wrongness of those acts through which the pleasure is obtained.²⁰ This sounds right: the pleasures of sex with children are wrong because sex with children is wrong, not the other way around.²¹

Connected to this point is that temperance is really about sexual *desires* for these pleasures. Virtues are character traits that moderate an agent's feelings, emotions, desires, and judgments. Thus, being a virtue, temperance moderates one or more of these. Since it is concerned with bodily pleasures, (sexual) temperance is concerned with sexual desires, given the close connections between desires and bodily pleasures.

We find the following elements of temperance in what Aristotle says. The temperate person

- (1) Finds the idea of experiencing wrong pleasures disagreeable, even odious (depending on the pleasure);
- (2) Does not find wrong pleasures enjoyable (he does not sexually desire them or is not tempted by the pleasures of wrong sexual acts);
- (3) Enjoys right pleasures (engages in right sexual acts);
- (4) Does not enjoy right pleasures too intensely;
- (5) Suffers no pain at the absence of right pleasures;
- (6) Moderately desires right pleasures;
- (7) Pursues right pleasures on occasion;
- (8) Does not desire right pleasures;
- (9) Enjoys abstaining from pleasures, including right ones.

Before commenting on some of these elements, note that not all of them sit easily with each another. For instance, (7) and (8) are in tension, even though we can imagine cases in which a temperate person pursues sexual pleasures for purposes, say, of experimentation. Also, (3) and (9) are in tension with one another, even though one can enjoy right pleasures but also enjoy not experiencing them, as the latter option might be more noble. Moreover, depending on which elements of the list we retain, we will have a stringent or relaxed conception of temperance, as we'll see in the following.

About wrong pleasures, Aristotle claims that the temperate person does not find them pleasurable and indeed finds them disagreeable. This claim is ambiguous. Construed experientially, it says, "The temperate person, were he to somehow experience a wrong pleasure, would not experience it as pleasurable." Another way to put this claim is "The temperate person does not sexually desire wrong sexual pleasures" or "the temperate person does not find tempting the prospect of experiencing a wrong pleasure."²² Construed non-experientially, it says, "The temperate person considers the idea of wrong pleasures disagreeable or odious." Note that on the second reading, the temperate person might sexually enjoy a wrong pleasure were he to undergo it, and he might be tempted by it, but he would still find its idea wrong and odious. Given his remarks, Aristotle seems to accept both meanings—hence (1) and (2). (Both these readings apply to types and tokens of wrong pleasures.) Should both be part of a plausible conception of temperance?

Clearly, (1) is non-negotiable. Indeed, not only is it part of temperance, but it is part of continence and incontinence as well, because all three types of agents recognize what is right and find the idea of acting wrongly disagreeable (though, perhaps, to varying degrees). Only the intemperate person differs in this respect, because, as Aristotle explains, he "acts on decision" and "thinks it is right in every case to pursue the pleasant thing at hand; the incontinent person, however, thinks it is wrong to pursue this pleasant thing, yet still pursues it."²³

Element (2) is also necessary for a plausible conception of temperance for two reasons. First, a person is temperate not only because of his thoughts and beliefs about right and wrong sexual pleasures and actions (which is what (1) encapsulates), but also because of the very constitution of his desires—his very character. A temperate person would not enjoy wrong sexual pleasures, would not desire them, and would not be tempted by them. If Pablo were virtuous, he would not be tempted by having sex with Vera because, knowing that she is his colleague's girlfriend, the thought of having sex with her would not move him. Sex with Vera is, to use a common expression in such discussions, "silenced by" the considerations of her relationship to him and to Kareem.²⁴

Second, and connected to the first reason, we need to distinguish temperate people from continent ones, and one obvious way to do so is via (2). Aristotle says, "For the continent and the temperate person are both the sort to do nothing against reason because of bodily pleasures, but the continent person has base appetites, whereas the temperate person lacks them. The temperate person is the sort to find nothing pleasant against reason, but the continent is the sort to find such things pleasant but not to be led by them."²⁵ If Pablo were continent, he would be tempted by the idea of having sex with Vera, and he would have enjoyed it were he to succumb to the temptation. He has base desires. We then need (2) to distinguish the continent from the temperate. Thus, both (1) and (2) are necessary for a plausible conception of temperance, whether relaxed or stringent.²⁶

About right pleasures, the elements in the list waver, but there is a clear suspicion of bodily pleasures reflected in (4), (5), (6), (8), and (9) (whether this suspicion is well-founded remains to be seen). On the one hand, Aristotle wants the temperate person to enjoy sexual pleasures as long as they are right, but, on the other, he is worried about them—hence the ideas that the enjoyment should not be too intense, that the temperate person would not miss the pleasures were they to not occur, that he would enjoy abstinence, and so on. Hence also the absence from the list of "desires right pleasures" without the modifier "moderately." It is as if the temperate agent says, "Well, if I stumble upon them, I will enjoy them, but if I don't stumble upon them, that's fine, too. Bodily pleasures are not a big deal to me."

Also, of (3)–(8), it is perhaps (4) and (8) that are in need of comment at this point because it is not clear what it means to enjoy bodily pleasures intensely, too intensely, or not too intensely, and it is not clear why (8) should be on a list of elements of temperance given the antipathy it expresses toward (even right) pleasures. Regarding (4), Aristotle must have had food in mind, because I think that the intensity is clearest in this case. We can imagine two people enjoying (rightly) the same meal, but such that one does it slowly, calmly, even dignifiedly, whereas the other "stuffs his face." There is a sense in which the latter is enjoying it too intensely, whereas the former is not. But even this might not be good enough to accurately capture "too intensely," as Aristotle might have had in mind a phenomenological difference—somehow, to the temperate, the enjoyment *feels* not as intense as it does to the non-temperate.

The preceding is hard to explain in words, and it is, I think, virtually impossible to do so with some sexual pleasures. When it comes, for example, to how orgasms feel, it is hard to see how the temperate might not feel them too intensely, as it is a physiological

reaction mostly beyond our control.²⁷ The orgasm is, of course, not the only sexual pleasure, but it is a crucial one, often the goal of many sexual actions. But I suspect also that because of the power of sexual desire (see later discussion), other sexual pleasures tend also to be very intense, in which case, when it comes to sexual pleasure, we might not be able to distinguish the temperate from the intemperate as far as intensity is concerned.

Regarding (8), it is on the list because of one peculiar thing that Aristotle says, and that I have already quoted: the temperate person “has no appetite for [any bodily pleasures].” In saying this, Aristotle foreshadows some Christian philosophers who conceived of temperance as outright abstinence (e.g., Thomas Aquinas, who considered the best form of temperance to be virginity). And as we’ll see in the following, (8) is explained by Aristotle’s general suspicion of bodily pleasures. However, I will not consider it any further, even as part of a stringent view of temperance, since it actually seems to be a form of intemperance, specifically, insensibility (even on Aristotle’s own ground).

“Moderately” in (6) merits a brief comment. The idea, I think, is that though the temperate person desires right pleasures, she does so without hungering for them and without making them the end all, be all, of her life or daily activities. Even though these pleasures are right, they are not of a nature to command much effort and mental energy to attain them. While doing the just or courageous action does deserve attention, time, planning, energy, and so on, pursuing a bodily pleasure does not. Indeed, doing so betokens that the agent is not actually temperate. This is the best way, I think, to cash in “moderately.”

The other elements on the list need no special comment.

II. TWO CONCEPTIONS OF TEMPERANCE

Given the preceding list, we can construct two general conceptions of temperance, one relaxed and one stringent. Common to both are (1) and (2), because, as I have argued, both are necessary for temperance. Furthermore, because we want to be able to distinguish the temperate from the insensible (which is one form of intemperance, according to Aristotle), we need to include (3) in both the relaxed and stringent conceptions. That is, even on the latter, we need to have the temperate agent emerge as enjoying right pleasures; otherwise, she would be insensible. Thus, (1) through (3) are common to both.

The relaxed conception takes as its starting point the idea that there are right sexual pleasures to enjoy. It thus accepts (6) because it would allow the agent to want such pleasures. It also accepts (7) on the grounds that since these pleasures are right, pursuing them, certainly on occasion, is also right. In accepting (6) it would thereby reject (9) because since the pleasures are right, there is no reason to not enjoy experiencing them.

But (4) and (5) are trickier. Accepting or rejecting them depends on how relaxed the conception is. A very relaxed conception would reject both: if bodily pleasures can be good and right, a temperate person would enjoy them intensely and would even feel pain at their absences. For example, if sex between Kareem and Vera is right, there is no

reason why Vera (who is virtuous) should not feel pain because the sex she was looking forward to with Kareem on a particular afternoon fell through. But a regularly relaxed conception could also accept (4) and (5): bodily pleasures can indeed be right, but they are not much worth our while. Enjoying them too intensely or feeling pained at their absences betokens a defective attitude toward them.

Thus, we can say that (4) and (5) more plausibly belong to a relaxed conception of temperance, but not a very relaxed one.

In addition to (1), (2), and (3), a stringent conception of temperance retains (4) and (5). If it accepts (3), it will insist on *both* (4) and (5), given that it is a stringent conception. It might accept (6) on the ground that as long as the desire is moderate, a temperate person can go ahead and desire the right bodily pleasures. A very stringent conception would reject (6) and retain (9).

Clearly, there is a demilitarized zone, consisting of (4), (5), and (6), between the not-very-relaxed and the not-very-stringent conceptions. Thus, these conceptions can shade into each other, depending on how we construe them.

Which conception should we accept?

The answer to this question depends on our view of sexual desire and appetite. The more benign we think it is, the more convincing a relaxed conception of temperance would be. The more malign we think it is, the more convincing a stringent conception would be. I happen to believe that sexual desire is quite malignant, so a stringent conception is more plausible. The catch is that it might not be attainable. Or so I will argue.

III. SEXUAL DESIRE

There is a long philosophical tradition that views sexual desire with extreme suspicion. Plato and Christian philosophers viewed it with hostility. Even Aristotle, whose views on bodily appetites seem to be optimistic, at least compared to Plato's, viewed bodily appetites with suspicion. Indeed, it seems that Aristotle does not view sexual desire as neutral but as downright dangerous. He states,

Some sources of pleasure are necessary; others are choiceworthy in their own right, but can be taken to excess. The necessary ones are the bodily conditions, i.e., those that concern food, sexual intercourse, and the sorts of bodily conditions that we took temperance and intemperance to be about. Other sources of pleasure are not necessary, but are choiceworthy in themselves, such as victory, honor, wealth, and similar good and pleasant things.²⁸

He later adds,

Some people are overcome by, or pursue, some of these naturally fine and good things to a degree that goes against reason; they take honor . . . (for instance) more

seriously than is right . . . [E]xcess about them is also possible There is no vice here . . . since each of these things is naturally choiceworthy for itself, though excess about them is bad and to be avoided. Similarly, there is no incontinence here either, since incontinence is not merely to be avoided, but also blameworthy [and these conditions are not].²⁹

Aristotle is distinguishing between two sources of pleasure: necessary ones and choice-worthy ones. His point is that even though there can be states of excess when it comes to the latter (e.g., honor), they are merely to be avoided and are not blameworthy. However, incontinence and intemperance, which are strictly speaking not about choiceworthy goods, are not only to be avoided but are also blameworthy. This is because they are about merely necessary goods—bodily pleasures.³⁰

Thus, Aristotle minimally believes that bodily pleasures are neutral; they are certainly not choiceworthy. In other passages he goes further, believing them to be dangerous:

For the things that need to be tempered are those that desire shameful things and tend to grow large. Appetites and children are most like this If, then, [the child or the appetitive part] is not obedient and subordinate to its rulers, it will go far astray. For when someone lacks understanding, his desire for the pleasant is insatiable and seeks indiscriminate satisfaction. The [repeated] active exercise of appetite increases the appetite he already had from birth, and if the appetites are large and intense, they actually expel rational calculation. That is why appetites must be moderate and few, and never contrary to reason. This is the condition we call obedient and temperate.³¹

These considerations seem to support a stringent view of temperance, one that includes elements (1) through (5). They don't go so far as to reject (6) and accept (8), because Aristotle cautions only against appetites that are "large and intense." If they are moderate, they might not usher in the dangers about which he worries.

Aristotle seems to be onto something important when it comes to sexual appetite, and we don't need to be prudes about sex to support him. Consider that the power of sexual desire is such that it³² (i) makes us willing to manipulate and deceive others to gain sexual satisfaction; (ii) makes us willing to convey false images (literal and non-literal) of ourselves to come across as sexually desirable; (iii) renders us rationally weak, easily manipulated, and at the whim of our object of desire; (iv) renders us morally weak, making it easier for us to engage in actions that are reprehensible, plain wrong, or unwise (adultery, pedophilia, constant viewing of pornography, etc.); and (v) "is inelastic, relentless, the passion most likely to challenge reason and cause us to experience weakness of will (*akrasia*), compelling us to seek satisfaction even when doing so involves the risks of dark-alley gropings, microbiologically filthy acts, slinking around the White House, or impetuous marriage."³³

Immanuel Kant also believed that sexual desire is by its very nature problematic in that it objectifies. It does so because it targets our bodies, not our humanity: "But there is

no way in which a human being can be made an Object of indulgence for another except through sexual impulse.”³⁴ Sexual desire, to Kant, makes of “humanity an instrument for the satisfaction” of lust and desire.³⁵ Given that Kant’s Formula of Humanity admonishes us to treat humanity always as an end not only in others, but also in ourselves, Kant’s worry about the problematic nature of sexual desire applies to *both* *X* using *Y* as merely an instrument *and* to *X* allowing *X*’s self to be used merely an instrument.³⁶ Even if sexual desire does not involve, in a particular case, the above-mentioned points (i–v), it still objectifies by targeting only the body of another.

Thus, sexual desires and appetites have the tendency to consume us, they target our bodies, not our humanity, and their power is such that they undermine our moral and rational wills. This is a pessimist view of sexual desire.³⁷ It is plausible, and we are well acquainted with sexual desire’s mind-numbing force. Because sexual desire makes it easy, for example, to rationalize “the right person, for the right end, at the right time,” and so on, when one (or more) is actually not right, we need to be on our guard against it. Hence, it seems that we have a Kantian-cum-Aristotelian reason for adopting a stringent conception of temperance: if sexual desire is powerful, controlling, and subversive of reason, a relaxed conception of temperance is unduly optimistic.

However, we have to be careful. A pessimist view of sexual desire does not entail a stringent conception of temperance. We can agree that sexual desire is powerful but claim that “temperance” is a success term: if a temperate person is someone who is truly able to bring his desires in line with his reason, then that is it—that would be our temperate person. That is, whether sexual desire is powerful or not powerful, the temperate person makes it listen to reason, end of story. We can claim that a temperate person would enjoy (moderately) sexual pleasures, and would even pursue them, even if sexual desire were powerful, because a temperate person is someone who has trained his desires to listen to his reason.

But the catch is that we make temperance a rare virtue: if sexual desire is indeed powerful, then it will be very hard to control and harder still to bring it in harmony with reason. Sexual desire would be the dark, not white, horse, in Plato’s *Phaedrus*. The habituation of sexual desire would be an incredibly difficult task—hence the idea that sexually temperate people are rare.³⁸

There’s another catch. If sexual desire is very powerful, why think that a stringent conception is any less rare than a relaxed one? Why believe that it is any easier to train oneself to not desire sexual pleasures at all? The pessimist view of sexual desire might also make a stringent conception of temperance unrealistic because there is no reason to believe that sexual desire is easier to squash than to mold. The pessimist view of sexual desire renders *both* conceptions of temperance unrealistic, thereby making a continent approach to sexual desire and pleasure realistic. I myself am very sympathetic to this point, one reason being that the rejection of the pessimist view of sexual desire is not much of an option, as a moment’s reflection on the phenomenology of sexual desire and pleasure shows its plausibility.

IV. POTENTIAL DIFFICULTY

Suppose Pablo sexually desires Vera because he wants to humiliate her by showing her how easy her virtue is. In such a case, it is clear that Pablo has a wrong sexual desire that no virtuous person would have. Any conception of temperance that makes room for such a desire would be unacceptable. But suppose that Pablo sexually desires Vera simply because she is attractive. Might he still be virtuous? If we claim that Pablo should not even be tempted by having sex with Vera (because she has a boyfriend, Kareem, who also happens to be Pablo's acquaintance and coworker), we have what many would accept as a plausible view of temperance, namely, that insofar as *any* pleasure is wrong, temperate people would not be tempted by it. But then the problem is that we again raise the bar high and make temperance a virtue extremely difficult to reach. This is because Pablo's finding Vera sexually attractive comes naturally to him given that she is, well, attractive, that he desires women, and that she happens to be "his type." Although Pablo's relationship with friendship with and loyalty to Kareem might affect this desire in a spectrum of ways, from not allowing it to exist, to silencing it, to not giving it any weight, Pablo is human and can, much like any other virtuous person, be tempted (sexually and non-sexually). So if Pablo does desire Vera, judging him non-temperate might be too harsh. The point is then that the danger to making temperance rare comes not only from a pessimist view of sexual desire, but also from which wrong pleasures we think are relevant.

This point can be supported further by some reflections on sexual desire and human psychology. First, the power of sexual desire implies that expecting people to not even feel its pull in cases such as the preceding is a tall order. Second, many of these wrong pleasures are instances of types of desires that are right. For example, Pablo's desire to have sex with Vera is an instance of his desire to have sex with women, which is, as a type, perfectly acceptable. We are asking, then, virtuous people to pull off something difficult indeed: to maintain a healthy sexual desire while also squashing it—not even feeling it or being tempted by it—in some cases when it is wrong to act on it. Perhaps we ought to make room here for the possibility that a virtuous person would be tempted by some wrong sexual desires, though he would not succumb to the temptation.³⁹

Third, our sexual desires and appetites are formed in ways (both natural and cultural) difficult to fathom and control, by processes that start early on in our infancy and that often take a long time to sort through. Even when our sexual desires change (people often develop new, and drop old, sexual tastes), the change is rarely transparent and rarely under our direct control.

Fourth, sexual desire seeks variety. People are rarely content to have sex with one and the same person over and over again. Few escape the clutches of the phenomenon of "bedroom death." Sexual monogamy is a sacrifice of sorts.⁴⁰

Fifth, the satisfaction of sexual desire is not easy. Consider: excepting extreme cases, satisfying hunger or thirst is not difficult; one can grab a piece of bread and be done with it. Not so with sex. We cannot satisfy it whenever we want or with whomever we want

(for obvious reasons). For many people, masturbation, which can blunt the pull of sexual desire, goes only so far. This means that there are many people whose sexual desires are often left unheeded. These include not only people who live in sexually repressive societies or who are sexually undesirable in some way or other, but also the majority of people, for the simple reason that the satisfaction of sexual desire depends on the consent of the other party and on other factors (e.g., finding a place to do it). Thus, there are many people who are sexually hungry. Viewed from this perspective, temperance is a very difficult virtue to attain.

All these points underscore the fact (of which Aristotle seems to have been aware) that sexual desire, like other bodily desires, is in a crucial sense independent of reason. Reason can (and does) control it, but it is just that—control. We should not expect people to have their sexual desires *in harmony* with their reason. Continence might be the norm, so temperance might indeed be out of reach for many people.⁴¹

These considerations raise the issue as to whether no wrong pleasures can ever be felt by the temperate. If we agree that some might be felt, then even though they would tempt temperate people, and even though they would enjoy them were they to experience them, they would not (of course) succumb to the temptations. This much is what they have in common with the continent.

There would then be two differences between the temperate and the continent. First, the class of wrong pleasures that can tempt temperate people is a subset of the class of wrong pleasures that tempt continent agents. The latter are tempted by far more wrong pleasures.³³ It might even be true that while temperate people are tempted by wrong tokens of right types of pleasure, continent people are *additionally* tempted by wrong types of pleasure (an issue worth further investigation). Second, we can claim that even though virtuous people are sometimes tempted by wrong pleasures, they do not endow them with value. The temptations are, we can say, felt on an almost physical level, without much deliberation about them, whereas continent agents value such temptations much more.⁴²

These measures would make temperance easier to attain, though our earlier remarks about sexual desire's power still make it a tough virtue to attain and maintain.

V. VIRTUOUS SEXUAL ACTS

A chapter on sexual ethics should not only be on temperance; it should also address actions. I focus on virtuous, not merely right, actions.

The first thing to note is that, like any other action, a sexual action can be virtuous in one way but non-virtuous in another ("non-virtuous" does not always mean "vicious"). If Kareem has sex with Vera, his action might be ungenerous or selfish, not paying heed to her pleasure, but good in every other aspect. Moreover, not every sexual action needs to be connected to sexual desire. Prostitutes, for example, often have sex for the purpose

of making money, and some of their actions need not be any less virtuous for that. Thus, virtues other than temperance can be part of the evaluation of sexual acts.

In Aristotle, we find two general ways of characterizing virtuous actions. The first is, as noted, that a virtuous action is done “at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way” (Aristotle should have added “at the right place” and “for the right duration,” and, for sexual desire especially, “with the right object”—more on this shortly). Let’s call this “RIGHT.” It is not necessary that each of these “right” aspects apply to every virtue; some might not. For example, “about the right thing” applies to mildness of character, as it is plausible that the mild person does not get angry about just anything. But it seems to not apply to generosity, as it is hard to make sense of the idea that one is generous about this or that (as opposed to *toward* this or that, *for* this or that end, or *with* this or that).

The context of Aristotle’s remarks about RIGHT is not a discussion of individual virtues, but of virtue in general.⁴³ This point, coupled with Aristotle’s view that practical wisdom infuses all the virtues, means that RIGHT applies to actions holistically, not just temperate or courageous actions. This makes sense: a virtuous person would get all these aspects correct in her acting (this does not commit us to any implausible view of the unity of the virtues).

The problem is that RIGHT is not sufficient for virtuous actions. Clearly, someone of unreliable moral character can act in such a way that she satisfies all the aspects of RIGHT, yet do so accidentally or as a one-time thing. Such actions are not virtuous, especially if by “virtuous” we mean “stemming from virtue,” as opposed to “mimicking what a virtuous person does” (though the mimicking in such cases goes deeper than in other cases in including the right motives).

Thus, we need the other conditions that Aristotle lays out for virtuous action: “First, [the agent] must know [that he is doing virtuous actions]; second, he must decide on them, and decide on them for themselves; and, third, he must also do them from a firm and unchanging state.”⁴⁴ It is an interesting issue of how these three (or four, really, since deciding on *X* and deciding on *X* for its own sake are two different conditions) connect to RIGHT.⁴⁵ But they are best construed as RIGHT’s framework: When a virtuous person does a virtuous action, she does so as RIGHT spells it out, while also satisfying the framework conditions: she will know that every aspect of her action (of RIGHT) is proper (right, virtuous, just, courageous, and so on—whatever relevant moral vocabulary is necessitated by the context and by the agent’s moral vocabulary), and she will engage in the action freely and because it is the right thing to do (again, using whatever appropriate vocabulary that is in her repertoire). Given her traits, she satisfies the first three conditions not on a fluke, but because of the virtuous person that she is.

Consider a simple example. I give five dollars to a homeless person in order to help her (and by not making a show of it), and replying with “You’re welcome” to her “Thank you.” My action satisfies all the relevant aspects of RIGHT. I also do what I do because it is the right thing. Note here how the notion of “end” in RIGHT is not the same as Aristotle’s second (my third) condition: I do the action for the end of helping the person, but I also do it because it is the right, generous, just, and so on, thing to do. Thus, we

have many conditions for a virtuous action: not only must the action satisfy RIGHT, but since any person can satisfy these aspects accidentally or as a one-time thing, Aristotle's additional conditions provide the framework within which RIGHT is to be acted on for the action to be virtuous. We have then RIGHT conditions and framework conditions.

Let's bring this to bear on virtuous sexual actions, starting with RIGHT.

We know what some of its aspects mean. For instance, there are wrong and right times during which to have sex. "Right place" is also clear, as there are obviously wrong places to have sex (e.g., the bed of one's parents, at the chapel, and, maybe, next to Fluffy the cat). "Right duration" might also be easy: a long sex act might be wrong because it makes one late to class or to delivering the State of the Union address.

"Right person" seems also clear: the spouse of one's best friend, an inebriated person, and so on, would (normally) be the wrong people (note here consent's necessity to render any person the right one; it is not sufficient, as the example of the best friend's spouse shows). But here we might be better off amending Aristotle's view and changing "right person" to "right object." This is because people have sex with things other than people, such as animals, inflated dolls (though not, say, dildos—they have sex using dildos, not with them), and cadavers. "Right object" gives us more flexibility by referring to all potential sexual partners, and we can thus discuss which of these are the right objects and which are the wrong ones.

Which are the right and wrong objects would have to be determined on non-virtue grounds; that is, the virtuous person is someone who would have sex with the right object, because he or she understands which are the right ones and which are the wrong ones. But these are yet to be determined, and many of them will depend on the context. It is also likely that Aristotle and us would agree on some but differ on others. We might agree on the wrongness of having sex with animals and with our siblings, but disagree with him on having sex with slaves (and maybe members of the same sex).

"Right way" is trickier, as it might refer to either how one *gets to* have sex with another or how the sexual act proceeds (position, use of "toys"—dildos, oils, smelly socks, etc., or use of methods related to procreation). Under the former, having sex by way of coercion or manipulation that undermines genuine consent (however this is fleshed out) would be a wrong way. Under the latter, unless the position somehow endangers one or more of the parties, the examples would have to come from conservative quarters (die-hard Catholicism or New Natural Law), in which case wrong ways would be non-procreative ones (use of contraceptive, anal sex, etc.). One can also imagine some puritanical stance that prohibits some position or other—for example, Greek style, standing up—as somehow wrong. But these views are unconvincing.

More puzzling are "about the right thing" and "for the right end." Similarly to generosity, I am unable to make sense of the view that one enjoys a sexual pleasure "about this or that thing." So "about the right thing" might not apply to sexual actions.

The most interesting is "for the right end." Enjoying sexual pleasure is one very common end of sexual actions. But it is not the only one: procreation, expressing love, making money, helping someone release sexual tension, and feeding one's ego are other ends that come easily to mind. Moreover, not all these ends stem from sexual desire. Two

people might have sex to procreate, even though neither desires the sex. *A* might help *B* release sexual energy even if *A* does not desire *B*. And, of course, prostitutes often have sex without desiring their clients.

"For the right end" is the most interesting because, first, it shows us clearly how temperance need not figure in sexual actions, and, second, its connection with Aristotle's framework conditions raises a minor challenge. To take up the first point: because not all sexual ends have to do with sexual desire, we should not confuse the ends of having sex in general with those specifically of sexual temperance. For instance, if *X* can have sex with *Y* in order to make *Y* feel better about *Y*'s self or to relieve *Y*'s sexual frustration, but *not* out of sexual desire for *Y*, temperance would not take part in our evaluation of the action (unless we blandly say, "the action is non-temperate"). Each of these ends is right, yet none is of temperance, simply because of the absence of sexual desire. We need to evaluate the action in terms of other virtues.

To take up the second point: in the earlier example of the homeless person, helping her because it is right makes quite a bit of sense, and similarly for other actions such as saving a life, donating to charity, paying back one's dues, and so on. We say to ourselves, "This is what I ought/need to do." But this does not transfer easily to most sexual actions, unless those actions are somehow obligatory. *A* might say to himself, "I should have sex with my boyfriend already, especially since he's been so patient with my moods." Or, more rarely, *A* says to himself, "I should have sex with this man because it is the charitable thing to do."⁴⁶ But the majority of sexual cases are not like this (indeed, the notion of sexual obligation outside the context of marital and similar relationships is one in dire need of philosophical exploration). If Kareem has sex with Vera, his action can satisfy all aspects of RIGHT, and it can satisfy almost all the framework conditions, but one remains strange: to say that Kareem has sex with Vera because it is right sounds bizarre. Other substitutes fare no better: "for itself," "for its own sake," "because it is proper," and so on. Even "because it is permissible" sounds strange. After all, Kareem does not say to himself, "I should have sex with Vera because it is not wrong not to do so."

I grant that this might not be an issue only with sexual acts (hence the "minor challenge" in the preceding), but with any permissible action that is also not, given the context, somehow obligatory. If this is true, then sexual actions won't raise special difficulties. But this is a point worth keeping in mind.⁴⁷

One final point before concluding: If Kant is right and sexual desire is by nature objectifying, then *any* sexual act engaged in from sexual desire (as opposed to non-sexual desires) is objectifying. Thus, every sexual act from sexual desire is morally tainted in at least this respect. No matter how generous, honest, tender, consensual, and so on, it is, it will always contain one unethical aspect, namely, that it is objectifying. One might argue that this objectification is only one part of our overall evaluation of a sex act, so some such acts might be overall morally permissible, despite the presence of objectification.⁴⁸ This is true, but the objectification might still be sufficient to render the act not fully virtuous. That is, sexual objectification might not render all sexual acts wrong, but it will render them not fully virtuous. This is a troubling thought indeed, though we can take some solace in the fact that sexual acts from non-sexual desires might still be fully

virtuous. Couples who are sexually bored with each other might score the highest when it comes to virtuous sex.

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE DIFFICULTY OF VIRTUE WHEN IT COMES TO SEX

This chapter is about sex and virtue. One of its main tasks is to delineate their connections, but another is to show just how difficult virtuous sex might be. The power of sexual desire, its constant recurrence, its voracious appetite, its seeking variety, the difficulty of satisfying it, and its objectifying tendencies make it a very powerful appetite in our lives. This makes virtuous sex difficult on two levels. First, it is difficult on the level of traits, in that temperance as a virtue is perhaps the most difficult one to attain and maintain. Second, it is difficult on the level of actions, in that it makes rationalizing the satisfaction of the aspects of RIGHT easy, whereas in truth many of them are not fulfilled. Add to this the usual dark nature of human beings, their tendency to be selfish; add to this the myriad ways in which people (especially men) develop strange and mysterious sexual preferences, and we end up with a very pessimistic picture of our ability to be sexually virtuous.⁴⁹ Continence might be the best hope for those lucky ones.⁵⁰

NOTES

1. I don't intend this example to privilege heterosexual desire in any way; the same virtue-and vice-relevant considerations would arise in gay, lesbian, and other forms of relationships.
2. Vera's action is all these, minus "vengeful" and perhaps "exploitive." It is an interesting question of how to describe their *joint* action.
3. The reader will notice how, as I refine what I consider to be a plausible conception of temperance, I do so based on our settled views of right and wrong sexual actions. I also distance myself from any view that considers the virtues to be primary and the concepts of right and wrong action secondary. An agent-based form of virtue ethics is like that; see Michael Slote, *Morals from Motives* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), and Daniel C. Russell, "Agent-Based Virtue Ethics and the Fundamentality of Virtue," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 45(4) (2008): 329–347. In this respect, my view is neo-Aristotelian in that Aristotle's idea that a virtuous person acts for the sake of the right and the noble implies that concepts such as "good," "right," "fine," and "noble" are all primary and that virtues target their referents.
4. Since my focus is on temperance, space limitations prevent me from discussing continence, incontinence, and intemperance in detail; whatever I say about them is in service of the discussion of temperance.
5. 1106b20. Unless otherwise noted, my references are to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2nd edition, translated by Terence Irwin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1999).

6. 1118a, 1118a25, and 1118a3–25, respectively.
7. 1118a30. Aristotle repeats these claims in the *Eudemian Ethics* at 1230b21, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, translated by J. Solomon, edited by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).
8. As Terence Irwin suggests in his commentary (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 215).
9. 1119a5, and 118b10.
10. Alan Goldman defines “sexual desire” as “desire for contact with another person’s body and for the pleasure which such contact produces.” This definition faces some problems, but it does capture some intuitions about the central role of touching in sexual desire. See “Plain Sex,” in *The Philosophy of Sex: Contemporary Readings*, 6th edition, edited by Nicholas Power, Raja Halwani, and Alan Soble (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 58. See other essays in the same volume for discussion.
11. I here part company with Aristotle: I think that temperance and intemperance about food and drink are about bodily pleasures attained through taste.
12. Whether touch is sufficient in the absence of sight is a tough question. In male gay orgy rooms, where often there is very little light, people use their hands to figure out the shape, size, body contours, age, etc., of their sexual partners, which allows them to form a rough *visual* image of their sexual partners. After that, touch seems to carry the day. There are always exceptions: voyeurs and exhibitionists whose sexual desires are enhanced precisely by not touching and being touched, but such exceptions do not unseat the general pivotal role of touch.
13. 1118b20.
14. 1095b20.
15. There is a notion of sexual excess, meaning “amounts,” at work in Aristotle’s view, but it is, I suspect, rare in actual life. That is, once X pursues sexual pleasures at the right times, in the right ways, for the right ends, etc., it is hard to see how sex can be excessive in the second way. Thus, I was wrong to make much of this distinction in *Virtuous Liaisons: Care, Love, Sex, and Virtue Ethics* (Chicago and LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 2003), 171–191.
16. 1119b25.
17. 1119a10–20. I set aside the points about health and fitness, as they are more pertinent to the pleasures of eating and drinking, though a case can be made about sex via the notion of STDs. Furthermore, they are covered, I think, by the general directive of what a virtuous action is: an action that is conducive to health and fitness and that does not exceed one’s means is an action done “at the right time, for the right reason, etc.,” a point I discuss later.
18. 1104b5. Compare this to Kant’s claim that it is the “universal wish of every rational being . . . to be wholly free from [inclinations].” *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by James W. Ellington (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1981), at 428.
19. Later in the chapter, I change “right person” to “right object” and explain why. Thanks to Nancy Snow for alerting me to this.
20. I worry that there are exceptions, but I am unable to find clear and convincing cases.
21. I use interchangeably “sexual pleasure” and “sexual act” when the context is clear that they are coextensive.
22. I will assume that these ways of stating the claim are equivalent.
23. 1146b23. Thus, while the incontinent agent *succumbs* to the temptation to enjoy the sexual pleasure, the intemperate does not—he thinks it perfectly okay to enjoy it. For more on intemperance, see Raja Halwani, “Sexual Temperance and Intemperance,” and Neera K. Badhwar, “Carnal Wisdom and Sexual Virtue,” both in *Sex and Ethics: Essays on*

- Sexuality, Virtue, and the Good Life*, edited by Raja Halwani (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
24. This is on first blush. Later, I complicate the discussion a bit.
 25. 1151b35.
 26. Continence and virtue are tricky to distinguish. Aristotle strictly confines continence and incontinence to those very same states that temperance and intemperance are about—bodily pleasures—even though contemporary philosophers often neglect this. Thus, the way to distinguish between them is through the presence of base desires in the former but not the latter. Distinguishing them using notions of internal struggle in continent actions or feeling pleasure in virtuous ones won't do, because many virtuous actions are not pleasant, and many involve struggle. It is also easy to imagine cases of continence not involving struggle. On this, see Karen Stohr, "Moral Cacophony: When Continence Is a Virtue," *The Journal of Ethics* 7(4) (2003): 339–363.
 27. Maybe some people who are trained in the sexual arts can moderate how it feels, but it is not obvious that plausible conception of temperance should require such training.
 28. 1147b25–30.
 29. 1148a30–1148b5.
 30. The discussion here benefited from Stohr, "Moral Cacophony."
 31. 1119b5–15. It is an interesting question how Aristotle's view about pleasure in general—that its goodness depends on the activity on which it supervenes—coheres with his remarks about bodily pleasures.
 32. I here borrow freely from Soble's "Sexual Use," 302–303, in *The Philosophy of Sex: Contemporary Readings*, 6th edition, edited by Nicholas Power, Raja Halwani, and Alan Soble (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013).
 33. Soble, "Sexual Use," 303. It is an interesting question whether this view is truer of men than of women.
 34. *Lectures on Ethics*, translated by Louis Infield (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1963), 163.
 35. *Lectures on Ethics*, 164.
 36. See Soble, "Sexual Use."
 37. On sexual pessimism and optimism, see Alan Soble, "The Analytic Categories of the Philosophy of Sex," in *The Philosophy of Sex: Contemporary Readings*, 6th edition, edited by Nicholas Power, Raja Halwani, and Alan Soble (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 1–21.
 38. If habituation is to begin early, then all is lost for sexual temperance, as teenagers (men mostly) are notorious for being sex-starved maniacs. This means that desire for pleasure would, early on, "grow large" and "go far astray."
 39. Compare this to the case that Hursthouse gives of a virtuous, poor woman tempted to keep the money she finds in a purse that someone drops on the street (*On Virtue Ethics*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 97). The idea is that the virtuous are not immune to temptation.
 40. Goldman writes, "fleeting sexual desire can arise in relation to a variety of other individuals one finds sexually attractive . . . For this reason, monogamous sex . . . almost always represents a sacrifice . . ." ("Plain Sex," 62). See also Alan Soble, *The Philosophy of Sex and Love*, 2nd edition (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2008), 196–199.
 41. To what extent bodily appetites differ in these respects from emotions is hard to tell. For example, anger, jealousy, or any other emotion, can make people act in strange or immoral ways, much like sexual desire can. But I suspect that sexual desire's rootedness in our

biology is much more of a force to contend with than our emotions. Moreover, sexual desire often targets the bodies of other people, and the mere sight of them is sufficient to trigger it. Not so with emotions, which require more extensive interaction with others for them to be triggered. On these issues, see N. J. H. Dent, *The Moral Psychology of the Virtues* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

42. It is interesting to attempt to distinguish between pleasures that are both wrong and base and those that are only wrong, and to then claim that the continent are tempted by the former. But I think that such a distinction is hard to pull off.
43. 1106b20.
44. 1105a30. For further discussion, see Halwani, *Virtuous Liaisons*, chap. 3, and Stohr, "Moral Cacophony."
45. Another interesting issue, which I do not discuss, is how the notion of right emotion or desire, when applicable, figures in these conditions. Perhaps "in the right way" is what captures it.
46. I read once—though now I cannot remember the source—of a nurse who masturbated a quadriplegic person to help him experience sexual pleasure, as he hadn't experienced it for months. The supererogatory is in dire need of discussion in both virtue ethics and in philosophy of sex. On the former, see Rebecca Stangl, "Neo-Aristotelian Supererogation," *Ethics* 126(2) (2016), 339–365. On the latter, see Alan Soble, "Gifts and Duties" in *The Philosophy of Sex*, 7th edition, edited by Raja Halwani, Sarah Hoffman, and Alan Soble (Rowman & Littlefield, forthcoming).
47. It also connects to the difficult issue about the role of duty and obligation in virtue ethics.
48. I argue for this claim (but not in the context of a virtue ethics) in "On Fucking Around," in *The Philosophy of Sex: Contemporary Readings*, edited by Nicholas Power, Raja Halwani, and Alan Soble (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 441–460.
49. On how dark sexual desire can be and its connection to character, see Seiriol Morgan, "Dark Desires," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 6 (2003): 377–410.
50. Special thanks to Nancy Snow for some excellent comments on this chapter, and thanks to all the friends and colleagues with whom I have discussed these issues over the years.

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CHAPTER 35

COMMUNICATION ETHICS AND VIRTUE

JANIE M. HARDEN FRITZ

I. INTRODUCTION

THE field of communication, as it has been studied in the West, has existed for over two millennia, beginning with the ancient Greeks. Questions of ethics were inherent in this domain of scholarly inquiry from the start.¹ Virtue ethics, present explicitly or implicitly throughout the field's history, has resurfaced as an explicit approach to communication ethics within the last three decades.

The current status of virtue ethics in the field of communication is tied to the field's scholarly development and identity. The academic domain of communication hosts three loosely affiliated disciplines claiming different histories.² One derives from the oral speech tradition, referred to here as *human communication studies*; another focuses on mediated (or mass) communication, referred to here as *media studies*; and another reflects the profession of journalism.³ During the last decades, elements of these three areas converged to form the interdisciplinary field of communication, united by the study of communicative practices and/or messages and their meanings and/or effects.⁴

Gehrke (2009) suggested that the question of ethics may be "the single most persistent and important question in the history of the study of communication and rhetoric."⁵ This enduring question grows in salience as new media and digital communication technologies reconfigure the interactive landscape of public and private life, placing new demands on journalism and media ethics.⁶ Calls for theoretical and philosophical approaches supporting communication ethics scholarship in a globalizing world and concerns about fragmentation as the area of communication ethics expands have elicited volumes such as the inaugural and comprehensive *Handbook of Communication Ethics*.⁷ In this context, virtue ethics offers communication ethics scholars an alternative to complement and enhance existing approaches.

Questions of communication ethics arise whenever human communicative behavior (1) involves significant intentional choice regarding ends and means to secure those ends, (2) holds the potential for significant impact on others, and (3) can be judged according to standards of right and wrong.⁸ Ethical issues are inherent in the communication process—human existence is a cooperative, social endeavor in which communicative action holds the potential for influence and necessarily bears moral valence.⁹ Communication theorists look to Aristotle's *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, to anchor the issue of ethical choice.¹⁰ Ethical decisions are not formulaic, but are discerned in response to the historical moment and constraints of particular situations.

Some journalism and media ethicists understand ethics as a quest for the universal end of human and social improvement, which extends beyond rules and regulations.¹¹ Plaisance (2002) connects media practices with the human condition in noting the role of media in upholding what it means to be human, a position echoed by Gehrke (2009), who observes that human communication scholars have long considered the symbolic capacity a defining feature of the human being, necessary for personal and communal well-being.¹² Tying communicative practices to perennial questions related to the good life for human beings, personally and collectively, places communication squarely within the purview of virtue ethics, which offers theoretical and practical grounding for the role of communication in human flourishing.

II. A TURN TO VIRTUE ETHICS

During the last fifteen years, explicitly articulated Aristotelian or neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics perspectives have increased, particularly in journalism and media studies.¹³ In human communication studies, Aristotelian and neo-Aristotelian approaches have enjoyed consistent representation from classical rhetoricians.¹⁴ Now virtue ethics scholarship is making an appearance in other areas of human communication, such as argument, integrated marketing communication, interpersonal and organizational communication, marital communication, and public relations/crisis communication.¹⁵ In journalism/media studies and in human communication studies, the turn to virtue ethics traces an identifiable trajectory. The remainder of this chapter highlights major developments in virtue ethics in these two broad areas of communication scholarship.

One of the major issues emerging from this review is how virtues are best conceptualized, which depends, in turn, on the view of human persons embraced by a given theoretical perspective. Are virtues discrete, internal, individualized properties of persons, much like personality characteristics or traits? Or are virtues situated within larger traditions, such as philosophical or religious worldviews or narratives, which then find embodiment through acting persons' communicative practices? This concern has been articulated most explicitly in human communication studies, where similar questions related to the nature of communication and the locus of meaning have given rise to discussions of alternative perspectives on communication.¹⁶

III. VIRTUE ETHICS IN JOURNALISM AND MEDIA STUDIES

i. Answering the Call of the Historical Moment

Klaidman and Beauchamp's (1987) *The Virtuous Journalist* foreshadowed the growing interest in virtue ethics in journalism and media. Beforehand, journalism ethics had taken a largely atheoretical, descriptive approach, loosely based on deontological ethics.¹⁷ Klaidman and Beauchamp argued for both duty-based and virtue ethics as professional guides. Three years later, Edmund B. Lambeth (1990) assessed Alasdair MacIntyre's (1981) work as offering a new perspective for journalism scholarship, particularly journalism ethics. A decade later, virtue-based pieces appeared increasingly in the media ethics literature.

Two major concerns propelled the turn to virtue in journalism and media ethics. One was the need for a philosophical framework for applied journalism and media practice to assist practitioners in navigating an increasingly challenging and dynamic commercial context with the integrity befitting a member of a tradition of professional practice.¹⁸ Another was to develop an adequate philosophical foundation for global media ethics to guide practice in multiple media contexts and across cultural boundaries.¹⁹ To these concerns was added a recent third: the need to take account of developments in the human sciences in ways that could inform ethical theorizing.²⁰

ii. Representative Scholarship

Scholars in journalism and media ethics appreciate the holistic approach of virtue ethics, which asks questions about what sort of person one should be and what sort of life one should live, rather than what rules one should follow.²¹ The broad framework of virtue ethics maintains clarity and rigor without resting on culture-bound norms and values. Some also see virtue ethics as consistent with a malleable, responsive human nature that develops over time while retaining its distinctively human character.²²

Sandra Borden (2007) develops an ethical theory for professional journalists based on MacIntyre's virtue ethics. She identifies practice-sustaining virtues emergent from the tradition of journalism as practice and as responsive to the environment of contemporary journalism. For example, courage and ingenuity protect journalism against corruption by external goods, such as market competitiveness; stewardship sustains journalists as institutional bearers of the practice by supporting the excellence in news reporting necessary for the success of news organizations; and justice, courage, and honesty support the collegial relationships needed to achieve journalism's goals through constructive criticism and recognition of excellence, including mutual verification of information.²³

Scholars pursuing virtue ethics in global media, the most prominent of whom are Nick Couldry and Patrick Lee Plaisance, push off from the work of Clifford G. Christians, the leading journalism and media ethics scholar. Christians has worked deductively to establish a foundation for media ethics grounded in dialogic communitarianism, an approach identifying transcultural ethical protonorms and resting on assumptions of the sacredness of life and a relational ontology of the human person.²⁴ Couldry and Plaisance see virtue ethics as a more fruitful direction for a global media ethics than dialogic communitarianism.

Couldry (2010) articulates four perspectives other than virtue ethics available for media ethics: Christian humanism, based on the work of Christians; nomadism, based on the work of Deleuze or Foucault; Kantian deontological ethics; and Levinasian ethics.²⁵ Couldry, contrasting virtue ethics and deontology, notes that Aristotelian virtue ethics focuses on human beings rather than on any rational being, an approach responsive to potential areas of agreement about the good among human beings and to the reality of historical contingency. Although Couldry recognizes the possibility of integrating concerns for the right and the good, he argues for virtue ethics because of its open-endedness and applicability to multiple cultures and for its prioritizing of the good for human beings. Virtue ethics offers a starting point in the nature of human beings, a more universal foundation than culturally bound understandings of duty.²⁶

Couldry (2010, 2013) draws on the work of Bernard Williams (2002) and Sabina Lovibond (2002) to identify “communicative virtues” of accuracy and sincerity connected to the human need for reliable information from others about the environment, identifying media as a type of MacIntyrean practice.²⁷ Two regulative ideals are internal to journalistic practice: circulating information contributing to individual and community success within a given sphere, and providing opportunities to express opinions aimed at sustaining “a peaceable life together” despite disagreements related to “conflicting values, interests, and understandings.”²⁸ Couldry’s work assumes the relevance of media ethics for both media consumers and producers.

In his later work, Couldry (2013) highlights Ricoeur’s focus on hospitality as a key issue for media ethics.²⁹ This expanded treatment of Ricoeur, beyond the brief mention of Ricoeur’s critique of Rawls in Couldry (2010), leads to the potential of a “virtue of care through media” consistent with both Onora O’Neill’s (1996) work and that of Lovibond (2013), who offers an integrated perspective on rights and duties in her perspective on “ethical living” in the media.³⁰ “Living well through media” and “ethical living through media” together suggest a constructive approach to a media ethics grounded in virtue and duty.³¹

Plaisance (2013) considers a virtue ethics approach more robust than a deductive approach predicated on identifying universal principles. The inductive nature of virtue ethics permits identification of “behaviors and practices that are directly linked to human flourishing,” locating their warrant in the human species.³² Plaisance points to Philippa Foot’s (2001) natural normativity as the virtue ethics approach most suitable for the global media context, noting that a focus on “traditional virtues and vices such as temperance and avarice” permits us to “see the concrete connections between the

conditions of human life—the presence and absence of the various necessary ‘goods’—and the objective reasons for acting morally.”³³ These concrete connections are made manifest in selected exemplars of virtuous media practice, which Plaisance (2015) offers in an extended treatment of virtue ethics in the context of media and public relations.

Plaisance (2015) continues his ongoing project to integrate virtue ethics with the findings of moral psychology by presenting and interpreting the results of a study of exemplary professionals in journalism and public relations in a book-length treatment. He provides models of good behavior—exemplars of excellence—rather than failures in ethics, following the lead of positive psychology scholars,³⁴ as well as strengthening virtue ethics theory in the area of media practices, noting that “our understanding of virtue in professional media work remains both abstract and rudimentary.”³⁵ His goal is to develop a theory that accounts for virtuous practice, and he identifies factors that lead to or thwart practitioners’ moral action.

Plaisance builds his study on the twin pillars of Philippa Foot’s virtue ethics and Jonathan Haidt’s moral psychology.³⁶ He interprets the study’s qualitative and quantitative findings by drawing on MacIntyre, O’Neill, and Rosalind Hursthouse.³⁷ Chapters on professionalism and public service, moral courage, and humility and hubris describe contexts within which the participants in his study developed “patterns of virtue” in their professional lives, thereby becoming moral exemplars of virtues for journalism and media practice.³⁸

The work of journalism and media ethics scholars in virtue ethics takes two forms. One, represented by Borden and Couldry (and Christians), moves outward, focusing on understandings of the human person that embed the human person within a meaning structure, such as a MacIntyrean tradition or another framework. The other, represented by Plaisance, moves inward to identify influences on personal dispositions to explain virtuous behavior. As will be seen in the next section, virtue ethics in human communication scholarship appears to break along similar lines, although the theoretical discussion surrounding these approaches emerges from a different set of underlying concerns.

IV. VIRTUE ETHICS IN HUMAN COMMUNICATION STUDIES

i. An Ongoing Story

Human communication ethics theorists trace their lineage to Aristotle’s connection of persuasion and virtue, and to Quintilian’s assumption that great orators should have excellent character as well as superior oratorical skills.³⁹ Some version of ethics containing virtue language consistent with an Aristotelian perspective was taken for granted in human communication ethics through the early part of the twentieth century. Moral

character was considered key to excellent speaking, and moral training in the tradition of the humanities was considered necessary for effective speech.⁴⁰ The mid-1930s, however, witnessed a shift in which virtue-related terms were “redefined into mental health standards” consistent with a mental hygiene approach.⁴¹ Bryngelson (1942), for example, listed “sincerity, humility, and confidence” as characteristics of excellent speakers, but his assumptions about human beings, consistent with mechanistic reductionism and laced with psychoanalytic language, were far different from those undergirding the virtues associated with classical rhetoric.⁴²

As the human communication field developed during the twentieth century, the basis for communication ethics underwent significant changes. Neo-Aristotelian understandings locating ethics in human nature and society recaptured explicit status in rhetorical studies mid-century in response to challenges from existential understandings of the human being, which denied an essential human nature.⁴³ In the face of crumbling philosophical foundations for moral judgments characterizing the 1960s and 1970s, rhetoricians who maintained faith in humanist or neo-Aristotelian understandings of human nature as a foundation for moral and ethical judgments kept the language of virtue ethics present in the scholarly literature,⁴⁴ even as approaches that understood ethics as “contingent, limited, and variable” surged.⁴⁵

Concurrently, methodological differences between social scientists and those committed to the rhetorical and philosophical tradition grew more pronounced. By this point, “the very possibility of moral judgment had been undermined by the prevalence of social scientific and psychotherapeutic understandings of human behavior,” and rhetoric took up ethics as one of its defining elements.⁴⁶ Although communication scientists implicitly assumed some human good guiding their quest to predict and explain communicative behavior and thereby improve human well-being, the philosophical foundations for that good and the substance of that well-being, as well as questions of ethics, were seldom, if ever, addressed.⁴⁷ The law-like generalizations characterizing communication science, which rested on a materialist ontology accompanied by empiricist methodology, did not accommodate axiological claims.⁴⁸

The subfield of interpersonal communication exemplifies an area characterized predominantly by quantitative social science assumptions and methodology.⁴⁹ Only recently have questions of ethics from this perspective been raised and addressed explicitly in the scholarly literature.⁵⁰ However, an approach to interpersonal communication rooted in dialogic philosophy found traction in a narrative understanding of human communication inspired by Alasdair MacIntyre’s work, which provided a context in which an approach to communication ethics consistent with virtue ethics could be addressed.

ii. By Way of Narrative

The narrative turn in the communication field paralleled that of many areas of academic inquiry seeking to reclaim a sense of human meaning and values lost with the adoption

of social scientific methodologies steeped in rationalism and naturalism.⁵¹ Within this context, Walter Fisher articulated the narrative paradigm, an approach to communication that invited understandings of human engagement with the world beyond traditional rationality and reclaimed meaning structures jeopardized by modernism's subversion of the "rational world paradigm" inherited from the ancients.⁵² Ronald C. Arnett's initial treatment of narrative, which incorporated Fisher's theorizing, drew also on the scholarship of Stanley Hauerwas, whose work reflected the virtue ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre.⁵³ Later, MacIntyre's work played a direct role in Arnett's conceptualization of practices, traditions, and competing virtue structures in the public sphere.⁵⁴

Arnett critiqued the confounding of humanistic psychological approaches to dialogue, which centered meaning within the self, with philosophical approaches, which located meaning in the communicative space between persons emerging during dialogic encounter.⁵⁵ For humanistic, or third-force, psychologists,⁵⁶ such as Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, meaning resides within the human person and emerges within a developing self. For Martin Buber, communicative meaning emerges between persons in conversation who are responsive to what the situation calls for.⁵⁷ The locus of meaning is not in the mind of persons, but in the interaction, a joint construction of the two parties.

Arnett's concern in differentiating these approaches focused on implications of the emphasis of humanistic psychology on the "real self," which he interpreted as challenging the legitimacy of roles that persons are called to enact in various life contexts and the struggles that persons undergo when seeking an appropriate response that may run counter to impulse.⁵⁸ Arnett's concern was to reduce the unreflective importation of therapeutic language into contexts of public discourse.⁵⁹ An emphasis on phenomenological dialogue and narrative moves the focus of attention back to larger meaning structures that situate the self within guidelines that offer direction without assuming universal legitimacy.⁶⁰ Arnett (1989), in his discussion of the importance of a common center for community or for relationships—a mission or goal that keeps people together and in conversation—made a theoretical connection between Buber's work on dialogue and Fisher's work on narrative. Narrative, a story larger than any of the participants and irreducible to the sum of their interactions, provides a common meaning center external to the self to bind persons together, even under conditions of personal dislike.⁶¹ Arnett (1989) also conceptualized Buber's "interhuman" as a story that emerges as participants "simultaneously engage in the writing of the narrative" in which each person becomes a vital participant.⁶² Neither the self nor the other is the center—the narrative is. Two senses of narrative become relevant: narrative as a larger story or common center connecting persons who join in participation, and narrative emerging as a joint construction between two persons. Both senses locate meaning not in the person, but between or among persons. By then, narrative communication ethics, a response to the work of MacIntyre, Hauerwas, and Fisher, had been identified as an approach to communication ethics, distinguished from universal/humanitarian approaches in its constructed, rather than a priori, nature: narrative is "rooted in community . . . [and] . . . constituted in the common communication life of a people."⁶³

Arnett's joining of Fisher's narrative perspective with Buber's phenomenological dialogue provided a foundation for understanding the human person as an embedded agent consistent with a MacIntyrean understanding of narrative and tradition, a framework that emerged in a later treatment of dialogic civility in public and private relationships. Drawing from MacIntyre, Arnett and Pat Arneson (1999) framed narrative as a story gathering public assent that provides a location within which embedded agents find meaning and in which virtue is situated. Arnett (2005) applied this framework to the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Arnett, Fritz, and Bell (2009) identified narrative as the location within which a given communication ethic finds traction.

Arnett, Fritz, and Bell (2009) did not claim to be presenting a virtue ethic for communication. However, their work offers a potential conceptualization of a communicative virtue ethics that follows MacIntyre and Charles Taylor (1989). In the face of the contemporary denial of a human nature that could supply the content of a substantive good to provide meaning and purpose for human life, or a *telos*, Arnett et al. situate virtue within narrative traditions. Arnett et al. appropriate Taylor's (1989) notion of the incapable experience of humans as moral agents located in a space of the good and on the value of human participation in ordinary life, particularly in its communicative, relational contexts, thereby conceptualizing communication ethics as centered on a particular substantive good or goods in human experience given meaning within a narrative structure.

Arnett et al.'s understanding of communication ethics as protecting and promoting goods of, for, and in human life refrains from explicit reference to an ontological *telos* for human beings. Their work explores communication ethics as a question of literacy related to different perspectives on the good emerging in a postmodern moment of virtue contention. Goods relevant to the virtues emerge from philosophical and religious frameworks or worldviews—narratives—that provide the substance of the good that defines human flourishing; approaches to communication ethics are situated within these virtue structures that define these underlying goods. Since these virtue structures are not shared publicly in today's historical moment, they must be made explicit in order to identify the narrative ground upon which communicators stand with monologic clarity as they engage in dialogue.⁶⁴ From this surfacing of goods, learning from difference and the identification of particular interests emerge as interlocutors discover each other's perspectives.

Arnett et al. do not assume that character-defining virtues, such as may exist, are best conceptualized as internal characteristics, mental properties, or elements of personality located within an individual self; instead, virtues emerge from worldviews, traditions, or narrative structures that situate persons. Virtues and goods, for Arnett et al., are tied to petite narratives, particular traditions, or worldviews within which persons are situated as embedded agents. In this sense, virtues are tied to character only inasmuch as persons are enactors of traditions of virtue, shaped and formed by those traditions.⁶⁵ One may derive from this work that engaging in communicative practices that protect and promote a given good may lead to the inculcation of virtuous character reflective of a particular narrative or worldview. Arnett et al.'s approach to ethics is rooted in an

understanding of rhetorical contingency—human beings cannot stand above history, although they are able to glean temporal glimpses of alternative understandings of the world through dialogic engagement with others who inhabit different narratives or traditions. The key virtue or “good” in Arnett et al.’s dialogic communication ethics framework is openness to learning.

Communication ethics, then, can be conceptualized as communicative practices that protect and promote an underlying contextual good—for example, the relationship, the public sphere, health, organizational mission, or culture—assumed to hold meaning within a larger framework. The centrality of the good in ethical considerations guides Arnett et al.’s (2009) understanding of definitions of communication ethics appearing in the literature. These definitions highlight issues such as relativistic and absolute positions, ends and means, “is” and “ought,” and public and private domains of human life; careful discernment of what values are important; attentiveness to the historical moment; choice; information-based judgments; and the “heart” and care for others, all of which become goods protected and promoted by a particular definition of communication ethics.⁶⁶ Arnett et al. (2009) revisit approaches to communication ethics through the framework of protecting and promoting goods: universal/humanitarian; democratic; codes, procedures, and standards; narrative; and dialogic ethics. For example, a universal/humanitarian communication ethic protects and promotes the good of universal rationality and of duty, while a codes, procedures, and standards approach protects and promotes the good of agreed-upon regulations, and dialogic ethics protects and promotes what emerges unexpectedly between persons. Each of these approaches could be explored as a virtue ethics approach supporting a good connected to a particular human *telos*.

The next section explores recent developments in virtue ethics in human communication studies, most of which have emerged within the last decade. These treatments address several specific domains of communicative practice ranging from the interpersonal to the institutional level. Several of them find their roots in the work of MacIntyre.

iii. Virtue Ethics in Human Communication Studies

As noted earlier, the rhetorical tradition maintained a focus on virtue ethics since ancient times, although the ground for this approach departed occasionally from its Aristotelian foundations during the early twentieth century. The revival of interest in Aristotelian virtue ethics on the part of rhetorical scholars, propelled initially by the work of MacIntyre, prompted James Herrick (1992) to conceptualize rhetoric as a practice marked by internal goods.⁶⁷ Rhetorical virtues would be “enacted habits of character” prompting apprehension of the ethical nature of rhetorical contexts, appreciation of rhetorical discourse as a practice, and skilled enactment of rhetorical practice.⁶⁸

As interest in virtue ethics continued, additional work in rhetorical studies and other areas of human communication emerged. Aberdein (2010) developed a virtue theory of argumentation, expanding the circle of philosophers of virtue ethics theorists relevant

to questions of communication. Aberdein draws on Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski's (1996) work on epistemological virtues and Richard Paul's (2000) investigation of virtues of critical thinking to identify argumentative virtues, including attention to detail, fairness in evaluating others' arguments, intellectual courage, and inventiveness. Aberdein offers a typology of four categories of argumentational virtue: willingness to engage in argumentation; willingness to listen to others; willingness to modify one's own position; and willingness to question the obvious.⁶⁹

Fritz's (2013) work on civility as a communicative virtue draws on Kingwell (1995), who addresses civility as a modality of virtuous communicative engagement in the public square. Kingwell offers a sociolinguistic understanding of politeness as "just talking," a method of public deliberation taking place between citizens who hold different positions on issues but who seek to accomplish the shared good of collective decision-making. This approach is consistent with that of Shils, who understood civility as a civic virtue that "enables persons to live and work together by fostering the cooperative action that makes civilized life possible."⁷⁰

Fritz (2013) interprets several domains of communication theory and research within the civility/incivility virtue/vice framework that connect to Kingwell's (1995) appropriation of communicative pragmatics—tact, restraint, role-taking, and sensitivity to context as civil communication practices necessary for joint action in the public sphere. Civility embodies practical communicative habits of character that define virtuous public interpersonal communication, which protects and promotes the good of the public sphere.⁷¹ In related fashion, Pat Arneson (2014) addresses the virtue of moral courage prompting a fitting response in the service of liberating others in her study of white women's efforts during the mid-1800s and early 1900s in the struggle to fight racism against black Americans. One virtue perspective on interpersonal communication emerges from a positive approach to communication, which tracks the recent turn in the social sciences to positive approaches to human behavior.⁷² Julien Mirivel (2012) suggests that communication excellence embodies virtues in interpersonal communication, employing Aristotle, MacIntyre, and Comte-Sponville (2001) as philosophical touchpoints. For example, the virtue of gentleness involves restraining impulses toward violence and anger, which requires face-attentiveness, or respect for others' dialectical needs for autonomy and interconnectedness, manifested in deferential verbal forms of address and compliments

Nathan Miczo (2012) bases his approach to virtuous interpersonal communication on Aristotle, Hannah Arendt, Nietzsche, and Comte-Sponville.⁷³ Communicative virtue is "excellence in 'words and deeds' . . . [that] comprises the performance of behaviors indicative of engagement."⁷⁴ Partners in discourse and a shared object of discourse between them constitute a vital relationship to the world that defines such engagement. Miczo focuses on four dispositions of the virtuous communicator: politeness, compassion, generosity, and fidelity. Politeness requires space for expression and listening. Compassion requires attentiveness to others, which helps bring forth their responses. Through generosity, persons contribute to the conversation to enrich it by sharing positions. Being committed to a position defines fidelity, taking and endorsing a stance. The

twin commitments to assisting others in their expression and standing within a position are necessary conditions for dialogue.

Fritz (2013), drawing on Arnett et al. (2009) and Arnett and Arneson (1999) and following Borden's (2007) application of MacIntyre to the profession of journalism, articulates professional civility as a virtue-based interpersonal communication ethic for organizational settings. The theoretical foundation of professional civility connects elements from the dialogic civility framework and the conceptualization of civility as a communicative virtue to the notion of profession as practice from a MacIntyrean virtue ethics perspective.⁷⁵ Professional civility protects and promotes goods of productivity, place (the organization within which professional work is accomplished), persons (those with whom one works), and the profession itself.

V. CONCLUSION

Virtue ethics is rising to prominence as an approach to communication ethics. For journalism and media studies, the fit between the conceptual strengths of virtue ethics and issues salient to media practices provides a compelling rationale for application. Borden (2007) and Quinn (2007), for example, identify virtue ethics as well suited to professional contexts in which journalists must make decisions rapidly, with little time for reflection. For human communication, approaches to virtue ethics offer communication a central theoretical role in meaningful human existence, as exemplified in the work of Herrick (1992) on rhetoric as virtuous practice.

The scholar with by far the largest effect on virtue approaches to communication ethics is Alasdair MacIntyre. His work is a key source for scholars in all areas of communication ethics, from human communication studies to journalism and media. Although some communication scholars take issue with MacIntyre's conclusions, many find his analysis of the current moral predicament stemming from Enlightenment rationalism and the accompanying loss of a foundation for moral judgment compelling.⁷⁶ Taylor and Hawes (2011), for instance, identify themes across communication scholars' responses to MacIntyre's work, each suggesting a potentially constitutive role for communication in the enactment of virtue in human communities. In the area of journalism, MacIntyre's work is foundational for Sandra Borden's treatment of journalism as practice. Christians, John P. Ferré, and P. Mark Fackler (1993) address problems with the Enlightenment articulated by Alasdair MacIntyre as they seek to establish a new basis for media ethics.

MacIntyre's work offers a framework resting in tradition and narrative that gives ground for the character traits supplied by virtue ethics, providing a place for the human person within a larger narrative. However, not all applications of virtue ethics in the communication field systematically engage a broad framework for virtue ethics. For example, Philippa Foot, Onora O'Neill, and Rosalind Hursthouse figure prominently in the virtue ethics adopted by media ethics theorists such as Couldry, Plasiance, and

Quinn. Although the rationale for such appropriations is the fit between virtue ethics and the nature of the human person, communication scholars make little explicit effort to situate the person within a larger narrative framework or tradition within which virtue finds its form and expression in particular human communities.

Without the larger framework within which to fit virtues, virtue ethics approaches for communication risk a return to what Arnett (1981) critiqued in some humanistic psychologists' work on dialogue: a focus on the individual as an isolated, autonomous self, rather than on the individual as a person embedded within an enduring tradition, as MacIntyre (2007) articulates. Understanding virtue in an atomistic, discrete manner permits an eliding of character into personality traits or biological propensities, rather than as an essential component of a meaningful narrative structure. A similar transformation took place with the early speech communication scholars' and teachers' move to the mental hygiene approaches of psychologists of the 1930s, which resulted in a shift for the ground of virtue ethics from classical teleological understandings to behaviorist and psychoanalytic assumptions.⁷⁷ This move may ultimately risk a return to emotivism, an understanding of the good as based on nothing more than personal preference,⁷⁸ without a basis in a framework outside the self that anchors and orients human meaning, which some philosophers argue is a defining element of human experience—part of the very ontology implicit in virtue ethics.⁷⁹

This risk appears to occur in the work of Mirivel (2012), one of the positive communication scholars making a turn to virtue, as well as in the media ethics work of Plaisance (2015). While drawing on several philosophers, including Aristotle, and much established communication research, Mirivel focuses attention on the individual person's quest for virtue in the interests of living a good life, without articulating assumptions related to a larger worldview or narrative tradition that defines the good life. Plaisance (2015) offers extensive theoretical development, integrating the work of philosophy and moral psychology, acknowledging the place of personal worldview—or ethical ideology—as a contributor to ethical decision-making on the part of practitioners. However, this approach places the nature of moral and ethical judgment within the individual once again, rather than within larger patterns of meaning within which persons as embedded agents find significance and moral purpose.

The virtues emerging from a minimalist agreement on some essentials of human nature may not be thick or robust enough—that is, they would be too loose, undefined, and unstructured—to nourish particular human communities. Agreement on a maximalist framework seems difficult or impossible to achieve. What is needed is a framework somewhere between a thin minimalism and a thick maximalism, adaptable to different cultural configurations, with the ability to accommodate a variety of narrative traditions. Couldry's (2013) work on understanding media use as MacIntyrean practice does appear to fit human communicative practices within frameworks of the good that transcend the individual person. The work of Christians and colleagues to identify a human ontology as a framework for media ethics is directed toward that end. The concern related to Enlightenment individualism that Christians and his colleagues expressed, as well as concerns related to psychological approaches to dialogue and

individualization of ethics noted by Arnett, can be addressed directly by communication scholars working from a virtue ethics perspective. For example, in journalism and media ethics, the work of Christians and colleagues could be usefully conceptualized as a virtue ethics perspective by addressing virtue explicitly within particular narrative traditions, as Borden has done with her work on journalism as practice and as Arnett, Fritz, and Bell (2009) do in framing narrative as a structure within which virtue resides. Finally, Arnett's treatment of figures such as Arendt, Bonhoeffer, and Buber could be reconceptualized as exemplars of virtuous agents embedded within narrative in order to offer an alternative balance to Plaisance's (2015) focus on exemplars of virtue from a moral psychology perspective.

NOTES

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3. Eadie, "Stories We Tell: Fragmentation and Convergence in Communication Disciplinary History."
4. Eadie, "Stories We Tell: Fragmentation and Convergence in Communication Disciplinary History."
5. Gehrke, *The Ethics and Politics of Speech: Communication and Rhetoric in the Twentieth Century*, 1.
6. E.g., L. Zion, and D. Craig (eds.), *Ethics for Digital Journalists* (New York: Routledge, 2015).
7. C. G. Christians, "The Ethics of Universal Being," in *Media Ethics beyond Borders: A Global Perspective*, edited by S. J. A. Ward and H. Wasserman, (New York: Routledge, 2010), 6–23; N. Couldry, "Media Ethics: Towards a Framework for Media Producers and Media Consumers," in *Media Ethics beyond Borders: A Global Perspective*, edited by Ward, S. J. A. Ward and H. Wasserman (New York: Routledge, 2010), 59–72; G. Cheney, S. May, and D. Munshi (eds.), *The Handbook of Communication Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2011), xi.
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12. P. L. Plaisance, "The Journalist as Moral Witness: Michael Ignatieff's Pluralistic Philosophy for a Global Media Culture," *Journalism* 3 (2002): 214.

13. E.g., T. H. Bivens, "The Language of Virtue: What Can We Learn from Early Journalism Codes of Ethics?" in *The Ethics of Journalism: Individual, Institutional, and Cultural Influences*, edited by W. Wyatt (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 165–184; S. L. Borden, *Journalism as Practice: MacIntyre, Virtue Ethics, and the Press* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007); N. Couldry, "Living Well in and through Media," in *Ethics of Media*, edited by N. Couldry, M. Madianou, and A. Pinchevski (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2013), 39–56; C. Ess, "Ethical Dimensions of New Technology/Media," in *The Handbook of Communication Ethics*, edited by G. Cheney, S. May, and D. Munshi (New York: Routledge, 2011), 1204–1220; P. L. Plaisance, "The Mass Media as Discursive Network: Building on the Implications of Libertarian and Communitarian Claims for News Media Ethics Theory," *Communication Theory* 15 (2005): 292–313; P. L. Plaisance, "Moral Agency in Media: Toward a Model to Explore Key Components of Ethical Practice," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 26 (2011): 96–113; P. L. Plaisance, "Virtue Ethics and Digital 'Flourishing': An Application of Philippa Foot to Life Online," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 28 (2013): 91–102. doi: 10.1080/08900523.2013.792691; P. L. Plaisance, "Virtue in Media: The Moral Psychology of U.S. Exemplars in News and Public Relations," *Media and Society* 9 (2014): 308–325. doi: 10.1177/1077699014527460; P. L. Plaisance, *Virtue in Media: The Moral Psychology of Excellence in News and Public Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2015); A. Quinn, "Moral Virtues for Journalists," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 22 (2007): 168–186.
14. Gehrke, *The Ethics and Politics of Speech: Communication and Rhetoric in the Twentieth Century*.
15. A. Aberdein, "Virtue in Argument," *Argumentation* 24 (2010): 165–179. doi 10.1007/s10503-009-9160-0; S. Baker, "The Model of the Principled Advocate and the Pathological Partisan: A Virtue Ethics Construct of Opposing Archetypes of Public Relations and Advertising Practitioners," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 23 (2008): 235–253. doi: 10.1080/08900520802222050; J. M. H. Fritz, *Professional Civility: Communicative Virtue at Work* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011); J. A. Herrick, "Rhetoric, Ethics, and Virtue," *Communication Studies* 43 (1992): 133–149; R. V. Leeper, and K. A. Leeper, "Public Relations as 'Practice': Applying the Theory of Alasdair MacIntyre," *Public Relations Review* 27 (2001): 461–473; J. J. Maciejewski, "Justice as a Nexus of Natural Law and Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 41 (2008): 72–93; N. Miczo, "Reflective Conversation as a Foundation for Communication Virtue," in *The Positive Side of Interpersonal Communication*, edited by T. J. Socha and M. J. Pitts (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 73–89; J. C. Mirivel, "Communication Excellence: Embodying Virtues in Interpersonal Communication," in *The Positive Side of Interpersonal Communication*, edited by T. J. Socha and M. J. Pitts (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 57–72; J. M. Persuit, *Social Media and Integrated Marketing Communication: A Rhetorical Approach* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2013); M. W. Seeger and R. R. Ulmer, "Virtuous Responses to Organizational Crisis: Aaron Feuerstein and Milt Cole," *Journal of Business Ethics* 31 (2001): 369–376; B. Strom, "Communicator Virtue and Its Relation to Marriage Quality," *The Journal of Family Communication* 31 (2003): 21–40.
16. E.g., R. T. Craig, "Communication Theory as a Field," *Communication Theory* 9 (1999): 119–161; B. A. Fisher, *Perspectives on Human Communication* (New York: Macmillan, 1978).
17. C. G. Christians, J. P. Ferré, and P. M. Fackler, *Good News: Social Ethics and the Press* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
18. E.g., Borden, *Journalism as Practice: MacIntyre, Virtue Ethics, and the Press*; Quinn, "Moral Virtues for Journalists."

19. E.g., C. G. Christians and S. J. A. Ward, "Anthropological Realism for Global Media Ethics," in *Ethics of Media*, edited by N. Couldry, M. Madianou, and A. Pinchevski (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2013), 72–88; Couldry, "Media Ethics: Towards a Framework for Media Producers and Media Consumers"; Couldry, "Living Well in and through Media"; Plaisance, "Virtue Ethics and Digital 'Flourishing': An Application of Philippa Foot to Life Online."
20. Plaisance, *Virtue in Media: The Moral Psychology of Excellence in News and Public Relations*.
21. E.g., Borden, *Journalism as Practice: MacIntyre, Virtue Ethics, and the Press*; Couldry, "Media Ethics: Towards a Framework for Media Producers and Media Consumers"; Quinn, "Moral Virtues for Journalists."
22. E.g., Couldry, "Media Ethics: Towards a Framework for Media Producers and Media Consumers."
23. Borden, *Journalism as Practice: MacIntyre, Virtue Ethics, and the Press*, 66–80.
24. Plaisance, "Virtue Ethics and Digital 'Flourishing': An Application of Philippa Foot to Life Online"; Christians, Ferré, and Fackler, *Good News: Social Ethics and the Press*; C. G. Christians and M. Traber (eds.), *Communication Ethics and Universal Values* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997); C. G. Christians, "Ubuntu and Communitarianism in Media Ethics," *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 25 (2004): 235–256; Christians, "The Ethics of Universal Being."
25. Couldry, "Media Ethics: Towards a Framework for Media Producers and Media Consumers," 62.
26. Couldry, "Media Ethics: Towards a Framework for Media Producers and Media Consumers."
27. Couldry, "Media Ethics: Towards a Framework for Media Producers and Media Consumers," 67; Couldry, "Living Well in and through Media," 67–68.
28. Couldry, "Media Ethics: Towards a Framework for Media Producers and Media Consumers," 68.
29. In the media ethics context, hospitality is based on the inevitability of our connectedness with others and the effects of media products on others both near and far. Hospitality invites solicitude and care for distant others and the social fabric of communal life on a global scale.
30. Couldry, "Media Ethics: Towards a Framework for Media Producers and Media Consumers," 53; S. Lovibond, "'Ethical Living' in the Media and in Philosophy," in *Ethics of Media*, edited by N. Couldry, M. Madianou, and A. Pinchevski (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2013), 220–221.
31. Couldry, "Media Ethics: Towards a Framework for Media Producers and Media Consumers"; Lovibond, "'Ethical Living' in the Media and in Philosophy."
32. Plaisance, "Virtue Ethics and Digital 'Flourishing': An Application of Philippa Foot to Life Online," 94.
33. Plaisance, "Virtue Ethics and Digital 'Flourishing': An Application of Philippa Foot to Life Online," 95.
34. Positive psychology explores factors that contribute to human happiness and optimal human functioning. See M. E. P. Seligman, and M. Csikszentmihalyi, "Positive Psychology: An Introduction," *American Psychologist* 55 (2000): 5–14; K. Rathunde, "Toward a Psychology of Optimal Human Functioning: What Positive Psychology Can Learn from the 'Experiential Turns' of James, Dewey, and Maslow," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 41 (2001): 135–153.

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37. A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); O. O'Neill, *Towards Justice and Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); R. Hursthouse, "Applying Virtue Ethics," in *Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory*, edited by R. Hursthouse, G. Lawrence, and W. Quinn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 57–75.
38. Hursthouse, "Applying Virtue Ethics," 75.
39. C. L. Johnstone, "An Aristotelian Trilogy: Ethics, Rhetoric, Politics, and the Search for Moral Truth," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 13 (1980): 1–24; H. Johnstone, "The Relevance of Rhetoric to Philosophy and Philosophy to Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 52 (1966): 41–46; Gehrke, *The Ethics and Politics of Speech: Communication and Rhetoric in the Twentieth Century*.
40. Gehrke, *The Ethics and Politics of Speech: Communication and Rhetoric in the Twentieth Century*.
41. Gehrke, *The Ethics and Politics of Speech: Communication and Rhetoric in the Twentieth Century*, 56. The mental hygiene movement, part of the early twentieth-century Progressive Era, assumed that treatment of maladjusted personalities would lead to decreased social pathology. This understanding was imported into the educational system in the United States in the 1930s; see B. K. Kearl, "Etiology Replaces Interminability: A Historiographical Analysis of the Mental Hygiene Movement," *American Educational History Journal* 41 (2014): 285–299.
42. B. Bryngelson, "Speech and Its Hygiene," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 28 (1943): 86.
43. Gehrke, *The Ethics and Politics of Speech: Communication and Rhetoric in the Twentieth Century*, 90.
44. E.g., C. L. Johnstone, "An Aristotelian Trilogy: Ethics, Rhetoric, Politics, and the Search for Moral Truth"; H. Johnstone, "The Relevance of Rhetoric to Philosophy and Philosophy to Rhetoric"; R. T. Eubanks, "Reflections on the Moral Dimension of Communication," *Southern Speech Communication Journal* 45 (1980): 297–312, doi: 10.1080/10417948009372458
45. These views included approaches that argued for a constructed human nature, one built through language rather than prior to language, which prefigured post-modernist approaches to communication theory. Gehrke, *The Ethics and Politics of Speech: Communication and Rhetoric in the Twentieth Century*, 94, 108, 118.
46. Gehrke, *The Ethics and Politics of Speech: Communication and Rhetoric in the Twentieth Century*, 108.
47. K. E. Andersen, "A History of Communication Ethics," in *Conversations on Communication Ethics*, edited by K. J. Greenberg (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1991), 3–19.
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52. Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument," 4.
53. R. C. Arnett, *Communication and Community: Implications of Martin Buber's Dialogue* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986).
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56. The term "third force" refers to humanistic psychologists, who sought an alternative to behaviorism and psychoanalysis. See A. Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1968).
57. Arnett, "Toward a Phenomenological Dialogue," 202–203.
58. Arnett, "Toward a Phenomenological Dialogue," 2, 4–5.
59. R. C. Arnett, "Dialogic Civility as Pragmatic Ethical Praxis: An Interpersonal Metaphor for the Public Domain," *Communication Theory* 11 (2001): 315–338.
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63. Arnett, "The Status of Communication Ethics Scholarship in Speech Communication Journals from 1915 to 1985," 54.
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65. J. -F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1984).
66. Arnett, Fritz, and Bell, *Communication Ethics Literacy: Dialogue and Difference*, 30–31.
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68. Herrick, "Rhetoric, Ethics, and Virtue," 139.
69. Aberdein, "Virtue in Argument," 175.
70. Fritz, *Professional Civility: Communicative Virtue at Work*, 66.
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PART VII

VIRTUE
EPISTEMOLOGY

CHAPTER 36

RELIABILIST VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

JOHN GRECO AND JONATHAN REIBSAMEN

I. WHAT IS RELIABILIST VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY?

ACCORDING to reliabilist virtue epistemology, or *virtue reliabilism*, knowledge is true belief that is produced by intellectual excellence (or virtue), where intellectual excellence is understood in terms of reliable, truth-directed cognitive dispositions. Insofar as cognitive dispositions are reliably successful, they can be thought of as cognitive *abilities*. As such, believing the truth from ability can be opposed to believing the truth by luck or accident. Put differently, a subject *S* knows whether *p* only if *S* believes the truth regarding *p* *because S* believes from intellectual virtue (or excellence, or ability).

Virtue reliabilism emerged in the late twentieth century as a development of earlier process reliabilism in epistemology. Process reliabilism is, roughly, the view that knowledge is true belief that is produced by a reliable cognitive process.¹ Motivated by critiques of process reliabilism, virtue reliabilists shifted from a focus on cognitive processes in general to a focus on those grounded in intellectual virtues (or cognitive abilities).² Like all virtue epistemologists, virtue reliabilists conceive of intellectual virtues as excellences of cognitive character; however, virtue reliabilists include reliable cognitive faculties (e.g., acute perception, sound reasoning) among the intellectual virtues. Thus understood, virtue reliabilism is a form of externalist epistemology, is a form of moderate naturalized epistemology, and is distinct from virtue responsibilism. In order to better grasp virtue reliabilism, let's take a closer look at these characteristics of the view.

i. An Externalist Epistemology

Virtue reliabilism is, like all other forms of reliabilism, *externalist*. Externalism in epistemology denies that the epistemic condition(s) on knowledge are in some sense internal to the epistemic agent. Consider two forms of internalism: access internalism and mental state internalism. Access internalists hold that one has knowledge that *p* only if one is aware of conditions or facts sufficient for justifying one's belief that *p*, or at least could become aware of such facts.³ Externalism denies that such access is a requirement of knowledge. Mental state internalism, on the other hand, is the view that what epistemically justifies a belief for *S* is entirely a function of *S*'s mental state(s).⁴ Externalism denies that only the believer's mental states matter for justification. Virtue reliabilism is externalist in both ways.

Let's consider mental state internalism first: Why would a virtue reliabilist deny that a belief is justified only by the mental state(s) of the believer? Because the virtue reliabilist thesis—that *S* knows that *p* only if *S* believes the truth regarding *p* because *S*'s belief that *p* is produced by intellectual ability—makes the etiology of the belief in question of central epistemological importance. That is, like other forms of reliabilism, virtue reliabilists argue that the causal history of a belief (e.g., having been produced by an intellectual ability) is essential to its epistemic goodness, and so conclude that no belief can be justified merely by its relationship to other mental states. How the belief came to be, and came to be related to the believer's other states, makes a difference to the epistemic status of that belief. Therefore, concludes the virtue reliabilist, mental state internalism is false.

Now consider access internalism. The virtue reliabilist thesis makes the etiology of a given belief essential to the epistemic evaluation of that belief; however, it is no part of the virtue reliabilist thesis that the subject must be aware of, or even potentially aware of, that etiology. Why? Because it is the fact that one's belief was produced by intellectual virtue that matters, not whether or not one is aware of the fact. For example, acquiring knowledge through visual perception does not require that one is aware that one's visual faculties are currently functioning well. In short, acquiring knowledge (or justification) does not require that one is aware that one's belief is produced by intellectual ability, which is to say that awareness of the facts grounding knowledge (or justification) is not a requirement.

ii. A Moderate Naturalized Epistemology

What intellectual abilities do we actually have? Under what conditions are our cognitive dispositions reliable, and under what conditions are they unreliable? These are empirical questions, and, according to virtue reliabilism, they are relevant to epistemic evaluation. Consequently, virtue reliabilism is a form of *moderate naturalized epistemology*. Moderate naturalized epistemology refers to any epistemology that takes questions regarding how we *actually* form our beliefs as relevant for answering questions

regarding how we *ought* to form our beliefs.⁵ Virtue reliabilists, then, will take seriously results from studies in cognitive science, developmental psychology, social psychology, and other fields of empirical research that bear on understanding the psychology of belief formation.

This way of conceiving the relationship between empirical psychology and epistemology is moderate relative to views such as those of W. V. O. Quine, who argued that epistemology should simply be subsumed into empirical psychology.⁶ This extreme proposal gives up on epistemology as a normative discipline and instead makes it purely descriptive. But, as we have seen, virtue reliabilists are concerned with epistemic evaluation; that is, they are concerned with assessing the epistemic goodness or badness of beliefs, and especially with assessing whether beliefs meet the normative standards required for knowledge.

iii. Distinct from Virtue Responsibilism

As we have seen, virtue reliabilists conceive of intellectual virtues as intellectual abilities, as cognitive dispositions that reliably produce true belief, at least when operating under appropriate circumstances and in appropriate environments. Some virtue epistemologists, however, think of intellectual virtues as more like the virtues of moral character; that is, as excellent acquired habits of thought, such as intellectual courage, carefulness, open-mindedness, humility, and so forth. Such views have been labeled *virtue responsibilism*, or sometimes *character-based virtue epistemology*.

Contrary to virtue responsibilists, virtue reliabilists use a variety of virtue-theoretic terms as synonymous with virtue, such as ability, competence, and the like. There is general agreement that intellectual virtues are belief-forming and belief-retaining dispositions of epistemic agents that are good from an epistemic point of view, where this goodness is generally thought to consist in being reliably truth-conducive. These virtues need not involve a motivational component, nor must they be acquired or habituated over time, as virtue responsibilists sometimes require.⁷ For example, someone who actually cares very little about believing truths can still know that there is a car coming up the road by the exercise of good visual perception, and even children who have not yet had the opportunity to develop habits of inquiry can have intellectual excellences.

For a time there was a conflict between virtue responsibilists and virtue reliabilists over the right way to conceive of intellectual virtues. However, in recent years something of a consensus has emerged. The traditional epistemological task of providing an account of knowledge in terms of necessary, sufficient, and informative conditions is best done from the virtue reliabilist perspective; that is, by understanding the virtue condition on knowledge in terms of cognitive abilities or reliable faculties. Other epistemological tasks, such as providing accounts of epistemic goods like wisdom, or promoting intellectual well-being, may very well require appeal to character virtues such as intellectual courage, carefulness, open-mindedness, humility, and the like.⁸ Virtue reliabilists have no objection to virtue responsibilism *per se*. They do object to any general account of knowledge in terms of the character virtues alone, and to the claim, made by

some virtue responsibilists, that traditional epistemological projects such as providing an account of knowledge should be given up on altogether.

It is important, however, to note two significant points of agreement common to all virtue epistemologists. First, they agree that epistemology is a normative discipline (as discussed in section I.ii), and so should be concerned with epistemic norms, value, and evaluation. Second, they agree that epistemic evaluation applies primarily to epistemic agents and only in a secondary way to beliefs or propositions. For example, it is more perspicuous, from a virtue-theoretic perspective, to say that “S is justified in believing that *p*,” than to say that “S’s belief that *p* is justified.” One way to think about this point is in terms of direction of analysis: from a virtue-theoretic perspective, the epistemic status of particular beliefs depends upon, and is explained by, properties of the believer, rather than the other way around. In this respect, virtue epistemology is like virtue ethics, since virtue ethical theories explain the moral status of actions by reference to the properties of moral agents.⁹

II. THE THEORETICAL POWER OF VIRTUE RELIABILISM

The central thesis of virtue reliabilism—that S knows that *p* only if S believes the truth regarding *p* because S’s belief that *p* is produced by intellectual ability—is both simple and theoretically powerful. Virtue reliabilists claim that their theory is anti-skeptical, can diagnose Gettier cases, and can explain the distinctive value of knowledge, all while maintaining a simple elegance regarding the epistemic condition on knowledge. Let’s take a closer look at each of these proposed virtues of virtue reliabilism.

i. Answers Skepticism

Like all forms of reliabilism, virtue reliabilism is to some extent designed to be anti-skeptical. That is, the virtue reliabilist assumes that we do know many things, and that our commonsense knowledge ascriptions are, for the most part, correct. A distinction between the epistemological projects of vindication and explanation will be helpful here. The *project of vindication* undertakes to answer skeptical arguments on their own terms, using only assumptions and premises that the skeptic would grant, or is forced to grant. The *project of explanation*, on the other hand, largely puts skeptical worries aside. It is, rather, concerned with explaining how it is that we do know the sorts of things we ordinarily take ourselves to know. Virtue reliabilism is largely concerned with epistemological explanation: to give an account of the knowledge that we take ourselves to have. This is not to say that virtue reliabilists are not also concerned with replying to skeptical arguments. On the contrary, they offer critiques of skeptical arguments that

are grounded on the account of knowledge that is yielded by their project of explanation. In this way, virtue reliabilists try to *explain* where skeptical arguments go wrong by explaining what knowledge is.

By way of example, consider the following argument for external world skepticism:

- (1) I can have perceptual knowledge about the external world—for example, that I am now sitting at a desk—only if I can reliably discriminate between that state of affairs and various skeptical possibilities (e.g., that I am actually a brain in a vat, being fed sensory information to make it seem to me that I am sitting at a desk).
- (2) But various skeptical possibilities are consistent with my perceptual evidence that I am now sitting at a desk (e.g., if I were a brain in a vat, my sensory experience would be just as it actually is), and so I do not have the ability to make discriminations in the way that perceptual knowledge requires.
- (3) Therefore, I cannot have perceptual knowledge about the external world, not even that I am now sitting at a desk.

The virtue reliabilist can respond by rejecting premise (1), arguing that the premise sets too high a standard for perceptual knowledge. In general, whether one has an ability is a function of how well one would perform in relevant situations. Put differently, one has an ability to ϕ just in case she would successfully ϕ in a range of situations relevantly similar to those in which she finds herself. Likewise, whether she has the ability does *not* depend on whether she would be successful in highly unusual or atypical situations. For example, we would not deny that Serena Williams has the ability to hit well-placed serves under normal tennis-playing conditions, even if she would be unable to do so during a hurricane. Likewise, it does not count against my ability to perceive that I am sitting at a desk by visual perception, that my perceptual faculties would be misled if I were a brain in a vat being subjected to misleading stimuli. The fact that I would be deceived in skeptical scenarios is irrelevant to whether I now have the intellectual virtues required for perceptual knowledge in the actual world.¹⁰ Since (1) requires reliable success in atypical possible worlds—something we do not require of other abilities—it is too demanding.

ii. Diagnoses Gettier Cases

Gettier cases are thought experiments, made famous by Edmund Gettier, that are designed to show that justification is not a sufficient epistemic condition on knowledge.¹¹ Here is one such case:

Jones believes that *someone in the office owns a Ford*, basing his belief on extensive evidence that his co-worker, Nogot, owns a Ford. But Jones's evidence about Nogot is misleading—Nogot owns no Ford. However, another co-worker in the office, Havit, does own a Ford, although Jones has no evidence for this.¹²

The question is this: Since Jones's belief is founded on good reasoning with good evidence, and since it is true that someone in the office owns a Ford, does Jones then *know* that someone in the office owns a Ford? If not (and the common intuition is that he does not), then it seems that something more than (or perhaps other than) justification is required for a true belief to count as knowledge. The *Gettier Problem* is to identify what that additional (or perhaps alternative) epistemic condition is.

Virtue reliabilists hold that knowledge is a kind of success from virtue rather than a merely lucky success. In this case, Jones's belief is true and it is formed in a virtuous manner, since Jones did reason well using his available evidence. But Jones does not have a true belief *because* he has formed his belief in a virtuous manner. Rather, Jones's believing the truth is a matter of lucky coincidence. The alternative condition on knowledge proposed by virtue reliabilism is that true belief must be "because of" or "attributable to" virtue, or, more exactly, to the knower's exercise of intellectual virtue.¹³ The next task, then, is to explain what it is for a true belief to be "*because of*" or "*attributable to*" an exercise of intellectual virtue. A variety of answers have been given to this question by different virtue reliabilists, some of which will be addressed further when we consider varieties of virtue reliabilism in section III.

iii. Explains the Value of Knowledge

There is a widespread intuition that knowledge has a distinctive value that is not reducible to the value of true belief; that is, that knowledge is, in some way, better than true belief that falls short of knowledge. Linda Zagzebski raised this "value problem" in epistemology as an objection to process reliabilism.¹⁴ The idea is that an account of knowledge should make available an explanation for the distinctive value of knowledge, but it is hard to see how process reliabilism does this. After all, isn't a good cup of coffee produced by an unreliable coffee machine just as valuable as a good cup of coffee produced by a reliable machine?¹⁵ Similarly, shouldn't a true belief produced by an unreliable process be just as valuable as one produced by a reliable process? But if so, then the process reliabilist account of knowledge—that knowledge is true belief produced by a reliable process—fails to explain the value of knowledge.

The virtue reliabilist has a powerful response to this question about the value of knowledge: knowledge is a kind of success from ability, and in that sense knowledge is a kind of *achievement*. And, in general, we value achievements more than lucky successes.¹⁶ Imagine a novice soccer player who intends to kick the ball straight at the net, failing to notice that there is a defender directly in the way. The novice, however, accidentally kicks the ball far to the right of both the defender and the net—but a sudden gust of wind blows the ball back toward the net after it passes by the defender, and a goal is scored. Now imagine that Lionel Messi scores a goal by expertly bending the ball around a defender. Both shots count for one goal, but there is something better—more valuable—about Messi's goal. Plausibly, it is that it manifests his athletic prowess—that is, it is attributable to his soccer-playing abilities (virtues) in a way that the novice's goal

is not. Similarly, the virtue reliabilist argues that knowledge is better—more valuable—than merely true belief because knowledge manifests the intellectual virtue of the believer in a way that true belief falling short of knowledge does not.

III. SOME VARIETIES OF VIRTUE RELIABILISM AND BEYOND

There is general agreement among virtue reliabilists regarding the overall virtue-theoretic approach to epistemology. But beyond this, there is considerable diversity. In this section we will briefly explore a few different forms of contemporary virtue reliabilism.

i. Robust Virtue Epistemology and Modest Virtue Epistemology

We have said that virtue reliabilists hold that one has knowledge only if one's success can be attributed to virtue—only if one believes the truth because of one's exercise of intellectual virtue. Notice that the only epistemic condition in this thesis is a virtue condition.¹⁷ Some virtue reliabilists think that this necessary condition is also a sufficient condition. In other words, they think that *S* has knowledge *if and only if* *S*'s believing the truth is attributable to *S*'s exercise of intellectual virtue. Let's call such a theory *robust virtue epistemology*.¹⁸ Robust virtue epistemology is contrasted with *modest virtue epistemology*, which is any theory of knowledge that includes a virtue-theoretic epistemic condition, but also includes one or more other epistemic conditions besides. One such view is the anti-luck virtue epistemology of Duncan Pritchard. Pritchard agrees that there is a necessary virtue condition on knowledge, but argues that it is not a sufficient epistemic condition. A belief may be produced by an intellectual ability, he contends, but still be too lucky to be knowledge. Consequently, he insists on an anti-luck condition on knowledge in addition to the virtue condition: knowledge is true belief that is (i) produced by intellectual virtue, and (ii) safe.¹⁹

ii. Sosa's Performance Evaluation Theory

Ernest Sosa views believing as a kind of goal-directed performance that is evaluable similarly to the ways in which other goal-directed performances are evaluable. First, believing can be evaluated for its *accuracy*; that is, by whether, or the degree to which, it succeeds in attaining its aim. Second, believing can be evaluated by its *adroitness*; that is, whether, or the degree to which, it manifests the skill of the performer. Third, it can

be evaluated by its *aptness*; that is, whether, or the degree to which, the accuracy of the performance is *because of* the adroitness of the performance. Knowledge, according to Sosa, is *apt belief*: it is belief that achieves the aim of truth because of the cognitive competence of the performer.²⁰ Sosa also distinguishes between merely apt belief and apt belief about which the believer has an apt second-order perspective. Merely apt belief is *unreflective* or *animal* knowledge; apt belief aptly endorsed is *reflective* knowledge.²¹

Sosa identifies a further dimension of performance evaluation. A performance is *meta-apt* when the performer skillfully assesses the performance as likely to be apt under the circumstances.²² A performer who can do this has a meta-competence that can also be manifested in a performance. If the first-order aptness of the performance is because of the meta-competence exercised by the performer, then the performance is *fully apt*; that is, the performance manifests the performer's first-order competence, and this manifestation of first-order competence is itself a manifestation of the performer's meta-competence. In the epistemic realm, a subject *knows full well* when the subject has both animal and reflective knowledge, and this knowledge manifests both first-order cognitive competence and second-order meta-competence.²³ One implication of this view is that simple knowledge (mere apt belief) does not require safety, even if "knowing full well" does.²⁴

iii. Turri's Ample Belief Theory and Ablism

John Turri has argued, like Sosa, that knowledge is true belief that manifests the believer's intellectual virtue. But he has also suggested a more radical departure: perhaps knowledge is *ample* belief, where a belief is ample just in case both the truth *and the safety* of the belief manifest the agent's competence. Ample belief, then, is safe belief by design.²⁵ However, Turri has more recently developed a new theory that he calls *ablism*, which explicitly rejects a reliability condition on knowledge. He makes a distinction between intellectual virtue and mere cognitive ability, and argues that intellectual virtue entails reliability but cognitive ability does not.²⁶ According to Turri, ability requires a success rate greater than chance, but does not require reliable success the way that virtue does. He goes on to argue that knowledge requires the manifestation of cognitive ability, but does not require intellectual virtue. Consequently, Turri calls ablism a successor to virtue epistemology, rather than a version of virtue epistemology.

iv. Greco's Pragmatic Attribution Theory

John Greco endorses the thesis that knowledge is a kind of success through ability (i.e., an achievement), but differs from other virtue reliabilists in his explanation of what it means for a subject to believe the truth *through* or *because of* intellectual ability. For Greco, an agent's believing the truth is attributable to the agent (or the agent's exercise of ability) when the ability contributes *in the right way* to the agent's believing the truth,

and the ability contributes in the right way when the way it contributes would regularly serve relevant needs for information.²⁷ How are relevant needs determined? Drawing on work by Edward Craig and others, Greco argues that the concept of knowledge serves the purpose of flagging good information and sources of information for use in action and practical reasoning.²⁸ Accordingly, the relevant informational needs are those associated with the actual practical tasks at hand, as well as any that are typical or likely to come up.²⁹ Knowledge, then, is true belief that is produced by the right sort of ability in the right sort of way, where “the right sort” means of a sort that would regularly serve relevant informational needs.³⁰

This account supersedes Greco’s earlier account, which held that true belief is attributable to ability just in case ability is “salient enough” in an explanation regarding why *S* believes the truth.³¹ Hence the present account replaces a quantitative approach to explanatory salience in favor of a qualitative approach.

v. Henderson and Horgan’s Iceberg Epistemology

Another form of virtue epistemology is the “Iceberg Epistemology” of David Henderson and Terry Horgan.³² Henderson and Horgan develop and defend virtue reliabilism by emphasizing its compatibility with recent developments in cognitive science. The term “Iceberg Epistemology” refers to a metaphor for human cognitive processing. The main idea behind the metaphor is that the “accessible and articulable” states and processes that have typically occupied the attention of epistemologists are only a small subset of states and processes that are relevant to epistemology (i.e., only the tip of the iceberg).³³ Most of human cognition is beneath the surface. The picture emerging from the best of contemporary cognitive science, argue Henderson and Horgan, is one of humans as dynamic and trainable connectionist systems, rather than as rule-following computers. As such, humans possess, and can develop and improve, a variety of cognition modules, or “epistemic competences,” and also possess and can develop meta-competences of suitable synchronic and diachronic modulational control. They argue that this empirical picture fits well within the virtue reliabilist framework.³⁴

vi. Knowledge-First Virtue Epistemology

Some epistemologists have proposed bringing together virtue epistemology with knowledge-first epistemology. Knowledge-first epistemology can be characterized in terms of a reversal of the traditional direction of analysis. Instead of attempting to analyze knowledge in terms of other concepts assumed to be more fundamental (like belief or justification), knowledge-first epistemology takes *knowledge* to be the most fundamental epistemic concept, and explains other concepts accordingly. For example, Timothy Williamson analyzes (mere) belief as a failed attempt at knowledge, and justified belief as belief that accords with what one knows.³⁵ In keeping with this approach,

Alan Millar has argued that our perceptual-recognitional abilities are best understood as knowledge-acquisition abilities, rather than as abilities for producing (mere) true belief.³⁶ Similarly, Lisa Miracchi has proposed that intellectual virtue should be understood in terms of knowledge: an intellectual virtue is a competence to know, and knowledge is the exercise of a competence to know.³⁷ More recently, Christoph Kelp and Harmen Ghijsen have proposed knowledge-first virtue epistemological accounts of both knowledge and epistemic justification.³⁸

Adherents of knowledge-first virtue epistemology claim that the approach can avoid some of the objections raised against virtue reliabilism, while retaining much of the view's explanatory power. For example, such an approach continues to see knowledge as a kind of success from ability, and in that sense an achievement, thus retaining virtue epistemology's resources for answering the value problem. Work on developing a knowledge-first virtue epistemology is very recent, and it remains to be seen what the various advantages and disadvantages of such a project might be.

IV. OBJECTIONS TO VIRTUE RELIABILISM AND REPLIES

We end by considering two prominent objections to virtue reliabilism. The first comes from social epistemology, charging that virtue reliabilism cannot adequately accommodate the extent of our social epistemic dependence. The second comes from empirical psychology, charging that, like other virtue theories, virtue reliabilism is open to a "situationist critique."

i. Social Epistemic Dependence

Objection

A number of philosophers have argued that virtue reliabilism cannot adequately account for our epistemic dependence on others. For example, it has been argued that virtue reliabilism performs poorly in attempts to explain testimonial knowledge. This objection was first raised by Jennifer Lackey, and further developed by Duncan Pritchard and Jesper Kallestrup. Lackey's target was what she called the "credit theory of knowledge," by which she meant the view that knowledge is true belief that is creditable to the believer. Lackey argues that credit theories are implausible, because knowledge can be acquired via testimony, including testimony from strangers. But in many testimonial cases (such as that of asking a stranger for directions), one depends on *someone else's* intellectual ability in believing the truth, rather than one's own. Since virtue reliabilism requires that one believes the truth because of *one's own* exercise of intellectual ability,

it seems that knowledge would have to be denied in such cases, an unwelcome skeptical result.³⁹

A common reply is to postulate intellectual abilities for distinguishing good testimony from bad, or good testifiers from bad testifiers, and so maintain that testimonial beliefs can still be sufficiently creditable to the recipient of testimony.⁴⁰ But Pritchard and Kallestrup argue that such a reply fails to grasp the depth of our social epistemic dependence, which is the real problem with virtue reliabilism. They present the following pair of cases:

Let *H* be an ordinary, competent epistemic agent embedded in an epistemic community GOOD in which most other speakers are reliable testifiers. In particular, not only does *H* possess an ability to discriminate between reliable and unreliable informants, she also regularly exercises that discriminatory ability in the process of acquiring testimonial knowledge. Moreover, in GOOD the testimonial exchanges between *H* and various speakers are monitored and policed in a properly and timely fashion. Assume that *H* acquires knowledge upon accepting reliable speaker *S*'s testimony. The content of *S*'s knowledge pertains to an ordinary proposition which pretty much any reliable speaker will know. The robust virtue epistemologist's diagnosis is that *H* acquires knowledge through her discriminatory ability.

Now imagine that *H* is unwittingly transported to epistemic community BAD which also mostly contains reliable testifiers. The difference is that while the testimonial processes in GOOD are monitored and policed in a knowledge-enabling manner, the corresponding processes in BAD are monitored and policed in a knowledge-precluding manner vis-à-vis *H*. That is to say, third party epistemic agents reliably ensure that *H* is mostly exposed to unreliable speakers. *H* has no inkling of the systematic way in which reliable informants are being screened-off from the testimonial processes. Most of the competent-looking speakers with which *H* comes into contact are in actual fact not trustworthy. Now assume that *H* forms a true belief on the basis of hearing reliable speaker *S*'s testimony. The proposition in question is again an ordinary one which nearly every reliable speaker will know.⁴¹

It seems that *H* in BAD has the same abilities as *H* in GOOD, and exercises them in the same way while receiving testimony, but fails to acquire knowledge in BAD. Why is this? Pritchard and Kallestrup argue that it is because of what Sanford Goldberg calls *diffuse epistemic dependence*: when we receive testimony, we often rely not just on our immediate testimonial source, but also on broader social institutions and structures.⁴² That is, the epistemic goodness of our beliefs depends not just on our contributions, or the contributions of our interlocutors, but also on properties of our wider social milieu. The deep problem, argue Pritchard and Kallestrup, is that virtue reliabilism is committed to *epistemological individualism*, that is, the view that the epistemic properties of an agent (or belief) supervene (almost) entirely on the properties of the individual agent, such that the difference between knowing and merely truly believing is (almost) entirely determined by the individualistic properties of the agent. If this is so, then the virtue reliabilist must deny that there is any epistemic difference between *H* in GOOD

and *H* in BAD. But there is no good option for doing so: it is counterintuitive that *H* in GOOD doesn't acquire knowledge, and it is counterintuitive that *H* in BAD does acquire knowledge.

Reply

We deny that virtue reliabilism is essentially committed to the sort of epistemological individualism described by Pritchard and Kallestrup. On the contrary, we argue, whether or not an agent's belief-forming disposition is an intellectual virtue depends upon facts external to the agent, such as facts about the environment and conditions. But note well: facts about *social* environment and conditions are just as relevant as facts about non-social environment and conditions. For example, some social environments are epistemically enabling for agents disposed to trust the word of others, whereas other social environments are not—indeed, some may be positively disabling, like BAD.⁴³ Put differently, *H*'s disposition to trust testimony from testifiers that give an appearance of trustworthiness is an intellectual virtue in GOOD, but not an intellectual virtue in BAD. Why? Because that disposition reliably results in true belief in GOOD, but not in BAD. Even if the two communities have the same overall ratio of trustworthy to untrustworthy testifiers, the social structures of BAD ensure the unreliability of trusting the testimony of others.

Suppose this is right. Lackey's objection might still stand. For isn't relying on testimony (at least in those cases in which we have no special knowledge of the trustworthiness of the testifier) believing because of another's intellectual ability, rather than one's own? No, it isn't; rather, it is the exercise of distinctively social cognitive capacities, what we might call "social sensibilities." Some virtue reliabilists have suggested that testimonial knowledge is the result of a communal virtue or competence in which the individual participates, but which is not, strictly speaking, the individual's ability.⁴⁴ This is not what we are suggesting here. Although the disposition to trust another's word within some domain is only a virtue given a certain kind of society and social conditions, it is still the individual's disposition in the same way that any belief-forming disposition is. What makes it distinctively social is that it is a disposition to interact with other persons, and one that requires social circumstances of the right sort for its status as a virtue (for example, circumstances structured by social norms that support the reliability of asking strangers for directions).⁴⁵ In sum, human beings are endowed with an array of social cognitive virtues—virtues that facilitate the navigation of our social world in much the same way that other cognitive virtues facilitate the navigation of our physical world.⁴⁶

Finally, consider a dilemma that has been pressed against virtue reliabilism.⁴⁷ Suppose that the kind of social cognitive abilities invoked in the previous paragraph indeed play an important part in the reliable reception of reliable testimony. How important must the contribution of the hearer's abilities be to count her as knowing? If we say that the hearer's abilities must be *the most important* factor in cases of knowledge, then in many testimonial cases the hearer will fall short, and this is, again, an

unwelcome skeptical result. But if we require only that the hearer's abilities play *some* role, then virtue reliabilism loses its diagnosis of Gettier cases. For recall, in Gettier cases S's cognitive abilities play *some* role in the story regarding how S arrives at true belief. One solution is to characterize the required contribution in qualitative rather than quantitative terms. That is, in cases of testimonial knowledge (and in cases of knowledge more generally), the knower's cognitive abilities must contribute *in the right way* to the production of true belief. Of course, this strategy requires an account of "in the right way" in order to be informative. As suggested earlier, we think that a promising approach takes into consideration the various needs for information that speakers and hearers might have.⁴⁸

ii. Situationism

Objection

As we have seen, virtue reliabilists take virtues to be reliable belief-forming dispositions. We have also seen that virtue reliabilism is a moderate naturalized epistemology, since it takes empirically discoverable facts about our cognition to be relevant to epistemic evaluation. But what if empirical research suggested that we don't have the reliable belief-forming dispositions that virtue reliabilists assume we do have? The critique from *situationism* makes just such claims.⁴⁹ Mark Alfano, Lauren Olin, and John Doris have recently argued that empirical evidence supports the claim that the inferential cognitive dispositions that we actually possess don't have the reliability required for an intellectual virtue.⁵⁰ Alfano cites studies that indicate that most people, under certain circumstances, will utilize unreliable inferential heuristics and consequently make inferential errors in certain predictable ways. For example, the *representativeness heuristic* refers to a tendency to estimate the probability that a sample is a member of a population based on how closely the sample resembles a typical member.⁵¹ Following this heuristic appears to lead test subjects to make inconsistent probability judgments, such as judging that a woman who displays stereotypical traits of a feminist (e.g., intelligent, outspoken, concerned with social justice issues, and single) is more likely to be a feminist bank teller than she is likely to be a bank teller.⁵² Alfano describes this and some other studies of implicit biases and heuristics, and then argues that the use of such heuristics should cause us to doubt whether most people actually possess intellectual virtues related to inferential reasoning. Similarly, Olin and Doris say (somewhat hyperbolically, they note) that "epistemic viciousness, rather than virtuousness, may best typify the human cognitive condition."⁵³

Alfano then poses a dilemma for virtue reliabilism: either (i) these unreliable heuristics are not intellectual virtues, and so most people have unjustified inferential beliefs, or (ii) unreliable heuristics are intellectual virtues.⁵⁴ The problem with (i) is that the use of such heuristics is ubiquitous, and so admitting that they are not virtues would, for the virtue reliabilist, entail fairly sweeping skeptical results. The problem with (ii) is that it is

hard to see how heuristics that predictably lead to error can be construed as intellectual virtues.

Reply

One way to understand the situationist challenge is that it is a kind of generality problem.⁵⁵ That is, it is a problem regarding how to understand the various parameters involved in the claim that our cognitive dispositions are reliable, relative to sets of conditions and environments. At one extreme, we can understand such claims about reliability to be completely general—that our cognition is always reliable, in any environment and under any conditions. But, of course, that kind of claim would be absurd, and virtue reliabilism is not committed to it. At the other extreme, we might specify dispositions, conditions, and environments in extremely fine-grained ways, for example claiming that there is an epistemically relevant distinction between visual perception of midsize objects on a sunny day and visual perception of midsize objects on a partly cloudy day. Somewhere between the extremes seems to be the way to go, but how exactly should this be done?

As a number of authors have noted, evaluations regarding the reliability of our cognitive dispositions will come out very differently depending on how this question is answered.⁵⁶ For example, if we paint dispositions, conditions, and environments in very broad strokes, they will likely come out somewhat reliable, but not extremely so. On the other hand, if we paint in very fine strokes, our dispositions will come out either extremely reliable or extremely unreliable, depending on which environments and conditions we choose to evaluate.

A non-epistemic example will serve to illustrate. Consider Usain Bolt's ability to sprint at high speeds. When we ask about this ability, we might be inquiring about his running in all environments whatsoever, including underwater, on the moon, on the beach in soft sand, and so on. We might also be asking about all conditions whatsoever, including when he is drunk, ill, sleeping, tied up, and so on. If our inquiry does involve such general terms, it will turn out that Bolt is a reliably fast sprinter, but not all that reliable. There will be many environments and many conditions in which he sprints rather slowly, or not at all. Of course, in the typical case where we are asking about a person's sprinting abilities, we are not concerned with these absurdly general parameters. Rather, our inquiry pertains to some set of relevant circumstances, such as typical, or normal, or actual circumstances.

According to the situationist critique, empirical results from psychology show that human cognition is often unreliable, and therefore does not count as virtuous on the virtue reliabilist conception. However, empirical studies tend to focus on specific cognitive dispositions, such as the use of particular reasoning heuristics in specific domains. As such, empirical results do not implicate human cognition across the board. More important, tasks and their circumstances in the psychology lab tend to be atypical, and may distort reliability for more typical tasks in typical circumstances. Indeed, some psychologists argue that reasoning heuristics are best understood as methods for overcoming our cognitive limitations. For example, Peter Todd and Gerd Gigerenzer defend a theory of cognitive heuristics they call "ecological rationality," according to which "we

are able to achieve intelligence in the world by using simple heuristics in appropriate contexts.”⁵⁷

In general, we do very well at navigating our social and physical environments, and we do so in part by employing cognitive abilities designed for just this purpose. We should not conclude that those are not really abilities, or not really virtues, because they would fail us in atypical circumstances. This would be like denying that Bolt can reliably sprint at high speeds, because we can design situations where he would fail to do so. So we go between the horns of Alfano’s dilemma: we accept that dispositions to use heuristics can be intellectual virtues, but deny that they are unreliable *when manifested in appropriate circumstances*.

V. CONCLUSION

Virtue reliabilism is a vibrant and growing epistemological research program. Its theoretical power and simplicity make it attractive for addressing perennial problems in epistemology, and it is being developed in exciting new ways. It is not without its critics and challenges, but as with any progressive research program, challenges and critiques to date continue to spur new and interesting developments.

NOTES

1. For a general overview of reliabilism that focuses primarily on process reliabilism, see Sanford Goldberg, “The Division of Epistemic Labor,” *Episteme* 8 (2011): 112–125.
2. E.g., John Greco, *Putting Skeptics in Their Place* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5–6.
3. See, e.g., Laurence Bonjour, *Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 222–224.
4. See, e.g., Earl Conee and R. Feldman, *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 56. Such a view is mental state internalism insofar as mental states are taken to be internal.
5. Hilary Kornblith, “What Is Naturalistic Epistemology?” In *Naturalizing Epistemology*, edited by H. Kornblith, pp. 1–14 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 1–3; cf. Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 45.
6. W. V. O. Quine, “Epistemology Naturalized,” in *Naturalizing Epistemology*, edited by H. Kornblith (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 15–31; cf. Kornblith, “What Is Naturalistic Epistemology?”
7. See, e.g., Jason Beahr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 17ff.
8. See, for example, Ernest Sosa, *Judgment and Agency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), chap. 2; and especially the “irenic parting” on Sosa, *Judgment and Agency*, 61.
9. Ernest Sosa, “The Raft and the Pyramid,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5 (1980): 3–25; Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the*

- Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); cf. John Greco and J. Turri, "Virtue Epistemology," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by E. Zalta (2015). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/epistemology-virtue/>
10. Greco, *Putting Skeptics in Their Place*; John Greco, *Achieving Knowledge: A Virtue-Theoretic Account of Epistemic Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010; cf. Greco and Turri, "Virtue Epistemology."
 11. Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis* 23 (1963): 121–123.
 12. Recent epistemological literature is filled with a stunning number and variety of such cases. This one is adapted from Keith Lehrer, "Knowledge, Truth, and Evidence," *Analysis* 25 (1965): 168–175.
 13. John Greco, "Knowledge as Credit for True Belief," in *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*, edited by M. DePaul and L. Zagzebski (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 111–134; Greco, *Achieving Knowledge: A Virtue-Theoretic Account of Epistemic Normativity*; John Greco, "A (Different) Virtue Epistemology," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 85 (2012): 1–26.
 14. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*; Linda Zagzebski, "From Reliabilism to Virtue Epistemology," in *Knowledge, Belief, and Character*, edited by G. Axtell (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 113–122; Linda Zagzebski, "The Search for the Source of Epistemic Good," *Metaphilosophy* 34 (2003): 12–28; cf. Duncan Pritchard and J. Turri, "The Value of Knowledge," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by E. Zalta (2014) <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/knowledge-value/>. The value problem has its philosophical roots in Plato's *Meno*, but Zagzebski inaugurated the contemporary discussion. It was further developed by Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
 15. Zagzebski, "The Search for the Source of Epistemic Good," 15.
 16. Greco, "Knowledge as Credit for True Belief"; Greco, *Achieving Knowledge: A Virtue-Theoretic Account of Epistemic Normativity*; Greco, "A (Different) Virtue Epistemology."
 17. That is, in addition to truth (the semantic condition) and belief (the psychological condition), the only other required condition (the distinctively epistemic condition) is virtue-theoretic.
 18. Duncan Pritchard, "Knowledge and Understanding," in *The Nature and Value of Knowledge: Three Investigations*, edited by D. Pritchard, A. Millar, and A. Haddock, pp. 3–90 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 25–26.
 19. Pritchard, "Knowledge and Understanding," 54ff. Safety is a modal condition: to say that a belief is safe is to say (roughly) that it is not only true, but could not easily have been false; that is (roughly), it is both true in the actual world, and in all or most of the nearby possible worlds in which the subject forms the same belief in the same way. Pritchard and others have formulated the safety condition on knowledge in various ways. See Ernest Sosa, "How to Defeat Opposition to Moore," *Philosophical Perspectives* 13 (1999): 141–153; Duncan Pritchard, "Virtue Epistemology and Epistemic Luck," *Metaphilosophy* 34 (2003): 106–130; John Greco, "Knowledge, Virtue and Safety," in *Performance Epistemology*, edited by M. A. Fernández (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).
 20. Ernest Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Lecture 2.

21. Ernest Sosa, *Knowing Full Well* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 11; see also Ernest Sosa, *Reflective Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009a), chap. 7.
22. Sosa, *Knowing Full Well*, chap. 1.
23. Sosa, *Knowing Full Well*, 11–13; cf. Sosa, *Judgment and Agency*, 65–69.
24. In his most recent work, Sosa distinguishes between judgmental knowledge and functional knowledge, and says that judgmental knowledge requires knowing full well, and hence requires safety as well. He takes judgmental knowledge to be the sort with which epistemologists have traditional been concerned. The basic model as described here, however, remains intact. See Sosa, *Judgment and Agency*, chap. 3.
25. John Turri, “Manifest Failure: The Gettier Problem Solved,” *Philosopher’s Imprint* 11 (2011): 9. He makes this suggestion without fully endorsing it, however, since he’s not convinced that the problem that it’s intended to avoid—environmental epistemic luck—really is a problem for virtue reliabilism.
26. John Turri, “From Virtue Epistemology to Abilism: Theoretical and Empirical Developments,” in *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, edited by C. B. Miller, M. R. Furr, A. Knobel, and W. Fleeson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), section 2.3.
27. Greco, “A (Different) Virtue Epistemology,” 16.
28. Greco, “A (Different) Virtue Epistemology,” 15; cf. Edward Craig, *Knowledge and the State of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); John Hawthorne, *Knowledge and Lotteries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Jason Stanley, *Knowledge and Practical Interests* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
29. Greco, “A (Different) Virtue Epistemology,” 18.
30. Greco, “A (Different) Virtue Epistemology,” 19.
31. Greco, “Knowledge as Credit for True Belief”; Greco, *Achieving Knowledge: A Virtue-Theoretic Account of Epistemic Normativity*.
32. David Henderson and T. Horgan, “Iceberg Epistemology,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 61(3) (2000): 497–535; David Henderson and T. Horgan, “Epistemic Virtues and Cognitive Dispositions,” in *Debating Dispositions: Issues in Metaphysics, Epistemology and Philosophy of Mind*, edited by K. Steuber, G. Damschen, and R. Schnepf (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2009), 296–319.
33. Henderson and Horgan, “Iceberg Epistemology,” 528.
34. David Henderson and T. Horgan, “Virtue and the Fitting Culturing of the Human Critter,” in *Naturalizing Epistemic Virtue*, edited by A. Fairweather and O. Flanagan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 223.
35. Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and Its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 9, 184ff.
36. Millar, Alan. “What Is It That Cognitive Abilities Are Abilities to Do?” *Acta Analytica* 24 (2009): 223–236, 227ff; Alan Millar, “Knowledge and Recognition,” in *The Nature and Value of Knowledge: Three Investigations*, edited by D. Pritchard, A. Millar, and A. Haddock (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 120ff.
37. Lisa Miracchi, “Competence to Know,” *Philosophical Studies* 172 (2015): 41. Miracchi argues that, even though this account of knowledge is circular, it is not viciously so, and has explanatory power.
38. Christoph Kelp, “Knowledge First Virtue Epistemology,” in *Knowledge First: Approaches in Epistemology and Mind*, edited by A. Carter, E. Gordon, and B. Jarvis (Oxford: Oxford

- University Press, forthcoming); Christoph Kelp and H. Ghijsen, "Perceptual Justification: Factual Reasons and Fallible Virtues," in *Moral and Intellectual Virtues in Western and Chinese Philosophy*, edited by C. Mi, M. Slote, and E. Sosa (London: Routledge, 2016)>
39. Jennifer Lackey, "Why We Don't Deserve Credit for Everything We Know," *Synthese* 158 (2007): 345–361; Jennifer Lackey, "Knowledge and Credit," *Philosophical Studies* 142 (2009): 27–42.
 40. See, for example, John Greco, "The Nature of Ability and the Purpose of Knowledge," *Philosophical Issues* 17 (2007): 63ff; and Wayne Riggs, "Two Problems of Easy Credit," *Synthese* 169 (2009): 208ff.
 41. Jesper Kallestrup, and D. Pritchard, "Robust Virtue Epistemology and Epistemic Anti-Individualism," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 93 (2012): 94–95.
 42. Kallestrup and Pritchard, "Robust Virtue Epistemology and Epistemic Anti-Individualism," 94; cf. Goldberg, "The Division of Epistemic Labor."
 43. Jonathan Reibsam, *Social Epistemic Dependence: Trust, Testimony, and Social Intellectual Virtue*, doctoral dissertation (Saint Louis, MO: Saint Louis University, 2015), chap. 5.
 44. Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology*, 94. See also Adam Green, "Extending the Credit Theory of Knowledge," *Philosophical Explorations* 15 (2012): 121–132; and Adam Green, "Deficient Testimony is Deficient Teamwork," *Episteme* 11 (2014): 213–227, for a similar but distinct view, according to which the credit for the hearer's believing the truth is distributed over a social network (or "team") to which the hearer belongs.
 45. Reibsam, *Social Epistemic Dependence: Trust, Testimony, and Social Intellectual Virtue*, chap. 5.
 46. A similar approach is taken by Benjamin McMyler, who says that testimonial knowledge results from the exercise of a distinctively social cognitive ability: "taking something on good authority." See Benjamin McMyler, *Testimony, Trust, and Authority* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Benjamin McMyler, "Responsibility for Testimonial Belief," *Erkenntnis* 76 (2012): 351.
 47. Lackey, "Knowledge and Credit," 34; Kallestrup and Pritchard, "Robust Virtue Epistemology and Epistemic Anti-Individualism," 90–91.
 48. Greco, "A (Different) Virtue Epistemology," 16ff.
 49. *Situationism* is the view that details about the situation of an actor play a greater role in determining (or explaining) an actor's behavior than does the actor's character. Applied to the cognitive domain, it is the view that details about the situation play a greater role in determining (or explaining) a cognitive agent's beliefs than does the agent's cognitive character. See John Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), chap. 1. For an informative statement and critique of the situationist objection to virtue ethics, see Nancy Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010).
 50. Mark Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 141; Mark Alfano, "Expanding the Situationist Challenge to Reliabilism about Inference," in *Virtue Epistemology Naturalized: Bridges between Virtue Epistemology and the Philosophy of Science*, edited by A. Fairweather, pp. 103–122 (Heidelberg: Springer, 2014), 109ff; Lauren Olin and J. Doris, "Vicious Minds: Virtue Epistemology, Cognition, and Skepticism," *Philosophical Studies* 168 (2014): 669ff.

51. Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction*, 143; cf. Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, "Extensional Versus Intuitive Reasoning: The Conjunction Fallacy in Probability Judgment," *Psychological Review* 90 (1983): 295.
52. This is, of course, impossible, since all feminist bank tellers are bank tellers. Alfano 2013, 143–145; cf. Tversky and Kahneman, "Extensional versus Intuitive Reasoning: The Conjunction Fallacy in Probability Judgment," 297.
53. Olin and Doris, "Vicious Minds: Virtue Epistemology, Cognition, and Skepticism," 670.
54. Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction*, 148–149.
55. Earl Conee and R. Feldman, "The Generality Problem for Reliabilism," *Philosophical Studies* 89 (1998): 1–29.
56. Olin and Doris, "Vicious Minds: Virtue Epistemology, Cognition, and Skepticism," 678ff; Ernest Sosa, "Situations against Virtues: The Situationist Attack on Virtue Theory," in *Philosophy of the Social Sciences: Philosophical Theory and Scientific Practice*, edited by C. Mantzavinos (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009b); Abrol Fairweather and C. Montemayor, "Epistemic Dexterity: A Ramseyian Account of Agent-Based Knowledge," in *Naturalizing Epistemic Virtue*, edited by A. Fairweather and O. Flanagan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 118–142; A number of essays in Abrol Fairweather and O. Flanagan, *Naturalizing Epistemic Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), are also relevant.
57. Peter Todd and G. Gigerenzer, "What Is Ecological Rationality?" in *Ecological Rationality: Intelligence in the World*, edited by P. Todd and G. Gigerenzer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3.

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CHAPTER 37

VIRTUE RESPONSIBILISM

SARAH WRIGHT

VIRTUE responsibilism is the branch of virtue epistemology that highlights the analogies and connections between the moral and intellectual virtues. While virtue responsibilism (hereafter responsibilism) has been articulated in many different ways, each version shares a defining mark—a focus on developed traits of intellectual character that reflect on the evaluation of their possessor. This distinctive characteristic marks responsibilists from virtue reliabilists, who focus instead on the outputs of cognitive dispositions, evaluating them as virtues if and only if they reliably produce true beliefs. Since virtue reliabilism and responsibilism focus on different features of a disposition, one can also support a mixed theory, requiring intellectual virtues to be developed traits of character and also to reliably produce true beliefs.¹

To distinguish the different forms that responsibilism has taken, we will explore some of the most important milestones in its development. As we shall see, one of the central distinctions within responsibilist virtue epistemology is whether or not giving a definition of knowledge is taken as a central concern of the theory; relatedly, we will encounter the question of whether intellectual virtues require reliability. After exploring the varieties of responsibilism, we consider and resolve a potential problem for the theory, and conclude by highlighting directions in which this branch of epistemology might fruitfully develop.

I. RELIABILIST VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

The general idea of taking a virtue-centered approach to epistemology was introduced by Ernest Sosa in his landmark article “The Raft and the Pyramid.”² In this article Sosa addresses the two most prominent theories of epistemic justification at the time, concluding that both are fatally flawed because they both assume that only states with propositional content can serve as the justifiers for our propositional beliefs. This approach systematically denies a substantial justificatory role for the character of the person

holding the beliefs. Sosa suggests denying the common assumption, instead allowing that justification may be grounded in features of the believer.

Sosa's suggestion introduces a unique direction of analysis shared by all approaches to virtue epistemology. Rather than starting with an account of what makes a belief a good belief, and only then explaining features of a good believer in terms of their generating good belief, virtue epistemology starts by examining the features of epistemically good believers, and then defines good belief (justified, rational, sufficient for knowledge) in terms of how it is produced by good believers.

Sosa's positive virtue reliabilist proposal, developed in *Knowledge in Perspective*, is driven by his focus on defining knowledge in virtue terms.³ Sosa's account of the intellectual virtues in this book focuses on faculties and dispositions that produce true beliefs. These reliabilist intellectual virtues are poised to play a role in "the view that knowledge is true belief out of intellectual virtue."⁴ Sosa's theory exposes two central choices in developing a virtue epistemology. First, one must give a characterization of what makes a trait an intellectual virtue. Second, one must specify the role (if any) of the intellectual virtues in defining knowledge. Sosa opts to characterize the virtues in a reliabilist way, and he gives a prominent role to the project of defining knowledge in terms of the intellectual virtues.

II. VARIETIES OF RESPONSIBILIST VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

In response to Sosa's development of his reliabilist version of virtue epistemology, Lorraine Code suggests a very different direction for virtue epistemology. She argues that Sosa's proposal is insufficiently radical; it still aims to give a general account of knowledge. Code argues that there is not enough uniformity between instances of knowledge to support such a project. Furthermore, looking for an analysis of "S knows that P" sufficiently broad to cover all the relevant people who might be S obscures important differences between potential knowers and overlooks relevant information about epistemic communities. Rather than looking for a unified account of knowledge, Code encourages us to consider epistemic situations in all their particularities. One way to do this is to consider fully developed narratives in assessing intellectual virtues. This methodology follows the suggestion, active in virtue ethics, that we ought to consider full narratives in our assessment of ethical character.

While her focus on the particular entails that Code will not be able to give a fully uniform analysis of knowledge, she still allows for important similarities in the epistemic character traits called for in various circumstances. The central intellectual virtue that Code highlights is that of epistemic responsibility. Epistemic responsibility is social; we are epistemically responsible, not just abstractly, but also *to* particular others *in* particular social contexts. Epistemic responsibility may also involve our commitments to

follow particular epistemic social norms that depend on the community and the role we play in it.

Code models her account on Aristotle's intellectual virtues; in fact, she thinks that "epistemic responsibility" is a close synonym for Aristotle's virtue of wisdom. However, she prefers the term "responsibility" to emphasize the active role of the cognizer; we should not think of ourselves as passive recipients of information, but rather as active inquirers. In addition to her focus on action, Code modifies Aristotelianism so that the intellectual virtues are not directed only at necessary truths; many of the important truths we seek are contingent. Code also breaks with Aristotle in that her virtues are not anchored in a static human nature; instead they are grounded in the practices of epistemic communities and so change over time. Rather than serving as an element in a definition of knowledge, the virtue of epistemic responsibility will serve a crucial role in considering how we ought to conduct ourselves in inquiry. While Code places epistemic responsibility in the category of Aristotle's intellectual virtues, it should be noted that she also thinks that this virtue will have a mean, like the Aristotelian moral virtues.

James Montmarquet also turns to Aristotle for inspiration, but he avoids focusing on Aristotle's intellectual virtues, which he thinks are too thinly developed and problematically divided by the kind of knowledge they produce.⁵ Instead, he turns to Aristotle's moral virtues, since they are more fully developed in their psychological detail, particularly in how they are motivated. Motivation is central to Montmarquet's account because he denies that the mere reliability of a disposition is sufficient to qualify it as an intellectual virtue. Montmarquet goes a step further and denies that reliability is even necessary in the intellectual virtues. In arguing this point, Montmarquet asks us to consider those in the history of science who seem to be exemplars of intellectual virtue; incredibly creative, impeccably careful, and demonstrating intellectual courage in defending unpopular views, they seem to exhibit many of the intellectual virtues. But, as science has progressed, we have learned that many of their groundbreaking theories were incorrect. Does this give us a reason to deny that these paragons of science were intellectually virtuous? Montmarquet thinks not; we should say both that they were intellectually virtuous and that they were unreliable in generating true beliefs.

How then are intellectual virtues related to truth? Montmarquet answers by considering the motivation to achieve truth and to avoid falsehood. Rather than focusing on the dispositions that actually achieve these ends, he asks us to focus on the traits of character that someone who cares about truth would want to develop. Of course, given a lack of information, these might not be the dispositions that reliably produce true beliefs, but so long as we are epistemically conscientious (we are properly motivated by a love of truth) we have met the basic criteria for being intellectually virtuous. Epistemic conscientiousness, then, is Montmarquet's central virtue. Being thinly specified, this central virtue will require auxiliary virtues to keep it from being led astray.

Auxiliary virtues of impartiality help us to consider the views of others; they keep conscientiousness from turning to dogmatism. Virtues of intellectual sobriety keep us from being too easily swayed by new information or attractive theories; instead, we must carefully consider all the evidence in coming to our conclusions. Finally, the virtues of

intellectual courage help us to consider and defend views that are unpopular. With the auxiliary virtues in place, we can then understand what it would be to believe a proposition in an intellectually virtuous way. And this is the definition that Montmarquet gives of subjective justification:

S is subjectively justified in believing p insofar as S is epistemically virtuous in believing p.⁶

Though Montmarquet gives this definition of a traditionally epistemic concept, he is not concerned with the project of defining knowledge. Instead, subjective justification is relevant to the way we morally evaluate the actions of others. This is, in the end, the goal that Montmarquet is concerned with: discovering when we can and cannot be held responsible for our actions based on incorrect beliefs. The focus on praise and blame is therefore central to his account of the epistemic virtues, and it is for this reason that Montmarquet asks us to consider epistemic character traits that are analogous to the Aristotelian moral virtues.

Linda Zagzebski, in her influential book *Virtues of the Mind*, goes further than Montmarquet, not only modeling her intellectual virtues on Aristotelian moral virtues, but also claiming that the intellectual virtues can be subsumed under the moral virtues.⁷ She rejects Aristotle's division between the parts of the soul, emphasizing that much of our relevant knowledge is about contingent matters. As a subset of the moral virtues, Zagzebski's intellectual virtues have a motivational component. Unlike the moral virtues, the intellectual virtues have a single underlying motivation that can be roughly characterized as the desire to obtain truth and avoid falsehood. However, Zagzebski argues that our appropriate epistemic ends are really the broader category of "cognitive contact with reality."⁸ This includes states that go beyond propositional knowledge, such as understanding and wisdom, as well as non-propositional representations of the world, such as pictures and maps. The particular intellectual virtues are distinguished by their characteristic motivation to achieve this end in a distinctive way. For example, the intellectual virtue of open-mindedness is characterized by the motivation to take the views of others seriously in one's deliberation. This specific motivation is adopted as one way to achieve our overall epistemic end, but it is still distinct from the motivations behind virtues like intellectual courage and carefulness.

Not only do virtues require that one be motivated by the correct ends, Zagzebski argues that they also require reliable success in achieving those ends. Intellectual virtues, possessing two-level ends, require success at both levels; the open-minded person must reliably succeed both at considering the views of others and at reaching true belief as a result. Zagzebski argues against Montmarquet's claim that the virtues do not require reliability by considering how the virtuous person would respond to the information that the character traits she considered intellectual virtues were not, in fact, reliably truth conducive. Zagzebski thinks that the virtuous person would respond by changing her epistemic patterns. She takes this as evidence that intellectual virtues must reliably get us the truth.

Because Zagzebski's account of the virtues includes a reliability component, her intellectual virtues are well suited to play a role in a definition of knowledge. Because she is considering virtues that are fully developed character traits, she does not require full virtue possession for knowledge. Rather, she defines acts of virtue generally and then fills in the details specific to intellectual virtues to generate the following definition:

An act of intellectual virtue A is one that arises from the motivational component of an intellectual virtue A, is an act that persons with virtue A would characteristically do in those circumstances, and is successful in reaching the truth because of these other features of the act.⁹

Zagzebski then formulates her definition of knowledge.

Knowledge is belief arising out of acts of intellectual virtue.¹⁰

This final definition is quite simple, but the simplicity is achieved through complexity in the definition of an act of virtue. Her definition of knowledge does not explicitly require truth, but truth is guaranteed by the requirement that every act of virtue be successful (here successful in reaching the truth). In place of a traditional requirement that the belief be justified, Zagzebski requires that one acts and is motivated as the person with the intellectual virtues characteristically would be. The action here is reasoning or otherwise coming to believe. If one thinks as the intellectually virtuous person would, one thinks well, even if one is not herself virtuous. If one jumps to hasty conclusions, one is not reasoning as the virtuous person characteristically would. If one is motivated by wishful thinking, one is not acting on the motivational component of an intellectual virtue. Either error blocks knowledge, even if one's belief is luckily true.

The very last clause of Zagzebski's definition of knowledge proposes a solution to the Gettier problem.¹¹ Her example of this type of problem involves Mary seeing a figure seated in her husband's favorite chair and thinking "my husband is sitting in the living room."¹² Unfortunately for Mary, the figure she glimpsed was her husband's brother, unexpectedly arrived in town. Fortunately for the truth of her belief, her husband is in the living room, just out of sight. So Mary's belief, while true and justified, is not knowledge. Zagzebski explains why knowledge is missing in cases like these by describing their general pattern. There is a bit of bad luck ("unfortunately") that would make the belief false, even though justified; then there is a bit of good luck ("fortunately") that cancels out the bad luck, by making the belief true. Fallibilist accounts of justification allow justified belief to be false; this permits the original bad luck. To avoid Gettier cases, Zagzebski's definition of knowledge is constructed to prevent bad luck in acts of virtue. An act of virtue requires that one is successful in reaching the aims of the virtue (here truth), *and* that one is successful *because* one is acting and is motivated as the virtuous person would be. Though Mary's belief is true and therefore successful, she didn't reach the truth because of the way she was thinking. Instead, her belief is true due to the lucky coincidence that her husband is in the same room as his brother. This luck means that

Mary didn't reach the truth *because* she was correctly thinking and correctly motivated. So her belief isn't the result of an act of virtue and hence isn't knowledge, according to Zagzebski's definition.

Jason Baehr, in his book the *Inquiring Mind*, argues that Zagzebski's proposed definition of knowledge, though intended to avoid Gettier cases, is still not able to do so.¹³ He uses the example of a detective investigating a fire. To fit with Zagzebski's definition, Baehr stipulates that the detective is acting as the intellectually virtuous person characteristically would and has the proper motivation. The detective believes that B started the fire, and this is true. But she reaches this truth in an aberrant way. A, B's neighbor, terrified she would be blamed for starting the fire, planted charred cigarette butts behind B's house. The presence of those cigarette butts is part of the evidence that leads the detective to believe B started the fire. While the detective reaches the right answer, she does not know that B started the fire. However, Baehr points out that the detective reached the correct answer *because* she was acting as the virtuous person characteristically would and with the correct motivation. If the detective had been less careful or less motivated, she would have missed the cigarette butts and have reached the wrong conclusion. Her true belief results from acts of intellectual virtue and so should count as knowledge on Zagzebski's definition. From this example, Baehr concludes that Zagzebski's definition of knowledge is still susceptible to Gettier problems.

Baehr also argues that not all the elements of Zagzebski's definition are necessary for knowledge. In particular, he targets the requirement that the knower be correctly motivated; while this requirement might be applicable to situations of inquiry, it is less applicable to simple perceptual cases. Baehr considers what would happen if a power cut shut off the lights in his room. He would immediately come to know that the lights are off, but not as the result of any motivation, good or bad. Cases like this show that correct motivation is not necessary for knowledge. Putting together his two objections, Baehr argues that Zagzebski has not succeeded in her project of defining knowledge. Since he also thinks that Zagzebski's proposal represents the best responsibilist definition of knowledge on offer, he concludes that responsibilist intellectual virtues cannot be used in a definition of knowledge.

Robert Roberts and Jay Wood also question the feasibility of Zagzebski's definitional project.¹⁴ They believe that it is not possible to give a single virtue-theoretic definition of knowledge that can cover all its varied instances. They object that virtue reliabilism, while accounting for low-grade or easy knowledge, cannot capture important elements of high-grade or laborious knowledge. To explain why high-grade knowledge is an achievement, one needs to consider virtues of character, as responsibilists do. Nevertheless, a responsibilist definition of knowledge cannot account for low-grade instances of knowledge (like the power-cut case, described earlier). Given this high-grade/low-grade distinction, we might aim to provide separate definitions for each kind of knowledge. Heather Battaly has recently argued that reliabilist and responsibilist virtue epistemologies can complement each other, with each focusing on a different kind of knowledge.¹⁵ Virtue reliabilists are better suited to explain basic perceptual and other

low-grade knowledge, while responsibilism is better suited to explain the high-grade knowledge that may require motivation and action to achieve.

However, Roberts and Wood question whether Zagzebski's responsibilist definition of knowledge is a good analysis, even if it were limited to high-grade knowledge. Roberts and Wood are concerned that the very concept of an act of virtue is *ad hoc*. Why, they ask, should we think that an act of virtue requires exactly these components in this arrangement? They are responding to Zagzebski's claim that, while her definition of an act of virtue might seem purely stipulated, it does correspond to a natural concept. She illustrates with the example of an act of justice. If a jury reaches the wrong verdict, or reaches the right verdict because incorrectly motivated, or reaches the right verdict by accident, we would not be willing to call any of these acts of justice. Thus we should exclude all these possibilities in the definition of an act of virtue. Roberts and Wood argue that this is not true of all acts of virtue. For example, I might give money to a charity. Even if the charity is subsequently duped, and so no one in need is actually helped, it seems that my donation was an act of the virtue of generosity. But my act doesn't meet Zagzebski's criteria because it lacks success; my donation does not help anyone in need. Roberts and Wood conclude that Zagzebski's definition of an act of virtue doesn't correspond to the way we normally think of an act of virtue. Of course, it could just be a stipulated definition of a new concept, but if so, Roberts and Wood object that it is an *ad hoc* construction generated only to avoid Gettier problems.

Roberts and Wood instead argue for an approach to virtue epistemology that is not concerned with giving a definition of knowledge. Instead, they propose developing a regulative epistemology, an approach that aims to direct our epistemic practices. They point out that this goal in epistemology has long historical precedents. Christopher Hookway has also argued that the most important job of virtue epistemology should be to provide us with guidance for how to conduct our inquiry, in part through providing evaluation of past inquiries.¹⁶ As we explore and come to a better understanding of intellectual virtues like intellectual courage and open-mindedness, the descriptive content of these virtues can provide us with guidance. They can also help us to find particular epistemic exemplars. A focus on exemplars fits with Zagzebski's view of the nature of the virtues. She argues for a meta-ethical foundationalism that grounds the virtues in particular exemplars (rather than in outcomes or in the good life).¹⁷ As we start becoming virtuous, we may not be in a good position to identify individual virtues; we may do better in picking out virtuous exemplars. We can do this through our emotional reaction of admiration toward particular individuals; those individuals can then serve as the basis for our further theorizing about the virtues.

Roberts and Wood's proposed methodology for generating a regulative virtue epistemology is to explore the particular intellectual virtues. They are not theoretically committed to any uniformity of the virtues. Rather than starting with a general characterization of the virtues and working in a top-down manner to examine the particularities of each virtue, they propose a bottom-up methodology, considering each virtue independently and allowing that they might have very different structures. When they consider the virtue of intellectual courage, they note that it can be developed by the

virtuous and the non-virtuous alike. In the virtuous person, intellectual courage will be motivated by a love of knowledge. That same trait in someone intellectually vicious might be motivated by mere stubbornness; it may then serve to make her more intellectually vicious. However, other virtues, like love of knowledge itself, serve to make everyone better off. This variation between different virtues has the effect of making universal characterization of the virtues impossible. As a result, a regulative use of the virtues also can't give us universal advice, only particular advice for particular situations.

Baehr's study of the individual virtues is, by contrast, a more top-down affair. He gives a universal characterization of the intellectual virtues: they all contribute to the personal worth of the possessor. With this general characterization in hand, it is possible to give the universal advice that everyone should develop all the intellectual virtues. Each step in developing intellectual virtues will contribute to one's personal worth. His unified account of the intellectual virtues allows him to specify ways that the intellectual virtues can help us to define epistemic terms other than knowledge. We might define justification in terms of following the evidence; if one considers all the evidence, the resultant belief would be justified. Yet this definition seems flawed when the evidence is incomplete or biased: if someone has been slipshod in gathering their evidence, or has intentionally sought out biased evidence. Baehr suggests that the intellectual virtues can help here. In addition to requiring justified belief to follow our evidence, we should also require that our evidence is gathered "in a manner consistent with intellectual virtue."¹⁸ While defining justified belief is a more constrained goal than Zagzebski's project of defining knowledge, Baer's proposal makes essential use of the intellectual virtues in the definition of a traditional target of epistemic analysis.

Whether we are looking for a universal characterization or prefer to study each virtue independently, diving deeply into the details of a particular intellectual virtue can allow us to make progress in our theorizing. Such detailed considerations may be taken up differently by different approaches to responsibilism, but the exploration of particular virtues is a shared project of many recent works in responsibilist virtue epistemology.

III. THE SITUATIONIST CHALLENGE TO VIRTUE ETHICS AND TO VIRTUE RESPONSIBILISM

Before we can examine particular virtues, we must address a challenge to any virtue theory. Situationism in psychology is the theory that our behavior is primarily influenced by the situations we find ourselves in, rather than by any character traits. When this theory is combined with the idea that virtues are robust character traits that generate patterns of "trait-relevant behavior across a wide variety of trait-relevant situations,"¹⁹ situationists come to the conclusion that there are no virtues.²⁰ Objections from situationists have

been raised against virtue ethics for over a decade, but the application to virtue epistemology is more recent. After examining some of the experiments that situationists cite as evidence, I will show why they do not challenge the existence of the virtues, moral or intellectual, so long as we are careful about how we understand the virtues.

One of the many experiments cited to support situationism about moral virtue was carried out on Princeton Theological Seminary students.²¹ The subjects were put in a situation where they could help someone slumped in a doorway, coughing and groaning. The experimenters looked for correlation between subjects' helping behavior and three other variables. The first, intended to capture a character trait, was the basis of their religious belief. They were categorized as being either interested in religion as a means (e.g., to salvation) or as an end (e.g., as a quest for meaning in life). The second was a situational variable. Some of the subjects were asked to read the parable of the Good Samaritan, while the others read a text about vocational alternatives to ministry. The third was also a situational variable: the amount of time the subjects thought they had before they were scheduled to give a talk. Experimental results showed that only the third variable significantly correlated with helping the person in distress: 63% of those who thought they had time to spare offered assistance, compared to 45% of those who thought they were on time, and only 10% of those who thought they were late. The experimenter's conclusion was that the subject's response was determined primarily by their degree of hurry—a situational variable.

This experiment (among many others) is taken to support the psychological situationist conclusion: behavior is best predicted by situations, not by character traits. Bringing this conclusion into contact with the philosophical literature on character traits and virtues, Gilbert Harman thinks of character traits as "relatively long-term stable disposition[s] to act in distinctive ways."²² Based on evidence that there don't seem to be stable dispositions that can predict behavior across situations, Harman thinks we should conclude that there are no character traits. Since character traits play an essential role in virtue ethics, Harman concludes that we ought to abandon virtue approaches in ethics.²³ John Doris's less radical conclusion is that almost all of us lack broad-based character traits of the sort that lead to similar behavior across a wide range of different situations. But that doesn't mean we cannot use character traits to predict behavior; instead, "[s]ituationism allows that a suitable fine-grained inventory of local traits may provide an account of personality that is both empirically adequate and theoretically useful."²⁴ So we might use the trait of compassion-when-not-rushed to predict behavior; but Doris's view still eliminates, for all practical purposes, any character traits broad-based enough to be called virtues.

How might situationism apply to virtue epistemology? Since our focus here is on virtue responsibilism, we will look at one experiment that has been used by Mark Alfano in arguing against responsibilism by showing that people lack epistemic character traits.²⁵ This is Solomon Asch's conformity experiment.²⁶ Subjects were asked to perform a simple visual task of picking which of three comparison lines was the same length as an original. The lines are discernably different lengths; in ordinary circumstances, people perform this task correctly more than 99% of the time. However, the "critical subjects"

in these experiments faced a situation where everyone else in the room (who were confederates) incorrectly identified a different line as the matching one. Facing the incorrect answer from everyone else, critical subjects went along with the majority in about one-third of the trials, and 75% of the subjects went with the majority at least once. Later studies showed that a unanimous majority of as few as three can still persuade critical subjects into agreement. Alfano concludes from this experiment that people do not have the virtue of intellectual courage; if they did, you would expect to see them sticking to their own answers more often. Perhaps we could ascribe to people the local trait of “intellectual-courage-unless-faced-with-unanimous-dissent-of-at-least-three-other-people,” but Alfano argues that this trait is not robust enough to count as an intellectual virtue.²⁷

How should the virtue theorist respond? Julia Annas recommends that we carefully consider what virtues are before comparing them to experimental results. She worries that situationists conceive of virtues too much like blind habits. When we are first learning to be virtuous, we might habitually follow the behaviors of our parents or simple ethical rules like “never tell a lie.” But Annas points out that these habits aren’t fully developed virtues:

[A] virtue is not a habit of reliably producing behaviour of a type independently fixed; it is a disposition to act on reasons of a certain kind. What is reliable and steady is the virtuous person’s disposition to act on reasons of bravery, generosity and so on.²⁸

An honest person will take honesty as a reason for action, but there might be circumstances (like that of facing a murderer at the door) where she decides she ought not tell the truth. This does not make her less honest; she is exercising her virtue of honesty in an appropriate way given the situation. Annas argues that virtue, like all practical expertise, “is highly situation-sensitive.”²⁹ So situation-sensitivity in behavior is not evidence of a lack of virtue.

It is instead the way that one reasons about and then responds to a situation that reflects one’s virtue, or lack of it. Reasons are harder to observe than behavior, but in both experiments we have some evidence of the subject’s reasons. Darley and Batson observed that those students who noticed the slumped-over stranger but did not help appeared anxious after their encounter. They hypothesize that the subjects who were in a hurry faced a conflict of reasons that those with time to spare did not.³⁰ A follow-up experiment by Batson et al. aimed to isolate the effect of wanting to help the experimenter from the effect of being in a hurry.³¹ In this study, subjects were told either that their data were or were not “vital for successful completion of a research project” and either that they were late and must hurry or had ample time. They again confronted a confederate slumped and coughing on the way. The subjects told that their data were not vital stopped to help at rates higher than in the original experiment; those told that their data were vital and that they must hurry stopped to help only 10% of the time. This suggests that even someone with the character trait of compassion might have passed by the person in need, so long as he judged (rightly or wrongly) that his obligation to help the experimenter was stronger than his obligation to the stranger. Thus, we should not take failure to stop as direct evidence of a lack of the character trait of compassion.

A similar conflict can be seen in the Asch experiment. Upon hearing six other people report that line 1 was the matching length, subjects in the experiment had a new reason to doubt their former belief that, say, line 2 was the match. Even someone with the virtue of intellectual courage should recognize this as a reason. We expect to encounter disagreement about matters of politics, aesthetics, and religion; but one rarely encounters persistent disagreement about simple perceptual judgments. Subjects' surprise at the situation can be inferred from their dramatic change in demeanor through the course of the experiment; some who were chatty became withdrawn and quiet, while another started laughing when giving his answers. Subjects in this experiment were also asked about their reasoning after they had been debriefed. Some who had been swayed by the group indicated that they had come to doubt their perceptions on the basis of so much counter-evidence. One subject said, "There was such an overwhelming weight of opposition against me that I wondered whether my eyesight or judgment were at fault . . ." ³² While an intellectually courageous participant should take his own perception seriously, he should take the perceptual reports of others seriously as well. Subjects in this experiment faced a conflict between legitimate epistemic reasons, and their agreement with the majority need not indicate that they ignored the reasons that are characteristic of intellectual courage.

We might also be surprised to find that Asch drew conclusions about the importance of character traits in his original experimental report. In the experiment, subjects were confronted with eighteen trials; the first nine and the last nine were identical in both the figures presented and the responses of the confederates. Asch's statistical analysis showed that the best predictor of behavior in the last nine trials was behavior in the first nine; from this he concluded that the "personal factor" was the most decisive. ³³ This reveals a stability of character traits within the same circumstance, and this is exactly what we would hope for within a virtue theory; though changes in our circumstances may legitimately change our behavior, we expect a virtuous agent to respond similarly to similar situations.

Thus, we need not accept the situationist claim that these experiments provide evidence that people lack robust character traits, whether moral or intellectual. However, experiments—particularly those exploring the ways we actually reason about moral and epistemological matters—are still of interest to the virtue theorist. For virtue theory is committed to making claims about how people ought to reason that are grounded in our capacities.

IV. CURRENT AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR VIRTUE RESPONSIBILISM

The application of empirical psychological research to virtue theory leads us to a project that is currently ongoing and may be further developed: that of bringing together empirical results with virtue ethical and epistemological theorizing about character

traits. Nancy Snow has done this in her recent book *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory*.³⁴ While part of Snow's goal in this book is to address situationist critiques, she goes beyond simply responding to objections by developing a theory of virtue in dialogue with contemporary psychological theory. She positions the virtues within the framework of Walter Mischel and Yuichi Shoda's cognitive-affective personality system model (CAPS), which focuses on how the individual characterizes the situation she finds herself in.³⁵ Snow argues that virtues are one type of CAPS trait, specifically those which we have worked to develop. While developing traits poises them to play the role of virtues, there are still questions about which of these traits are virtues and what makes the virtues valuable. What makes them part of living well? Snow answers these questions by narrowing the range to traits related to social intelligence. Social intelligence clearly helps us in our quest to live well, and, being focused on our relations with others, it also helps to pick out the traits relevant to the moral virtues. It remains to be seen if this characterization of the moral virtues can also apply to intellectual virtues. However, a hopeful outlook might be found in noting that any account of the intellectual virtues which takes into account the social aspects of our epistemic practice will require aspects of social intelligence.

Heather Battaly, in responding to the situationist challenge for virtue responsibilism, also notes that results from empirical psychology can assist us in helping our students to develop the intellectual virtues.³⁶ If we take the psychological results as indicators of situations in which it is difficult to practice a virtue, or of situations where it is difficult to balance the demands of competing virtues, we can use this information to develop classroom environments in which exhibiting virtue is easier. Battaly suggests ways that we might encourage students to raise objections and express disagreement. This activity helps them to develop intellectual courage, even when expressing an opinion in opposition to the majority (as illustrated in the Asch experiments). While Battaly encourages us to start students in environments that facilitate their virtue expression, she notes that we also need to help them consider what they would do in more difficult environments.

A further area for the development of responsibilist epistemic theory lies in joint projects and interdisciplinary discourses concerning the particular intellectual virtues. One recent example of this is the Philosophy and Theology of Intellectual Virtue Project, which is bringing together interdisciplinary research clusters working on topics related to the virtue of intellectual humility.³⁷ One of the many projects that have resulted from this interaction is a paper in which Whitcomb et al. present a characterization of intellectual humility that they hope will be of use in psychological experimentation on the trait, as well as in philosophical evaluation of this trait as a virtue. To this end, they start with a characterization of intellectual humility that does not require its particular instances to be virtuous; it only requires that we are appropriately sensitive to our limitations. They then explain that intellectual humility is a virtue only when it is adopted out of a concern for the truth; instrumentally adopted intellectual humility fails to be a virtue. By considering the trait and the virtue separately, Whitcomb et al. provide a framework that can be used in non-normative psychological experiments as well as in normative responsibilist epistemology.

Miranda Fricker's concern with the intellectual character virtues needed to avoid epistemic injustice introduces important questions about the social nature of the intellectual virtues as well as questions concerning the virtues of groups.³⁸ Though virtues like open-mindedness involve our reactions to others and so are social in nature, the epistemic benefits considered in treatments of the virtues are often those for the individual possessing the virtue. One should be open-minded because one loves the truth and wants to obtain it for oneself. The epistemic benefit for others is often not explicitly considered.³⁹ But the epistemic injustice that Fricker considers does harm to both parties in the interaction. Epistemic injustices occur when someone is granted low credibility as a source of testimony because they belong to one or more socially stigmatized groups. This reduction in credibility hurts the hearer epistemically as she may miss important information through her bias. It also harms the speaker epistemically; he is robbed of an opportunity to develop his own abilities as a testifier and to see his own testimony as important. Fricker argues that the virtue of epistemic justice is needed to combat this injustice; individuals must work to discover and fight their own biases. The benefits of the virtue of epistemic justice accrue both to the person who develops it and to the people she interacts with. But this raises a question about the source of epistemic injustice: if it is directed at members of socially stigmatized groups, isn't it an intellectual vice of the whole society (or a biased group within society)? Elizabeth Anderson argues that epistemic justice is a virtue that is most effective at the level of social institutions.⁴⁰ In response, Fricker employs Margaret Gilbert's conception of a "plural subject" to argue that groups with the right kind of internal structure can have intellectual virtues and intellectual vices.⁴¹ This shift to considering the intellectual virtues and vices of groups opens up one more area in which virtue responsibilism might be fruitfully developed.⁴²

Finally, growing attention has also been paid to the inverse of intellectual virtue—intellectual vice. When Miranda Fricker demonstrates the need for a virtue of epistemic justice, she is motivated in this search by observing the intellectual vices that lead to epistemic injustice. If our aim in epistemology is to improve inquiry, uncovering intellectual vice can help us discover where we need improvement. Heather Battaly looks at the ways that analyzing vice can help us to better understand intellectual virtue in her "Varieties of Epistemic Vice."⁴³ Quassim Cassam uses the concept of epistemic vice to help us provide a deeper critique of those people who hold particularly intractable (but coherent) sets of beliefs.⁴⁴ In addition to these general considerations of intellectual vice, explorations of particular vices have also been developed, paralleling the growing interest in understanding particular intellectual virtues. Battaly has looked at the ways that the vice of epistemic self-indulgence might drive skepticism; skeptics may be overindulging their concern with avoiding error, while at the same time ignoring the value of believing truths.⁴⁵ Jason Baehr explores the very possibility of epistemic malevolence; he argues that it is not exhibited by the skeptic, but rather by those who oppose or directly work to undermine the epistemic well-being of others.⁴⁶

The exploration of intellectual vice, group virtues, and psychologically informed accounts of the intellectual virtues are all ongoing projects in virtue responsibilism.

These projects are only a sampling of the wide variety of current work in responsibilism, a body of work that is poised to grow in depth and breadth over time.⁴⁷

NOTES

1. Though faculty virtues are most often the examples considered in reliabilist virtue epistemology, Baehr (2006) and (2011) has argued that intellectual character virtues can meet the reliabilist requirements for virtue, and that we must acknowledge such character virtues to explain particular instances of knowledge. Jason Baehr, "Character, Reliability, and Virtue Epistemology," *Philosophical Quarterly* 56 (2006): 193–212; Jason Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). While Sosa often uses examples of faculties or skills, he has been explicit in his most recent book (2015) that his theory is not intended to exclude character trait virtues. Ernest Sosa, *Judgement and Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
2. Ernest Sosa, "The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5 (1980): 3–26.
3. Ernest Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
4. Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective*, 277.
5. James Montmarquet, *Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993).
6. Montmarquet, *Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility*, 99.
7. Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
8. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 45. Her use of this terminology for our broader epistemic end is continued in Linda Zagzebski, "What Is Knowledge?," in *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, edited by John Greco and Ernest Sosa (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 92–116.
9. Zagzebski, "What Is Knowledge?," 108.
10. Zagzebski, "What is Knowledge?," 109.
11. The Gettier problem concerns situations where someone believes the truth, and does so with justification, but her belief is not knowledge. A solution to this problem is to provide criteria for knowledge that properly characterize these instances as lacking knowledge. The original formulation is in Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis* 23 (1963): 121–123.
12. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 286.
13. Jason Baehr, "Epistemic Malevolence," *Metaphilosophy* 41 (2010): 189–213.
14. Robert C. Roberts and W. J. Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
15. Heather Battaly, "Virtue Epistemology," *Philosophy Compass* 3(4) (2008): 639–663; Heather Battaly, *Virtue* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2015).
16. Christopher Hookway, "How to Be a Virtue Epistemologist," in *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*, edited by Michael DePaul (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 183–202.
17. Linda Zagzebski, "Exemplarist Virtue Epistemology," *Metaphilosophy* 41(1–2) (2010): 41–57.
18. Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology*, 82.
19. John Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 18.

20. Gilbert Harman, "Moral Psychology Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 99 (1999): 315–331; Gilbert Harman, "The Non-Existence of Character Traits," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 100 (2000): 223–226; Harman (1999 and 2000) holds this strong position, while Doris allows that "situationism does not preclude the existence of a few saints." Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, 60.
21. John Darley and C. Daniel Batson, "From Jerusalem to Jerico': A Study of Situational and Dispositional Variables in Helping Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 27(1) (1973): 100–108.
22. Harman, "Moral Psychology Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error," 317.
23. Harman, "Moral Psychology Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error," 327–329; Harman, "The Non-Existence of Character Traits," 224.
24. John Doris, "Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics," *Noûs* 32 (1998): 508.
25. Mark Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
26. Solomon Asch, "Effects of Group Pressures upon the Modification and Distortion of Judgment," in *Groups, Leadership, and Men*, edited by H. Guetzkow (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Press, 1951), 177–190; Solomon Asch, "Studies of Independence and Conformity: A Minority of One against a Unanimous Majority," *Psychological Monographs* 70 (1956): 1–70.
27. Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction*, 135.
28. Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics and Social Psychology," *A Priori* 2 (2003a): 28.
29. Annas, "Virtue Ethics and Social Psychology," 26. See also Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
30. "Why were the seminarians hurrying? Because the experimenter, whom the subject was helping, was depending on him to get to a particular place quickly. In other words, he was in conflict between stopping to help the victim and continuing on his way to help the experimenter . . . Conflict, rather than callousness, can explain their failure to stop." Darley and Batson, "From Jerusalem to Jerico': A Study of Situational and Dispositional Variables in Helping Behavior," 108.
31. C. D. Batson, P. J. Cochran, M. F. Biederman, J. L. Blosser, M. J. Ryan, and B. Vogt, "Failure to Help When in a Hurry: Callousness or Conflict?" *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 4(1) (1978): 97–101. This study is used by Nancy Snow (2010) in response to the situationist interpretation of the original Darley and Batson study. Nancy Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010).
32. Asch, "Studies of Independence and Conformity: A Minority of One against a Unanimous Majority," 41.
33. Asch, "Studies of Independence and Conformity: A Minority of One against a Unanimous Majority," 19.
34. Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory*.
35. Walter Mischel, and Yuichi Shoda, "A Cognitive-Affective System Theory of Personality: Reconceptualizing Situations, Dispositions, Dynamics, and Invariance in Personality Structure," *Psychological Review* 102(2) (1995): 246–268.
36. Heather Battaly, "Acquiring Epistemic Virtue: Emotions, Situations, and Education," in *Naturalizing Epistemic Virtue*, edited by Abrol Fairweather and Owen Flanagan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014a), 175–196.
37. Information about the project is available at <http://humility.slu.edu/about.html>.

38. Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
39. Kawall (2002) has argued that we should not limit the intellectual virtues to those which provide self-regarding epistemic benefits. Jason Kawall, "Other-Regarding Epistemic Virtues," *Ratio* 15(3) (2002): 254–275.
40. Elizabeth Anderson, "Epistemic Justice as a Virtue of Social Institutions," *Social Epistemology* 26(2) (2012):163–173.
41. Miranda Fricker, "Can There Be Institutional Virtues?," in *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*, edited by T. Szabo Gendler and J. Hawthorne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 235–252.
42. I demonstrate one way that groups might be said to have epistemic virtues in Sarah Wright, "The Stoic Epistemic Virtues of Groups," in *Essays in Collective Epistemology*, edited Jennifer Lackey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 122–141.
43. Battaly, "Acquiring Epistemic Virtue: Emotions, Situations, and Education."
44. Quassim Cassam, "Vice Epistemology," *The Monist*, 99(2) (2016): 159–180.
45. Heather Battaly, "Epistemic Self-Indulgence," *Metaphilosophy* 41 (2010): 214–234.
46. Baehr, "Epistemic Malevolence."
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CHAPTER 38

SENTIMENTALIST VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

The Challenge of Personalism

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BOTH virtue ethics and virtue epistemology have been reviving in recent decades, but the revival has taken them in somewhat different directions. There are currently two main competing branches of virtue ethics: the neo-Aristotelian and the sentimental-ist or neo-Humean. But the two main forms of virtue epistemology, reliabilism and responsibilism, both take inspiration from Aristotle: the former from his work on intellectual virtue, the latter from his work on ethical virtue. In neither case is Hume in the picture, but we hope to show the reader that virtue epistemology in fact has a lot to learn from Hume and from sentimentalism more generally. Here, we explore an alternative to both reliabilism and responsibilism: personalism. Personalism recognizes two categories of epistemic virtues that have been undervalued by reliabilists and responsibilists. First, inspired by Humean sentimentalism, personalism recognizes natural epistemic virtues that operate at the level of the person, rather than at the sub-personal level. Second, inspired by contemporary work on responsibility, personalism recognizes acquired epistemic virtues for which the agent herself is not responsible. We argue that embracing these two categories of virtues, and the personalism in which they are grounded, has some advantages. Personalism offers responsibilism a way to analyze low-grade knowledge, and offers reliabilism a way to analyze high-grade knowledge. Accordingly, responsibilists and reliabilists who are willing to cross over to personalism will gain answers to some of the key challenges to their views. In an effort to make their crossover relatively painless, we suggest a personalist analysis of epistemic virtue that is open to pluralism—one that also allows for reliabilist virtues and responsibilist virtues.

I. PERSONALISM, RESPONSIBILISM, AND NATURAL EPISTEMIC VIRTUES

Unlike reliabilism, responsibilism holds that epistemic virtue and rationality apply only at the level of individuals (given its emphasis on Aristotelian moral virtue, it doesn't attribute virtuous functioning to sub-personal cognitive systems or faculties like vision). Moreover, responsibilism holds that individuals are in substantial ways responsible for whether they are epistemically virtuous or vicious: for example, whether they are intellectually courageous or open-minded, or lack those qualities. But responsibilists who discuss open-mindedness as a prime example of epistemic virtue never mention its intrinsic connection with human sentiment and empathy; if we can argue for such a connection, this will in fact give our approach to virtue epistemology a basis for criticizing responsibilism.

A genuinely open-minded person doesn't have to be open or receptive to *everything*. It is sometimes appropriate, or at least not inappropriate, for an open-minded person to reject certain crazy beliefs or views out of hand, especially those held only by those who are themselves quite closed-minded or dogmatic about their opinions. But where open-mindedness is called for, it paradigmatically involves and is based on an ability and willingness to see things from the point of view of people who disagree with one about some topic, and this characteristically involves a kind of empathy. However, the recent psychological and philosophical literature on empathy mentions two basic kinds of empathy: projective empathy (or simulation), which involves putting oneself deliberately into someone's shoes, into her head, in order to see where things stand from her point of view; and associative or receptive empathy, which involves involuntarily coming to feel what another person feels. This last kind of empathy was what Bill Clinton was implicitly referring to when he said "I feel your pain"; but the relevant literature makes clear that this kind of empathy is often not purely affective, because it can involve and rest on certain cognitive and conceptual abilities. I can't feel the disappointment of some person or group of people I read about unless I possess a number of relevant beliefs and cognitive capacities; such associative empathy is therefore sometimes referred to as "[cognitively] mediated associative empathy."

But may not open-mindedness just involve a willingness and ability, via projective empathy, to get into the heads of other people, see where they are coming from and how they would want to argue, and without any of this involving associative or receptive empathy, or being based in feeling or emotion on the part of the person who gets into the other person's head? Arguably not, when open-mindedness is an intellectual virtue, and is thus motivated by a love of epistemic goods like truth. The most open-minded person will be able to feel some kind of *intellectual sympathy* with (relevant) views that differ from his own. If someone is able to get into someone else's head, but lacks all sympathy for her views—if, for example, he is simply trying to probe or explore for weaknesses in that other person's ideas and arguments in order to be able to give a better

argument for his own intellectual position—he can't be considered a prime example of open-mindedness. When open-mindedness is an intellectual virtue, it is motivated by a love of truth and knowledge, not by the desire to show up an opponent. The motivation for truth drives the open-minded person to see things from the other person's differing point of view, where this involves sharing, at least to some extent, that other person's favorable attitude to that point of view—which is tantamount to intellectual sympathy. (None of this entails that he will eventually come to *agree* with the other person.) So in its highest and best forms, open-mindedness characteristically involves receptivity to others and their views in a way that, at least to some extent, emotionally/empathically involves us with them—it enables us to feel the same pull of their views that they feel. And this conclusion can help us move in the direction of a sentimentalist virtue epistemology. Open-mindedness, as we have described it, involves our being (empathically) receptive vis-à-vis others' differing opinions. But, it can be argued that an element of receptivity is also required for the justification of ordinary and non-controversial perceptual beliefs. And to the extent that, as many of us believe, our empirical beliefs as a body depend on perceptual beliefs, it will then turn out that epistemic justification in general depends on, and involves, the epistemic virtue of receptivity. Since responsibilist accounts of low-grade perceptual, memory, and inductive justification and knowledge have been too strong, this will give the present sentimentalist approach an advantage over responsibilism.¹

The argument for these conclusions depends on drawing an analogy between practical and epistemic rationality. Political liberals frequently tell us that we should subject all our beliefs, values, emotions, and relationships to critical rational scrutiny and questioning—and should do so for reasons of principle and not because we necessarily have (different) specific reasons to question each and every one of our beliefs, emotions, and so on. Now the questioning of beliefs, and even of emotions, may well be an epistemic as well as a practical matter, but since the liberal also talks of questioning relationships and values more generally, we think they are speaking in practical rational terms. When they say that we should subject everything to serious critical scrutiny and questioning, they are making a practical suggestion and, we think, telling us that this is the most rational way to lead one's life.

But should a parent really question, seriously question, his love for his child? Should friends question their relationship, even apart from any specific reasons either of them has for wondering whether it is going well or is a good thing (for them) in general? Many liberals will say yes, and will therefore, as we understand their position, say that a failure (ever) to do so would be a failure of rationality, would show someone to be less practically rational in and about his life than he could or (rationally) should be. But can't we turn the tables here? Don't we really think that it would be irrational to *question* a friendship in the absence of some particular worrying fact or factor? Or consider our ordinary desire to avoid pain and sickness. If someone, at the behest of liberal doctrine, were to seriously question that desire, that value, she would have to put it into a kind of practical abeyance until such time as she could satisfactorily justify having that desire, and if this constitutes a serious, if temporary, personal attitude (not just an issue for debate in

a class on philosophy), they will be *less highly motivated to avoid these things than it is rational for them to be*. So, following the liberal injunction to seriously question everything would require us to have motivational attitudes that are clearly criticizable in practical rational terms.

Let's now unpack this in a sentimentalist direction. The liberal injunction to subject everything in our lives to serious rational scrutiny is offered as a way for someone to be in rational *control* of how she leads her life. But to that extent, the commitment to liberalism also exemplifies a less than receptive attitude to what life may have (already) brought one's way. By contrast, the idea defended here—that it is rationally incumbent on us not to question what we are doing, and so forth, without a very specific reason—recommends a (more) receptive attitude toward the contents of one's own actual life. This receptivity is not necessarily or always an empathic receptivity toward others, but, given its relevance to all of a person's practical activities and attitudes, it is certainly an important form of receptivity. What we have just been saying therefore implies that practical rationality involves or includes an element or dimension of receptivity that is violated by the liberal injunction. By the same token, we are soon going to see that *epistemic* rationality involves receptivity in a much broader way than what we said earlier about what open-mindedness entails; and this will lead us toward a form of sentimentalist virtue epistemology.

Having just distinguished, on the one hand, sheer intellectual or philosophical doubts about whether the avoidance of pain (or anything in life) is worth pursuing and, on the other hand, serious personal doubts about such matters that would involve an attenuation of practical motivation and resultant action that could be characterized as to some extent irrational, we can make a similar distinction in epistemology. If someone believes he sees a tree, but then goes into a classroom to discuss whether there is any philosophically convincing reason to have any beliefs about the external world, this will presumably not undermine or weaken his earlier belief that he saw a tree. But what if epistemological skepticism gets to him more deeply and personally and makes him start seriously worrying about whether he ever has seen or does see any trees. If he does, it might well be argued that he has become epistemically at least somewhat irrational; that he now lacks certain beliefs that he in all epistemic rationality ought to have.

This conclusion has a certain plausibility and appeal all on its own, but it derives additional strength or plausibility from the analogy with practical rationality. If it is practically irrational to act and think as if nihilism about the avoidance of pain or about all values had to be taken very seriously in one's life, might it not be epistemically irrational to act and think as if Cartesian-like doubts had to be taken seriously in one's cognitive life? And the parallel extends further. If the person who seriously doubts the value of his own interests and emotions shows a lack of receptivity and trust toward (the contents of) his own life that can be seen as running counter to the dictates of ordinary practical rationality, then can't we similarly say that a person who in his life seriously doubts his senses on Cartesian grounds is showing an epistemically deplorable lack of trust vis-à-vis his own senses or, alternatively, a lack of epistemically appropriate receptivity vis-à-vis the deliverances of his senses?

Similarly, it makes practical sense to question one's own interests or emotions if one has specific and commonsensically understandable reasons for doing so, and by the same token it can be epistemically rational to question one of one's perceptual beliefs in the light of specific evidence against it (as with the Mueller-Lyer illusion, or when one knows one is in a desert and subject to mirage illusions). But from these facts it simply doesn't follow that it can be practically rational to seriously question one's emotions or values on the kind of very abstract grounds that liberalism subscribes to or that arise from very general forms of practical/evaluative skepticism. And it also doesn't follow that it can be epistemically rational to seriously question ordinary perceptual beliefs on grounds deriving solely from Cartesian skepticism.

Now you may say at this point that all this ignores how difficult, if not impossible, it is to argue against Cartesian skepticism by giving reasons for epistemically favoring commonsense views about the world over various skeptical hypotheses. And can we really be justified in our empirical beliefs if we have no argument(s) to rule out skeptical alternatives? Well, let's assume we lack such arguments. Even so, we could still claim that it is epistemically irrational or unjustified for one to seriously, personally, doubt most of one's perceptual beliefs, or not believe things about the world around one on the basis of one's sense perceptions. And the basis for saying so would be the analogy between practical doubts and epistemic ones, and the force of our original claim that seriously lived liberalism or skepticism about practical value demonstrates an irrational lack of receptivity to what life brings one's way. If seriously questioning all relationships and feelings for this reason makes no practical sense, then the lack of epistemic receptivity involved in seriously questioning (all) the beliefs that naturally arise from sense perception argues for the epistemic irrationality of such questioning.

Or so, at least, the sentimentalist virtue epistemologist can say. And think what this means. Responsibilist virtue epistemology has had a difficult time accounting for low-grade perceptual knowing and justified perceptual belief because the traits it countenances are too robust to be required for such knowledge and justification—children can have perceptual knowledge, though they have not yet acquired the motivational components of the intellectual virtues.² But if one casts one's net more widely and takes in the putative epistemic virtue of receptivity to what one's sense organs have brought one's way (and similar arguments could be applied to ordinary memory beliefs), then a certain epistemic character trait does lie at the heart of justified perceptual belief. The justification for such belief lies in the way it exemplifies a kind of epistemic receptivity that it is rational for human beings to exemplify—just as someone who casts aside her perceptual beliefs on skeptical grounds counts as epistemically irrational for *failing* to be receptive to what her senses have “told” her. A lack of receptivity to others' views is a mark of non-virtuous and irrational dogmatism; and just as receptivity plays the role of an epistemic virtue in regard to open-mindedness, it can play a similar role more broadly in regard to perceptual or memory knowledge.

Reliabilism has always seemed to have an advantage over responsibilism because of its presumed ability to justify ordinary perceptual beliefs via the reliability of the sub-personal cognitive systems that underlie them. But receptivity is a personal character

trait, it applies at the level of the individual person, it is not something sub-personal, and this then means that a responsibilist who works solely at the personal level and takes on board what we have just been saying about receptivity could account for the epistemic justification of perceptual (and memory) beliefs. One reason for preferring reliabilism to responsibilism—namely, its supposedly superior ability to account for perceptual and memory justification—is thereby undercut, and this means that reliabilism has to be defended on other grounds.

However, if the responsibilist moves in the direction we are suggesting, he will also have to give up one aspect of his own previous theorizing. Our ordinary receptivity to what our sense organs “tell us” is not a trait that has to be cultivated, so if there is virtue in such a personal trait, it isn’t virtue that we have had to cultivate or that we are in any ordinary sense responsible for. Therefore, the responsibilist who wishes to account for the epistemic justification of perceptual beliefs in terms of the personal character trait of receptivity that the sentimentalist brings into the picture is no longer in the fullest sense a responsibilist. His view would then be better described as a form of virtue-epistemological “personalism,” and in affirming such a view he would have moved closer to the received reliabilist assumption that some epistemic virtues don’t have to be cultivated.

Moreover, the personalist idea that not all epistemic or cognitive virtue needs to be cultivated or developed actually makes a certain sense on its own. Romantics like Rousseau and Wordsworth saw the curiosity and fresh eyes of childhood as particularly worthy of admiration. We think it is a plus for our personalist position that it can regard childhood (and subsequent) curiosity and imaginativeness—and not just the perceptual and emotional receptivity we also seem to have from the start—as epistemically valuable in a way that responsibilism, with its emphasis on cultivation and responsibility for epistemic virtue and vice, cannot. And we can begin to see how our personalism takes us toward a sentimentalist (virtue) epistemology, if we notice the similarity with what Hume says about natural (moral) virtues. Hume’s moral sentimentalism treats traits like benevolence and gratitude as “natural virtues” that are present even in children. And the virtue epistemologist can similarly insist that curiosity and epistemic receptivity are natural *epistemic* virtues (of persons), an idea that has been absent from responsibilism and epistemology more generally.³

Some points about terminology need to be made. Sentimentalist virtue ethics standardly invokes emotions like compassion, sympathy, and benevolence, but what we are calling sentimentalist virtue epistemology rests on the character trait of receptivity, and receptivity, while a virtue, is no emotion. But moral sentimentalists like Hume invoke (associative) empathy, and thus implicitly invoke receptivity as underlying the emotional motivations they base morality on. So, even if a sentimentalist virtue epistemology doesn’t rest on emotion, it rests on a factor, receptivity, that itself underlies and provides a basis for the emotions that sentimentalist virtue ethics relies on. (Aristotelian-inspired virtue epistemology doesn’t emphasize receptivity in this way.) And the idea that personalism is a form of specifically *sentimentalist* virtue

epistemology is further supported by the fact that it bases its account of the epistemic virtues (in part) on epistemic analogues of the natural virtues invoked by Hume's moral sentimentalism.

However, there is an even stronger reason to bring what we are doing here under the rubric of sentimentalism. We noted earlier that an open-minded person can to some extent, and at least temporarily, share the favorable attitude someone else has to a point of view (including various arguments in its favor) that she (the open-minded person) initially rejects. Via receptivity, the open-minded person who is motivated by truth can feel the pull of someone else's point of view—the same pull that the other person feels. But if we take this literally, it means that anyone who disagrees with us favors a way of seeing things that we do not, and that belief in general involves having a favorable attitude to some argument, theory, or viewpoint and its propositional content. One of us⁴ has argued at considerable length that believing a proposition intrinsically involves favoring it over relevant others for inclusion in one's theoretical picture of the world. Far from being “inert” and purely intellectual or cognitive, belief arguably (though the arguments have to be stated at length) involves the kind of affect involved in favoring one thing over another. The strong emotional reactions we have when someone questions or denies ordinary beliefs of ours “out of the blue” is some evidence for the intrinsically emotional character of all—yes, all—beliefs, and this means that for those beliefs that *are* justified, whether perceptual or otherwise, their justification may turn out to depend in some way on emotion or affect. Other (virtue) epistemologists haven't ever drawn this conclusion, but the conclusion clearly entails that we are doing sentimentalist virtue epistemology here.⁵ And for reasons we have detailed elsewhere,⁶ epistemological sentimentalism doesn't at all have to undercut the objectivity of (claims about) epistemic virtue any more, as it turns out, than moral sentimentalism has to undercut the objectivity of morality.

But we are far from done with our critique of responsibilism. Both Baehr and Greco have pointed out the difficulty of understanding the justification of perceptual and memory beliefs in terms of some personal (i.e., non-sub-personal) trait or traits of character, but we don't know that anyone has pointed out that responsibilism faces a similar problem with regard to enumerative induction.⁷ The reliabilist can say that generalizing from particular instances is, other things being equal, reliable and can therefore count as a basis for justified belief in generalizations (either to a next instance or to all instances of some phenomenon). This doesn't directly address Hume's doubts about or Nelson Goodman's “New Riddle” of induction, but the reliabilist can consistently hold that our present beliefs in various generalizations and our tendencies to believe in accordance with normal canons of enumerative induction are justified if in fact, and as almost all of us believe, they would lead to truths most of the time.

By contrast, the responsibilist may be unable to offer even this much of an answer to the question of what makes it epistemically rational to inductively generalize without triggering the objection that her analysis of inductive knowledge and justification is too strong. Children can have inductive knowledge well before they have acquired the

motivational components of the intellectual virtues. However, the personalist can offer responsibilists who are willing to move over to personalism a way out of this further difficulty.

When we generalize or infer to the next instance—the next crow will be black—this is typically a matter of belief more than of action, but actions or action-tendencies also generalize, as the behaviorists (explicitly) taught us during the earlier parts of the twentieth century. According to the so-called “law of effect,” if in certain circumstances a certain kind of action or behavior is rewarded (punished), then that behavior is more (less) likely to occur in the future when similar circumstances arise than it was prior to its originally being rewarded (punished). The law of effect makes sense whether one is a behaviorist or not (though it makes use of terms like “similar” that need to be more explicitly pinned down), but we want to say that both beliefs based on enumerative induction and behaviors or actions occurring on the basis of (made more likely by) the rewarding or punishing of previous similar/dissimilar actions are cases of generalization.

Note, however, that in the latter case the tendency to generalize is sometimes based on a single instance: once burned, twice shy. Discussions of enumerative inductive have focused on the accumulation of many instances of a given generalization, on what Hume calls “constant conjunction.” But this focus on the many seems to have made us unable to see the full epistemic force of the one. In line with what the law of effect tells us about rewarded behavior, a single instance of a generalization may support that generalization and support it, *other things being equal*, more strongly than our philosophy of science or epistemology has previously reckoned with.

Let’s be clear. We aren’t claiming that a single instance of a generalization always, or even typically, supports the generalization in question. That sort of reasoning is clearly problematic, and has generated countless sexist, racist, and otherwise hasty and unjustified beliefs. Rather, what we are claiming is that a single instance of a generalization can support the generalization in question only when, for starters, other things are in fact equal. If other things aren’t in fact equal, then a single instance won’t support a generalization.

What else is needed for a single instance to support a generalization? Do we need to know that other things are in fact equal? Do we need to know that the single instance is representative of its kind? After all, it can be replied that samples can be unfair or biased, and that this point especially applies to any single instance of a generalization. If I see a single black crow or even a group of black crows, how do I know that they represent a fair or unbiased sample of the class of crows? And if I don’t know this, how can I have any justification to believe that all crows or even the next crow that I see will be black? But this overstates the relevant objection. In general, we don’t need to know that our sample isn’t biased in order for our inductive inferences to be justified—it is enough that we have no positive reason to think that our sample *is* biased. But even granting this point, you may want to say that this applies only to large samples of some generalization but not to any single instance of it.

But why not? Let's say I see a single instance not of a black crow, but of a kind of bird I have never seen before, and let's assume it is black. In such a case, I may hesitate to generalize to the next member of the new species or kind because I know that many species of birds or other animals are variable with respect to their color. But this may just mean that I am in a situation where the inductive generalizations I would otherwise have reason to make cannot be reasonably made *because they are in conflict*—because I am in possession of some undermining evidence. Perhaps, then, if we didn't have evidence of color variability within species, the spotting of a single bird of a new kind *would* be evidence, good evidence, that other members or the next member of that kind would be similarly colored, given that other things are in fact equal. So we are suggesting that a single instance may allow for epistemically reasonable or justified generalization or inference when there are no contrary generalizations or underminers in play, and other things are in fact equal.

Consider a behavioral equivalent of the refusal to infer from a single instance: a child who has never before encountered an open fire, who is painfully burned by touching that fire, but who acquires on that basis no tendency at all to fear fire or avoid touching future fires. This would be bizarre, and if the child started speaking, in Hume-like fashion, of how one single instance might not at all be a very good indication of how fires are generally or of what the next fire would be like, we would think that something had gone very wrong. Because in this case other things are in fact equal and one has no underminers, a single instance of fire should give rise to a tendency to believe fire dangerous and/or to avoid touching fire in the future, and it would make no rational sense to act as if the given instance didn't give one strong reason to avoid fire or some particular fire in the future. But similarly, then, noticing the color or song pattern of a given bird gives us *prima facie* reason to infer the color or song pattern of the next instance one will encounter, when other things are in fact equal; and we think that if someone hesitated to make such an inference in the absence of any contrary generalization(s) or underminers, they would show themselves to be lacking in a certain kind of epistemic decisiveness that characterizes rational thinking. Because of all the things we know, it is very difficult to imagine situations in which everything else is equal, but where everything else is in fact equal, and we are not in possession of underminers, a single instance supports an inference to the next instance and possibly beyond that as much as, in the case of fire, it also supports a behavioral generalization.

We are saying, then, that the insistence on constant conjunction as a necessary basis for inductive inference and/or generalization where everything else is equal is a mistake. And if someone were somehow unable or unwilling to make such a generalizing inference, we think that would show them to be epistemically indecisive in an unjustified way. (All this ties in with evolutionary psychology.) Any person who was thus indecisive would be a bit like the obsessive-compulsive person who locks and leaves his house but keeps coming back to see whether the door really is locked. On the other hand, it is not neurotic or irrational to refuse to make a generalization where one's evidence leads

in contrary directions or is hard to grasp as a whole, but that is entirely consistent with what we are saying here.

Now Hume in the first *Enquiry* (section IV, part II) tells us that constant conjunction (he never uses the word “induction”) cannot give us any real argument for a generalizing conclusion, because no genuine argument can depend on producing more and more instances of what is similar to the first instance of a given generalization. How, he effectively asks, can finding other instances that are just like a given first instance create a rational argument when the first instance didn’t give us any argument? But if a single instance is or gives us, other things being equal, an argument and if constant conjunction isn’t required, then these doubts about induction that Hume raises in the first *Enquiry* (but not the *Treatise*) can be answered. (Ironically, Hume even mentions the case of being burned once and consequently shying from future fire, but doesn’t see how it works against his own insistence on constant conjunction.) And if you then say, by way of possible objection, that having more than one instance is evidentially or epistemically better than having just a single one, one can point out that on the present view having many instances favoring an inductive conclusion is having many different arguments for that conclusion, and having several arguments for a given conclusion is epistemically better than having only one.

Of course, none of this answers Hume’s worry in the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* that inductive arguments can’t meet the standard of deductive validity without begging the question, but many people have pointed out that this imposes an unnecessary and unjustified burden on inductive inference and cannot be used to validly undermine induction. Hume’s further argument against induction, based on the idea that the repetition of similar instances cannot produce an argument where none existed in the first place, has been pretty much ignored both in the Hume literature and the literature on induction. But it is an argument worth considering—it has a certain force. And we have claimed that the best way to counter it is to recognize (as Hume himself dimly did) that, other things being equal, in the absence of undermining evidence, a single instance is a kind of argument for a conclusion, something that both the behaviorist literature on the law of effect and commonsense about children’s reactions to being burned support and illustrate.

We are saying, then, that belief can, in the absence of underminers and when other things are equal, legitimately generalize on the basis of a single instance. And epistemic decisiveness re induction is a natural epistemic virtue of individuals, not of subsystems of individuals. So by bringing in that epistemic character trait, the responsibilist who becomes willing to countenance virtues that don’t have to be cultivated can extend her now-personalist account of epistemic rationality to take in yet another area of the epistemic realm, enumerative induction. (The argument for the virtue of epistemic decisiveness can easily be extended to abduction and even deduction.⁸) However, even if receptivity and decisiveness are natural epistemic virtues that can be found in all normal children, they can be affected, for epistemic better or worse, by what happens to us as children or adults, and that fact is relevant to another important part of our sentimental-ist/personalist critique of responsibilism.

II. PERSONALISM, RESPONSIBILISM, AND UNWITTINGLY ACQUIRED EPISTEMIC VIRTUES

Many responsibilists (notably, Zagzebski)⁹ hold that adults bear a substantial amount of responsibility for whether they exemplify epistemic virtues or vices: that we are blameworthy, for example, if we let ourselves develop the vices of dogmatism or intellectual cowardice and praiseworthy if we shape ourselves into virtuously open-minded or intellectually courageous individuals. They grant that others can have an influence on these processes, but think, nonetheless, that the individual who comes to possess virtues and vices must be responsible for their acquisition and operation. But we think this overestimates the amount of control people have over their possession of epistemic virtues and vices that are not natural—that aren't natural in the sense that attaches to the virtues of perceptual receptivity and inductive decisiveness. Reliabilists think that we cannot be praised or blamed for how virtuously or non-virtuously sub-personal cognitive systems like vision operate within us, and the personalist seeks to extend this idea to the possession or exercise of natural virtues at the level of persons. But as personalists we also wish to maintain, as against certain forms of responsibilism, that we need not be praiseworthy or blameworthy for *becoming* epistemologically virtuous or vicious in various significant ways. In fact, we hold that both our possession and our exercise of various relevant personal virtues or vices (of personal character traits) may be much more the product of the environments in which we happened to grow up than due to our own deliberate efforts and intentions. We may typically have less control over our possession and exercise of acquired epistemic virtue(s) and vice(s) than responsibilists have suggested.¹⁰

To illustrate, the open-mindedness of a privileged and wealthy student may be largely, or even entirely, a result of good luck—the good luck of being raised by open-minded parents who encourage similar thinking in their children, and the good luck of being educated within enlightened institutions—in which case the student *herself* wouldn't be praiseworthy or responsible for her open-mindedness. Likewise, personalism acknowledges that the dogmatism and closed-mindedness of an impoverished young man in the Swat Valley may be largely, or even entirely, a result of bad luck—including the bad luck of being indoctrinated by the Taliban—in which case, he might *himself* be blameless for his dogmatism.¹¹ The possibility of such traits coming about in these ways suggests that personalism differs importantly from both reliabilism and responsibilism regarding the issue of how responsibility, praiseworthiness, and blameworthiness relate to epistemic virtue and vice. The personalist agrees with the reliabilist that there are virtues and vices for which we are not responsible; but unlike the reliabilist, claims that this can be true of both natural and acquired personal character traits and not just of cognitive subsystems of the person. Further, the personalist agrees with the responsibilist emphasis on

personal character traits, but disagrees with the responsibilist about whether we have to be responsible for the presence or absence of such traits or for their exercise.

In a similar vein, Miranda Fricker and George Sher have argued that we often initially come to possess virtues and vices without being responsible (accountable) for possessing them.¹² This is entirely in keeping with personalism, but clearly goes against Zagzebski's form of responsibilism. Zagzebski holds, for example, that "it is part of the nature of a virtue in the standard case that it is the result of moral work on the part of the human agent."¹³ On her view, virtues require effort, and the agent who succeeds in acquiring moral or epistemic virtues is praiseworthy for putting in the requisite effort and for coming to possess and act on a virtue rather than a vice. Vice, too, is said to be something acquired, presumably, as a result of a lack of effort on the part of the agent. Such an agent would be considered blameworthy for failing to exert the appropriate effort to be virtuous, and thus for coming to possess a vice rather than a virtue.

For Zagzebski, then, the agent has a good deal of control over her epistemic (or moral) development and over whether she becomes virtuous or vicious overall, or in some particular way. But, the personalist holds that this view is implausible with respect to many instances of epistemic virtue and vice. On the personalist view, and following Ben Vilhauer, we can distinguish between possessing a virtue or vice and being responsible for possessing it.¹⁴ What we said briefly about open-mindedness illustrates this point very well, but we can expand on what was said earlier to make the point more thoroughly. A child raised by a family and a community that are devoted to Taliban ideals and purposes is likely to soak up the closed-mindedness that characterizes everyone around him. Hume in the *Treatise* notes how the operation of sympathy—we would nowadays call this empathy—typically leads us to non-self-consciously take in the attitudes of those around us. But such a process is not within the individual's control, and so we cannot consider an individual blameworthy for having empathically absorbed the intolerant or closed-minded attitudes of those around him. This result can also come about through specific and deliberate interventions of the family or community. If a child in a Taliban community questions the goodness of Allah or questions whether the people who disagree with his community are really wrong, the child's family or community may respond very negatively and punitively with something like, "How can you be so wicked to question Allah's goodness or your community's opinions when they have been so good to you, you ungrateful child!" Such strong reactions against a child when that child dares to consider alternative views and question what his community believes will make it very hard for him to voice or even think such things in the future, and may undercut any chance the child has to become open-minded about religious or other matters. But none of this is the fault of the child, and a child who is treated this way and who is surrounded by closed-minded fanatics doesn't seem to bear any responsibility (accountability) or blame for becoming like those around him. By the same token, a child whose parents encourage her original and dissenting thoughts and who, as a result, becomes open-minded about all sorts of things doesn't seem responsible (accountable) or praiseworthy for becoming that way. The process seems to occur outside of the child's deliberate control.¹⁵

Now, some responsibilists, like James Montmarquet, have held that we can be responsible and blameworthy for *exercising* vices like closed-mindedness even when we aren't

responsible for our original *possession* of them.¹⁶ But consider the closed-mindedness of someone brought up by the Taliban. We have said he isn't blameworthy for failing to possess open-mindedness—he lacks appropriate control over the process that led him to become closed-minded. But, presumably, this typically involves his not seeing his closed-mindedness as an epistemic vice or not believing that it is an epistemic vice. So, mightn't he also lack control over this failure to see and to believe? If so, it may not be reasonable to consider him blameworthy—as Montmarquet seems to think many closed-minded people are—for not trying to be more open-minded (on various occasions). How can one be blameworthy for not working against a certain epistemic vice if one isn't blameworthy for failing to see or believe that it *is* a vice? In this manner, the personalist may want to oppose responsibilist ideas about the *operation* of acquired epistemic virtues and vices like open-mindedness and closed-mindedness, in addition to opposing responsibilist ideas about their *possession*.¹⁷

Of course, none of this entails that self-cultivation (i.e., cultivation in which the individual plays an active and intentional part), even early self-cultivation, is impossible. Some schools and communities encourage early self-cultivation, alongside other methods for developing epistemic virtues. Consider the Intellectual Virtues Academy, a public middle school in Long Beach, California, the mission of which is to “foster meaningful growth in the person qualities of a good thinker or learner: curiosity, wonder, attentiveness, open-mindedness . . . and related traits.”¹⁸ At this school, teachers and students explicitly discuss epistemic virtues and their development; and students are given regular opportunities to practice epistemic virtues and to reflect on their progress toward virtue. Accordingly, we can expect graduates of the Intellectual Virtues Academy to be partly responsible for any epistemic virtues they come to possess. (Perceptual receptivity may not develop or increase in such students, but the “intellectual” receptivity involved in being open-minded presumably can.) But, unfortunately, such schools are few and far between, and this sort of self-cultivation is not the norm. Typically, if self-cultivation occurs at all, it occurs late in the game, once one is already in possession of virtues and vices.

However, one may have worries about what personalism is saying about these matters. One might think, for example, that the virtues and vices acquired through the influence of one's environment have more in common with the sub-personal qualities of reliabilism than with the character traits of responsibilism, and thus that these virtues and vices fall short of being full-blown *personal* qualities. But, this worry can be answered. For responsibilists, personal qualities are those that express who one is as a person—they express one's judgments, one's conception of value, and one's motivations (where these are informed by one's judgments and values). They do this through belief and motivational components that are built into the quality.¹⁹ Now, the qualities we have described in the preceding meet all of these conditions, even though they are unwittingly acquired from the environment. To illustrate, the closed-mindedness of the now adult who was raised by the Taliban is a full-blown trait with belief and motivational components. It is important to see that in ignoring the views of outsiders, he is *not* an unthinking automaton. Rather, he is acting in accordance with a conception of value to which he is committed, and about which he cares; he believes outsiders to be misguided,

is motivated to ignore or oppose their views, and for these reasons, does ignore or oppose their views. Though we may find his values, motivations, and actions offensive or worse, there is no reason we can't think of his closed-mindedness as a personal quality, whatever we may say about his lack of responsibility (accountability) for acquiring it (and for acquiring its belief and motivational components). In this manner, personalism can expand to include acquired qualities that express who one is as an individual person (in addition to including natural epistemic virtues).

Nor does our lack of responsibility for our possession or exercise of personal epistemic traits undercut the claim that those traits are virtues or vices. For all the reasons we have mentioned, a given person may not be blameworthy for being closed-minded, but that closed-mindedness is still a character trait we can attribute to the person in question. And it is a character trait we have every reason to describe as a vice, not a virtue. Arguably, it is a vice because it entails a motivation (to ignore the views of outsiders) that is intrinsically bad, and false beliefs (that outsiders are misguided) that are intrinsically bad. So in terms of our evaluations, we aren't letting the closed-minded member of the Taliban off "scot-free."

Responsibilists who are willing to cross over to personalism will arguably benefit in two ways. First, as argued in section I, natural epistemic virtues (which apply at the level of the person) offer responsibilists a way to explain low-grade perceptual and inductive knowledge. Second, the unwittingly acquired epistemic virtues addressed in this section arguably offer responsibilists a more realistic route to high-grade knowledge (roughly, knowledge that requires active inquiry and effort; e.g., knowing that the butler committed the crime). Briefly, Zagzebski has argued that knowledge of both sorts (high- and low-grade) requires an act of intellectual virtue, which in turn requires possessing the motivational component of an intellectual virtue. For Zagzebski, one must have sufficient control over, and be praiseworthy for, coming to possess this motivational component. But, if what we have argued earlier is correct, we often lack such control. Accordingly, Zagzebski's analysis of knowledge threatens skepticism. In contrast, our personalism can preserve what is correct about Zagzebski's analysis, while avoiding skepticism. Personalism can grant that high-grade knowledge sometimes requires an acquired motivation to get the truth, while denying that the agent herself must be accountable for possessing this motivation. As such, personalism makes high-grade knowledge (somewhat) easier to achieve.²⁰ Does personalism also offer benefits to reliabilists?

III. PERSONALISM, RELIABILISM, AND PLURALISM

Reliabilists nowadays insist that some epistemic virtues and vices occur at the level of persons. But there is, nonetheless, a problem about the way in which they base the

rational justification of ordinary perceptual, memory, and inductive beliefs solely on the virtues of sub-personal cognitive systems. How, we might ask, does what is virtuous, what shows skill and excellence, at the sub-personal level translate or get transformed into rational justification or virtue *at the level of persons*? The *natural* epistemic virtues of personalism offer the reliabilist a possible answer here. The reliabilist might hold, with the personalist, that epistemic receptivity and decisiveness are personal epistemic virtues that provide the basis for the justification of perceptual, and so on, beliefs that occur at the personal level; but they might then go on to add that this is entirely consistent with being a reliabilist about our ultimate epistemic justification for such beliefs. In particular, they could claim that decisiveness and receptivity are rationally justifying epistemic virtues because and only because they reliably (i.e., more often than not) yield true beliefs.

Further, the *acquired* epistemic virtues of personalism may help reliabilism in its efforts to explain high-grade knowledge. Reliabilism does allow acquired character traits to count among the epistemic virtues, given that they are reliable; but it has yet to provide an analysis of such traits. Here, reliabilism stands to benefit from the personalist analysis of these virtues. Like responsibilist virtues, these acquired virtues have motivational components, but like the paradigmatic reliabilist virtues, they do not require accountability. Accordingly, reliabilists who avail themselves of these personalist virtues would be free to claim that there are some situations in which knowledge will require sharing the motivations of the virtuous person, without landing themselves in skepticism. They can avoid skepticism by insisting that these motivations be personalist ones, for which the agent need not be accountable.

Such views would combine elements from personalism and from reliabilism. But they involve an assumption that the personalist may well not want to make: the assumption that a trait cannot be a virtue or provide rational justification if it isn't reliable. Consider induction. We have argued (without giving all the details) that when other things are equal the making of enumerative inductions can be based on the epistemic virtue of decisiveness. But consider, then, a conceivable case where our inductive inferences are about to be systematically undermined, where the world is about to change in radical (and unexpected) ways that will falsify most of what we have inductively come to believe. Our world is about to become a demon-world. In the demon-world, enumerative induction is no longer a reliable mode of inference, and according to reliabilism such inferences on our part will not be (or will no longer be) rationally justified. But internalists have argued that this seems, intuitively, to be a mistake. In a world that is about to become a demon-world, those who think inductively seem still to be rational in their thinking from within their own perspectives, even if most of that thinking will turn out to be, unexpectedly, mistaken.²¹ In this manner, internalists have argued that reliability in producing true beliefs isn't necessary for epistemic justification or for epistemic virtue.

Personalists who are internalists needn't tie the epistemic virtues to conditions of reliability. But that doesn't mean that reliability can't ever justify on its own. The reliability of sub-personal systems or individual/personal character traits might sometimes be

sufficient for rational justification, even if it isn't necessary for such justification; and if we make the latter assumption, then we end up with a kind of virtue-epistemological pluralism in which sentimentalist/personalist factors have justificatory force, but reliabilist considerations also have an independent ability to justify (or confer virtue status). And at that point we might also want to let responsibilism back into the picture. Even if closed-mindedness can be and often is inculcated outside the control of the person who becomes closed-minded, there seems to be no reason why someone cannot become distressed, say, at the results of her own closed-mindedness. Her daughter has, for example, married someone who practices a different religion, and she refused to accept the match or even attend the wedding. But she loves her daughter and eventually comes to see how destructive her attitude has been to her daughter's peace of mind and happiness; and this might make her resolve to try to be more accepting of her son-in-law and might lead her to read more of the history associated with his religion in order to become more open-minded about and sensitive to what he believes. Doing so would count both as epistemic and as moral self-cultivation for which the parent who eventually changes would deserve some credit or praise; and there is no obvious reason why a personalist shouldn't take this aspect or part of the responsibilist view on board. Personalism can function quite well on its own as an alternative to responsibilism and reliabilism, but it might want to accept elements from responsibilism and reliabilism that would lead it to become a more pluralistic approach to virtue epistemology than either of those other approaches has allowed for. Either way, personalism enriches the possibilities for virtue epistemology and deserves to play a substantial role in its future.

NOTES

1. H. Battaly and M. Slote, "Virtue Epistemology and Virtue Ethics," in *The Routledge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, edited by Lorraine Besser-Jones and Michael Slote (New York: Routledge, 2015), 253–269.
2. See Zagzebski's analysis of low-grade knowledge. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 277–281. For arguments that this analysis is too strong, see J. Baehr, "Character in Epistemology," *Philosophical Studies* 128 (2006): 479–514; J. Greco, "Virtues in Epistemology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology*, edited by Paul K. Moser (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 287–315.
3. Reliabilist Ernest Sosa has spoken of the epistemic motivation for truth as operating at a sub-personal level even in children. Sosa, *Knowing Full Well*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 22ff. But we think it makes more sense to identify that underlying human motivation with regular, ordinary curiosity or inquisitiveness as a characteristic of persons or individuals. Incidentally, if animals are curious (there is evidence that they are) or can receptively believe what their senses tell them, then our account extends beyond what are ordinarily regarded as persons. But the term "personalism" is nonetheless convenient for our purposes here.
4. M. Slote, *A Sentimentalist Theory of Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
5. Hume was a moral sentimentalist, but not a sentimentalist about belief (he thought beliefs only *caused* emotions) or about epistemic virtue. We think this is partly accounted for by

the difference between Hume and the Romantics who came after him. The latter saw the values and virtues of childhood much more clearly than anyone in the Enlightenment period, even a moral anti-rationalist like Hume, ever did. Incidentally, even if believing something involves favoring a certain view of things, that doesn't entail that one is happy about having to view things that way, about having to believe what one believes—as when a person who discovers that her spouse has been multiply unfaithful may (finally) believe this about him but be unhappy about having to believe it.

6. Battaly and Slote, "Virtue Epistemology and Virtue Ethics"; M. Slote, *Moral Sentimentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
7. Baehr, "Character in Epistemology"; Greco, "Virtues in Epistemology."
8. M. Slote, *Sentimentalist Virtue Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).
9. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*.
10. H. Battaly, "Epistemic Virtue and Vice: Reliabilism, Responsibilism, and Personalism," in *Moral and Intellectual Virtues in Western and Chinese Philosophy*, edited by Chienkuo Mi, Michael Slote, and Ernest Sosa (New York: Routledge, 2016), 99–120.
11. Thanks to Neera Badhwar for suggesting an analogous example about moral virtue.
12. M. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 89; G. Sher, *In Praise of Blame* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 55.
13. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 125.
14. B. Vilhauer, "Hard Determinism, Humeanism, and Virtue Ethics," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 46 (2008): 125.
15. The children here described are not accountable for coming to possess, as adults, the intellectual virtues and vices that they come to possess. Following Watson's (1996) distinction between accountability-responsibility and attributability-responsibility, Battaly allows for the possibility that agents who lack accountability-responsibility for their virtues and vices might still be responsible for them in the attributability sense. Battaly, "Epistemic Virtue and Vice: Reliabilism, Responsibilism, and Personalism," in *Moral and Intellectual Virtues in Western and Chinese Philosophy*, edited by Chienkuo Mi, Michael Slote, and Ernest Sosa (New York: Routledge, 2016), 99–120.
16. J. A. Montmarquet, *Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993), 15, 34.
17. Battaly, "Epistemic Virtue and Vice: Reliabilism, Responsibilism, and Personalism," in *Moral and Intellectual Virtues in Western and Chinese Philosophy*, edited by Chienkuo Mi, Michael Slote, and Ernest Sosa (New York: Routledge, 2016), 99–120.
18. <http://www.ivalongbeach.org/about/about-iva>
19. Battaly, "Epistemic Virtue and Vice: Reliabilism, Responsibilism, and Personalism."
20. Ibid.
21. Here we are ignoring Goodman's New Riddle of Induction (1954), but one of us has elsewhere argued at length (Slote, forthcoming) that predicates like "grue" can be ruled out *ab initio* by a personalist-sentimentalist account of inductive inference.

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CHAPTER 39

MORAL AND INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES

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VIRTUE theory concerns itself with the nature of virtue, and there are of course significant disputes on this issue. Standard divisions among virtue theorists concern whether we give priority to motive or consequences in our understanding of what virtues are, or whether virtues are akin to faculties rather than traits. Parties to these debates often argue about whether or not some candidate virtue *is* a virtue. Thus ‘virtue responsibilists’ think that the faculty virtues championed by ‘virtue reliabilists’—faculties such as perception, memory, introspection, and inductive reasoning—are not virtues at all. In the same vein, ‘virtue consequentialists’ hold that certain reliable traits that are not standardly recognized as virtues nevertheless ought to merit that status. In this chapter I’ll be concerned with a further distinction, albeit one between excellences that all agree are virtues. This is the distinction between *moral* and *intellectual* virtues. The distinction is apparent in ancient and medieval philosophy, but has attracted much less attention than the distinctions between motive and consequence, or faculty and trait virtue. One reason for this is that, until recently, pretty much everyone agreed that there is a genuine distinction between moral and intellectual virtues, even if they disagreed as to how this distinction should be drawn. In the contemporary literature, there is still disagreement about how the distinction should be drawn. But there is also, and interestingly, a view that there is no real or genuine difference between the putative kinds at all, since attempts to explain this difference all fail. This is the line taken by Zagzebski in her splendid book *Virtues of the Mind*.¹ Renewed interest in moral and intellectual virtues has stemmed, in part, from this skepticism about whether they are indeed distinct kinds. My plan in what follows is to consider different accounts—some traditional, some contemporary—as to what the difference between moral and intellectual virtues comes down to.² If none of these is a plausible way of drawing the putative distinction, then it will be tempting to conclude that Zagzebski and others of similar mind are right to deny that there is any genuine difference between moral and intellectual virtues.

I. INTRODUCTION

Moral virtues are sometimes called virtues of character, and traditionally include benevolence, courage, temperance, justice, generosity, tact, compassion, fairness, fidelity, charity, honesty, humility, kindness, patience, trustworthiness, love, and steadfastness. Intellectual virtues are sometimes called epistemic virtues, and traditionally include open-mindedness, intellectual courage, intellectual humility, perseverance, fairness, wisdom, curiosity, attentiveness, and understanding. The distinction between these two putative kinds of virtue is a staple of thinking about the virtues, both ancient and modern, and its status as platitudinous is due to a number of factors. One of these is historical: probably the most important ancient writer on virtue, Aristotle, thought that there was a clear distinction here, as did the most prominent medieval philosopher, Thomas Aquinas. Another is theoretical: philosophers have long thought there is a genuine difference between the subject areas of ethics and epistemology, with a corresponding distinction between the excellences thought necessary for correct ethical behavior and those required for correct epistemic activity. A third factor, prominent in everyday thought and academic work across a range of subjects, is the divisions between thinking and feeling, reason and passion, the life of the mind and the life of action.

So, at least, traditional thinking has it. But can we explain *why* moral and intellectual virtues are different in kind? In what follows I'll discuss attempts to do so that make appeal to the following putative differences between them:

- (i) They govern different parts of the mind;
- (ii) They are developed differently;
- (iii) They have different motives;
- (iv) They have different formal and material objects;
- (v) They are expressed in appropriate answers to questions in different domains.

I will argue, in the next four sections of the chapter, that (i)–(iv) are problematic as ways of drawing the distinction. In the final section I'll suggest that (v) has a good deal of plausibility, and defend this proposal there. I conclude that skepticism about whether there is a genuine distinction is thus unwarranted.

II. VIRTUES OF DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE MIND

The first possibility we'll discuss is that moral and intellectual virtues can be distinguished in light of the fact that they are excellences of and govern different parts or faculties of the mind. This idea is prominent in two of the major writers on the virtues, Aristotle and Aquinas.

Aristotle's view is most clearly seen in passages from the *Eudemian Ethics*, where he distinguishes different parts of the soul, and then claims that moral and intellectual virtues 'belong' to these different parts. He writes,

As it is human virtue that is the object of our inquiry, let us assume that there are two parts of a soul that share in reason, but that they do not both share in reason in the same way; one's nature is to prescribe, the other to obey and listen . . . It makes no difference if the soul is divided into parts or lacks parts, as it certainly has distinct capacities, including the ones mentioned—just as in a curve the concave and convex are inseparable, and the white and the straight may be, though the straight is not white, except incidentally, and it is not essentially the same.³

These two parts or elements correspond to *reason* and *emotion*. Aristotle continues,

Virtue is of two forms, virtue of character, and intellectual virtue. For we praise not only the just, but also the intelligent and the wise . . . The intellectual virtues, having, as they do, a rational principle, such virtues belong to the part that has reason and prescribes to the soul in so far as it possesses reason, whereas the virtues of character belong to the part that is non-rational, but whose nature is to follow the rational part; for we do not say what a man's character is like when we say that he is wise or clever, but when we say that he is gentle or daring.⁴

A simple way of interpreting these passages is to hold that intellectual virtues have the rational part of the soul—or the faculties of mind that govern reasoning in its various aspects—as their 'domain of operation.' Intellectual virtues are what enable the various rational sub-faculties (deduction, induction, intuition, introspection, memory) to operate optimally. Moral virtues, on the other hand, have the emotional part of the soul—or the faculties that govern feeling in its various forms—as their domain of operation. Moral virtues are what enable our emotions (fear, anger, joy, pride) to operate so that we feel as we ought. Part of what the intellectual virtues do, when they govern, is to ensure that the dictates of the rational part of the soul are as they should be. Part of what the moral virtues do, when they govern, is to ensure that the person's emotions are such as to obey and serve the dictates of reason and enable right action. So we distinguish the virtues in terms of different things that they govern: intellectual virtues govern intellectual activity in the rational part of the soul; moral virtues govern emotional activity in the spirited part of the soul. However, despite the fact that the virtues govern different parts of the soul, in the fully virtuous person the virtues will operate together to ensure that the correct decisions are made and enacted.

A similar view is proposed by St. Thomas Aquinas. He writes,

Human virtue is a habit perfecting man in view of his doing good deeds. Now, in man there are but two principles of human actions, viz. the intellect or reason and the appetite . . . Consequently every human virtue must needs be a perfection of one of these principles. Accordingly if it perfects man's speculative or practical intellect in

order that his deed may be good, it will be an intellectual virtue: whereas if it perfects his appetite, it will be a moral virtue. It follows therefore that every human virtue is either intellectual or moral.⁵

For Aquinas, the moral virtues are in the business of controlling feeling or appetite so as to enable choice in accordance with reason—temperance controls passions such as sexual desire that threaten to interfere with rational choice; courage prevents the subject from giving into other passions such as fear—while the intellectual virtues are habits that dispose the subject to believe in accordance with reason. Here, too, the virtuous person's faculties of reason and appetite/feeling work together to ensure that they do the right thing and perform good deeds.

Is this a plausible way to distinguish moral and intellectual virtues? We might think not, and for a number of reasons. The first is that it is unlikely that we can draw any hard and fast distinction between reason and feeling, between the rational and emotional parts of the mind or soul, between faculties that deal exclusively in thought and faculties that deal exclusively in choice. As a result, we will be hard pressed to identify intellectual virtues in terms of those features that enable our rational faculty to work as it ought, while moral virtues are those features that facilitate proper functioning of our emotional faculty.⁶ This is because our reasoning ability would seem to *require* input from emotion, and the proper functioning of our emotional faculties would seem to *require* input from reason. For evidence of the former, consider Antonio Damasio's work on the importance of feeling or affect for rational deliberation and choice. Damasio persuasively argues that feelings, in the form of 'somatic markers,' are essential for accurate, efficient, and timely decision-making, and that in the absence of feelings our deliberations would be "inordinately long," would be susceptible to serious error, and would have extreme cognitive costs.⁷

A similar conclusion is warranted if we consider Thomas Reid's view on the necessity of curiosity or other emotions for attention, and the necessity of attention for "firm and stable judgment." We thus need emotions to achieve such intellectual and epistemic goods. Reid writes, "[i]t requires a strong degree of curiosity, or some more important passion, to give us that interest in an object which is necessary to our giving attention to it. And, without attention, we can form no true and stable judgment of any object."⁸ And "[a]ttention may be given to any object, either of sense or of intellect, in order to form a distinct notion of it, or to discover its nature, its attributes, or its relations and so great is the effect of attention, that, without it, it is impossible to acquire or retain a distinct notion of any object of thought."⁹ So for Reid, emotion is necessary for us to pay attention to some object or event, and paying attention is necessary for us to form an accurate judgment about that object or event. Proper functioning of our intellectual capacities needs the input of feeling, therefore.

A second reason to be suspicious of this way of drawing the distinction is that excellent intellectual activity and hence intellectual virtue often require not just the presence but the proper *governance* of emotion.¹⁰ For example, intellectual courage requires the *control* of fear; suppose, to illustrate, that we wish to defend a novel but unpopular

hypothesis, or commit a year's research leave investigating a promising but high-risk research strategy. By the same token, intellectual honesty requires that we control intemperate desires; for instance, a strong yearning for career advancement might incline one to fudge research data, or agree to take part in a morally dubious but personally advantageous research project.

Similar conclusions are warranted if we consider the importance of intellectual virtue to the proper functioning of our emotional faculties and hence of the feeling or appetitive part of the mind. Compassion requires not just a compassionate motive, but (as Zagzebski stresses) reliable success in helping others.¹¹ But this plausibly requires one to know who, when, and how to help; and we might think that the intellectual virtues are important (and perhaps even necessary) for *this* kind or level of understanding of one's evaluative situation. Similarly, courage requires one to know who and what to fear, and what the appropriate behavioral response to the source of danger would be. But this requires epistemic or intellectual excellence. If so, we cannot simply identify moral virtues as ones that constitute the correct choice and behavior when (e.g.) one is faced by danger, since putative examples of intellectual virtues will, plausibly, be required for correct choice and behavior here as well.¹²

It is thus rather doubtful that we can distinguish moral and intellectual virtues on the basis that they are necessary for the proper functioning of different parts or faculties of the mind. Rather, excellent rational deliberation and excellent choice of action would seem to require both sorts of virtue.

III. A DEVELOPMENTAL DIFFERENCE

A second distinction appeals to the different developmental stories we might tell for the different kinds of virtue. Once more, this explanation is prominent in Aristotle. He writes,

Virtue, then, being of two kinds, intellectual and moral, intellectual virtue in the main owes both its birth and its growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time), while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit . . . For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyreplayers by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.¹³

But the latter is not true of intellectual virtue; as Julia Driver puts it, "[i]n the case of intellectual virtue . . . the trait is not acquired by developing the habit of performing characteristic actions. One doesn't become wise by performing wise actions."¹⁴

The central problem with this way of drawing the distinction is that some intellectual virtues *are* acquired and developed by habit, rather than by teaching, and some moral virtues *can* be taught.¹⁵ It certainly seems true that our intellectual abilities can improve

with performing intellectual activities—by intellectual exercise and practice. This must be true of intellectual virtues that have moral equivalents: so intellectual courage, perseverance, humility, and fairness would seem to necessarily develop along parallel lines to moral courage, perseverance, humility, and fairness. But it is also true of other intellectual virtues: faith in one's convictions is an intellectual virtue, but one that is developed by acts of faith when one's commitments are tested. Something similar can be said about open-mindedness: it is not obvious that open-mindedness is a trait that is developed as a result of teaching, but is rather developed through being open-minded, seeing what the open-minded person does, discovering what happens when one is not open-minded, and so forth.

On the other hand, some moral virtues are (we might argue) the product of natural capacity and teaching. Other species than humans seem to have a sense of fairness, which suggests that it is a natural capacity;¹⁶ and this sense of fairness is developed in the direction of virtue in part by teaching and in part by habituation. Something similar might be said if we think that we are naturally benevolent or compassionate. By the same token, we are often taught what is a fitting object of fear and what is not, so the moral virtue of courage requires the education of a natural capacity for fear, much in the way that the intellectual virtue of curiosity requires teaching and habituation so that people are motivated by and interested in the right kinds of questions and topics. So a case can be made that many moral and intellectual virtues are grounded in a natural capacity and develop as a result of both teaching and habituation. We can, in light of this, doubt that there is any principled distinction between moral and intellectual virtues from a developmental perspective.

IV. A DIFFERENCE IN SUBSTANTIVE GOALS

If it is implausible to hold that moral and intellectual virtues are restricted to different parts or faculties of the mind, or that they follow different developmental paths, perhaps they can be distinguished in terms of their relations to different *goods*. One such relation is intentional: virtues are to be understood in terms of *aiming at* certain goods, and hence in terms of their motivational structure. A different relation is causal: virtues are to be explained in terms of their *causing* certain goods to be brought about. Since the first option is most prominent in discussions, I'll start with it here.

In Zagzebski's rich and detailed neo-Aristotelian account, a virtue is a character trait with a distinctive motivational structure. She writes: "A virtue . . . can be defined as a deep and enduring acquired excellence of a person, involving a characteristic motivation to produce a certain desired end and reliable success in bringing about that end."¹⁷ Now although Zagzebski herself thinks that there is no real distinction between moral and intellectual virtues, and that the latter are (at best) a subclass of the former,¹⁸ a supporter of the claim that there is a genuine difference in kind here might appeal to the motivational structure of virtue in order to make her case. For

perhaps we can define intellectual virtues as having a particular motivational structure directed at particular intellectual or epistemic ends, while moral virtues have a different motivational structure directed at particular moral goods. What are these motivational structures? Zagzebski writes that “individual intellectual virtues can be defined in terms of motivations arising from the general motivation for knowledge and reliability in attaining the aims of these motives.”¹⁹ As for the moral motives, as Driver notes, the characteristic motivation might be some form of benevolence or goodwill.²⁰ As a result, we might propose a distinction between moral and intellectual virtues in light of substantive differences in the motivational elements present in each: intellectual virtues are characterized in terms of their distinctive intellectual motives, while moral virtues are characterized in terms of their distinctive moral motives. As Baehr puts it, “it might be thought that moral virtues, like intellectual virtues, can be understood teleologically, or in terms of their ultimate aim or goal, such that we can think of intellectual virtues as personal qualities aimed at distinctively epistemic ends and of moral virtues as personal qualities aimed at distinctively moral ends.”²¹

The causal version of this story will distinguish moral and intellectual virtues in terms of reliable causal links with distinctively moral and epistemic ends: so moral virtues are ones that reliably bring about certain goods, such as “pleasure, the absence of pain, autonomy, justice, love, respect, friendship, and the like,”²² while intellectual virtues are reliably linked with epistemic goods such as truth, knowledge, and understanding.

How do these suggestions fare? One significant difficulty, according to Baehr, is that it is not obvious how we are to specify or delineate the moral domain, and so determine that the ends in question count as moral. It is not obvious, he argues, that the goods listed in the preceding—pleasure, autonomy, friendship, and so on—have any feature in common, in light of which they qualify as moral.²³ Moreover, without a clear specification of the moral domain, the relevant distinction between the kinds of virtue promises to be too imprecise to be useful. For it might be the case that *intellectual* goods also qualify as moral—at least, this possibility cannot be ruled out without a clear understanding of what it is for some good to be a moral good. If so, however, then we cannot distinguish intellectual and moral virtue by identifying distinct classes of separate goods and proposing that our two kinds of virtues are to be understood in terms of intentional or causal relations to these respective classes.

Two responses suggest themselves. The first is to identify some substantive good that all of these particular moral goods contribute to, and hold that this is what unifies them and helps delineate the class of moral goods. The most obvious candidate, given the history of virtue theory and virtue ethics, is *eudaimonia* or *human flourishing*. So on this view we can identify moral virtues in terms of intentional or causal links to certain goods, where these goods are constitutive of human flourishing. This particular move is doomed to failure, however. For as Baehr points out, any objective list of the components of well-being or human flourishing will *include* epistemic goods like knowledge and understanding.²⁴ If so, then *eudaimonia* fails to be a substantive good that unifies all and only the objects of *moral* virtues.

A second response is to make appeal, not to some substantive, overarching good such as well-being, but to some single overarching motive that has these goods as targets, and from which the motivational components of all the other moral virtues can be derived. On this view, what unifies the plurality of goods is that they are all related to a *further* intentional element: they are all goods that would be wanted by someone with an overarching moral motive. Taking our cue from Driver's earlier suggestion, and work by Michael Slote, we might think that this motive is one of *universal benevolence*. On this account, the set of moral goods listed in the preceding are all ones that a universally benevolent person would be motivated to bring about. Indeed, we might adopt a virtue ethical theory that makes such universal benevolence the *criterion* of right action and valuable ends, and so define morality itself in terms of such a motive. As Slote writes, "morality as universal benevolence regards actions as right or morally permissible if they reflect or express a motive that is close enough to universal, that is, impartial, benevolence."²⁵

But this response is also problematic, since we might think that the motive of universal benevolence does not *exhaust* moral motives. For there are other overarching motives that might be regarded as general moral motives: consider in this light the motive of justice, or to pick some more of Slote's examples, a partialistic motive like caring, or Nietzschean motives of inner strength. It might be difficult to argue that one sole executive motive—such as universal benevolence—is rightly regarded as the supreme moral motive, with all others subordinate. If so, however, then we are left with a plurality of motives, all of which appear to be candidates for moral motives. And then the question arises again: In virtue of what do *these* motives, and only these, qualify as moral? Unless we can answer this question in a plausible way, then the line between moral and intellectual motives, and hence the line between moral and intellectual virtues, will be blurred once again. It thus seems unlikely that we can draw a plausible distinction between our two putative kinds of virtues by appeal to their intentional or causal links with certain substantive values.

V. A DIFFERENCE IN FORMAL GOALS

In the previous section we saw difficulties in trying to distinguish moral and intellectual virtues in terms of motivational structures directed toward different substantive ends. However, a related approach appeals to the relation between the different kinds of virtues and different *formal* goals. This is the line adopted by both Baehr and Driver, with the former opting for an intentionalist version of the view, and the latter a causal variant.

Baehr thinks that instead of trying to identify a substantive conception of morality, we can do better with a formal conception of morality as 'others-regarding.' On this view, what makes something a moral action, end, or motive, is that it concerns to some extent the welfare and treatment of others.²⁶ So this is what justice, love, respect, friendship, and the like have in common. Moreover, although Baehr doesn't address this point, we

can nevertheless say this is also what the ‘executive motives’—of universal benevolence, inner strength, and partialistic caring—have in common, since they are all motives that are expressed in our behavior toward others. Driver proposes something similar, albeit stressing a causal rather than intentional focus. She writes that what marks “moral virtue is that its traits systematically produce good for others *whatever* the agent’s psychological states.”²⁷

This highlights a significant point of difference between moral and intellectual virtues. For intellectual virtues are traits that systematically produce good *for the subject herself*. Driver writes that “the intuition I would like to explore is that intellectual virtues have—as their source of primary value—truth or, more weakly, justified belief for the person possessing the quality.”²⁸ So Driver thinks that “moral virtues produce benefit for others—in particular, they promote the well-being of others—while the intellectual virtues produce epistemic good for the agent.”²⁹ Baehr considers a similar account: perhaps we should regard intellectual virtues as directed toward certain substantive epistemic goals—such as truth and understanding—and “also as strictly *self-oriented* or *egoistic*, that is, as aiming strictly and necessarily at their possessor’s own acquisition of knowledge, understanding, or the like.”³⁰ As Baehr points out, if this account of intellectual virtue is correct, then moral and intellectual virtues are distinct in a very strong way (i.e., by being mutually exclusive).³¹

Unfortunately, this suggestion ultimately proves no more successful than the previous attempts to distinguish moral and intellectual virtues. The first thing to note is that some intellectual virtues are also others-regarding, in which case moral and intellectual virtues will not be mutually exclusive. Consider in this light honesty, which seems to involve a love of truth and so has an epistemic aim, and yet seems to be in the business of conveying truth and knowledge to *others*. Or consider an advisor who remains open-minded about the intellectual standing of her student’s ideas, out of a commitment to being a good advisor and benefiting her student. This kind of intellectual virtue is also others-directed. By the same token, a researcher might be intellectually conscientious in her inquiries because she is concerned with truth and accuracy and getting things right; but her concern with this is grounded in the thought that such care and concern is what she owes to her subject and to others who study it. In each case we have an example of what seems to be an intellectual virtue, but one that is others-directed rather than self-directed.

Now Baehr would happily accept this conclusion, since he thinks that some intellectual virtues are also moral virtues—and indeed, that all intellectual virtues can have an others-regarding dimension. Driver too seems happy to accept that, at least with respect to some virtues, “things just are fuzzy”³² as to whether they fall in the moral or intellectual camp. This still allows for some principled distinction between moral and intellectual virtues, since (for Driver) most cases will *not* be fuzzy, and (for Baehr) moral virtues have a formal others-regarding character, while intellectual virtues have a substantive epistemic goal.

However, I think that proponents of this kind of view have reason to be more worried than they are; for things are fuzzier than Driver would like, and more complicated than

Baehr can happily accept. This is because the idea that moral virtues can be identified as being necessarily others-regarding is false. If so, then moral virtues can be self- *and* others-regarding, and intellectual virtues can also be self- *and* others-regarding. Given this, the prospects of appealing to a difference in formal objects in order to plausibly differentiate moral and intellectual virtue appear dim. To see this, note that some of the moral goods that Baehr identifies, and the moral motives that Slote appeals to, are self- rather than others-regarding. For instance, if moral virtues are ones that reliably bring about “pleasure and the absence of pain,” then moral virtues can be self- as well as others-directed, when it’s one’s own pleasure and pain that is of concern. By the same token, concern for one’s autonomy and integrity would seem to be moral concern, but moral concern that is self-directed. Indeed, the idea that we have moral duties *to ourselves* is a central part of one of the major traditions in moral philosophy. So Kantians at least will think it not at all obvious that morality is necessarily others-regarding. And we don’t have to be Kantian to think that certain traits that harm oneself are vices precisely *because* they harm oneself: think of sloth, laziness, timidity, intemperance, and cowardice.

A similar point can be made about motives. This is because the motives that seem to characterize ‘inner strength’ are presumably components of moral virtues, and yet are self-directed or at least self-regarding. Compassion and generosity are virtues, on a Nietzschean view, because they express one’s own inner strength and self-sufficiency, and are thought to be admirable *because* they express these things. So it is by no means clear that such motives and such virtues are, at their core, genuinely others-regarding.

If this is correct, then appealing to the self–other distinction in order to maintain that there is a genuine difference between moral and intellectual virtues is problematic. In the next section I’ll propose and defend a different way of drawing this distinction. If this works, we need not follow Zagzebski in being skeptical about the view that moral and intellectual virtues are genuinely different kinds.

VI. A DIFFERENCE IN DOMAINS OF OPERATION

In section II we discussed the idea that moral and intellectual virtues govern different faculties or parts of the mind. Moral virtues govern *feeling* and the practical domain, while intellectual virtues govern *thinking* and the theoretical. However, and as we saw, there are doubts as to whether we can identify intellectual virtues in terms of those features that enable our rational faculty to work as it ought, while moral virtues are those features that facilitate proper functioning of our emotional faculty. This is because our reasoning ability would seem to require input from emotion, and the proper functioning of our emotional faculties would seem to require input from reason. So excellence in thinking and subsequent belief requires correct feelings (including appropriate control

of feelings), while excellence in feeling and subsequent action requires accurate beliefs (including appropriate control of belief-forming mechanisms).

Now I think that this criticism is correct, if leveled at the idea that moral virtues are restricted to the domain of feeling and intellectual virtues are restricted to the domain of thought. Nevertheless, I think that a claim in the *vicinity* of this one is correct, and that we can make a principled distinction between moral and intellectual virtues by focusing on virtues in different domains of operation. The idea that there are different domains of operation for virtue can be understood in a number of ways. One is, as we've just seen, that virtues govern different faculties of the mind, namely feeling and thinking. Another is that virtues aim at or are causally related to different kinds of substantive value, such as knowledge and well-being. But a third way of interpreting this thought is in terms of *questions* generated by different 'spheres of experience,' which is an idea familiar from Martha Nussbaum's account of virtue.³³

For Nussbaum, nearly all humans will encounter certain spheres of experience in which they "will have to make *some* choices rather than others, and act in *some* way rather than some other."³⁴ The virtues are those traits that enable us to respond well in these different domains. Now some of these spheres of experience can be grouped together insofar as they pose *practical problems*—they raise, in other words, the question *what should I do?*—and insofar as the relevant response is action. We can identify moral virtues as those traits that enable a subject to do what she ought to do in these spheres of experience, to answer such a question in the right kind of way. Since this will require her to be appropriately motivated, then moral virtues will consist in the appropriate feelings and appetites that constitute the relevant motives. To illustrate: we will all experience, to some degree or another, certain threats or dangers—to bodily integrity, reputation, those close to us, our comfort, our established way of living, and the like. We can identify *courage* as the trait that disposes us and moves us to act appropriately in the face of threats and dangers. By the same token, we all experience bodily pleasures, and are sometimes susceptible to overindulgence in these. *Temperance* or *moderation* is the virtue that motivates us to act well when faced with such temptations: to stand fast against them, to refuse to give in. As social creatures in a non-ideal world, we will encounter others who are in need of our assistance in many different ways. *Benevolence* is the virtue that moves us to help those in need. And as social creatures in a non-ideal world, we will also have to face the problem of how we should share limited resources. *Justice* is the virtue that motivates us to respond well in the face of this practical problem: to give and take what it is fair to give and take.

However, there are other spheres of experience that feature in human life, and in which humans will have to respond in a different kind of way. These spheres of experience can be grouped together insofar as they pose *theoretical problems*—they raise, in other words, the question *what should I think?*—and insofar as the relevant response is belief. The intellectual virtues will be traits that enable us to believe what we ought to believe when faced with this question, and hence to answer this kind of theoretical question appropriately. For example, we will all experience situations when our beliefs or opinions are unpopular or at odds with our peers, and where to continue to endorse

them is to invite ridicule. *Intellectual courage* is the trait that disposes us to stick to our beliefs in the face of opposition and peer pressure. There will also be times when intellectual inquiry is difficult and the path to a right answer not clear. *Perseverance* is the trait that enables us to keep inquiry going, even though the way ahead is dark and tangled. *Intellectual temperance* or *moderation* is a trait that reliably disposes us *not* to believe something even though it would profit us to believe it—perhaps the belief would be comforting, for instance. As social creatures we are all susceptible to various forms of epistemic prejudice and bias. *Intellectual justice* is a trait that reliably disposes us to counteract such prejudice and not succumb to such bias. Finally, as social creatures we will also encounter opinions that differ from our own, to greater or lesser degrees, and which raise the question of whether we should be prepared to re-evaluate our opinions and attitudes in light of new information. *Open-mindedness* enables us to consider such opinions alongside our own and give them due consideration.

On this picture, then, to say that moral and intellectual virtues operate in different domains is to say that the former are needed to respond appropriately when faced with spheres of experiences that require a *practical* solution in the form of action, and that the latter are needed for appropriate responses when we encounter spheres of experience that require a theoretical solution in the form of belief. More succinctly: moral virtues enable us to act well when faced with the question *what should I do?*, while intellectual virtues facilitate appropriate epistemic states when we are faced with the question *what should I believe?* If we think that these are genuinely distinct questions, then we should be open to the possibility that different virtues are needed to elicit genuinely distinct answers.

We might think that this merely paints over the central problem of any appeal to different domains of operation, however. For as we saw in section II, and again in the preceding, it is plausible to hold that correct (governance of) feeling is necessary for us to respond well when faced with the question of what to believe, and appropriate epistemic states are necessary when faced with the question of what we are to do. After all, moral courage requires us to respond appropriately to danger; but to do so we will need to know that we are in danger, in what ways, and how to respond. So moral courage requires epistemic excellence. By the same token, perseverance is the intellectual trait that motivates us to respond appropriately when inquiries get difficult; but to persevere we will in all likelihood need the right kind of emotional attachment to the value of the inquiry and the right kind of desires to see it through. So intellectual perseverance requires excellence in feelings. So even if we switch attention from different faculties of the mind to different spheres of experience, we are faced with the same problem in delineating moral and intellectual virtues: *both* seem needed if we are to act and believe as we ought.

However, focusing on spheres of experience enables us to meet this challenge—or so it seems to me. For we might identify moral virtues as ones that are *expressed* in responding appropriately in practical domains, while intellectual virtues are *expressed* in responding appropriately in theoretical domains. This allows for correct thinking to play a role in the former, and correct feeling to play a role in the latter, insofar as

we understand this role as *enabling* the other sorts of virtues to be expressed. In other words, it is indeed a mistake to identify moral virtues as those that are exclusively involved in answering correctly practical questions, and intellectual virtues as those that are exclusively involved in answering theoretical ones. However, the fact that appropriate action and belief often require excellence in thought and feeling is compatible with the idea that there are different relations between thought and feeling in intellectual and moral virtues. In particular, we can identify moral virtues as those that are expressed in appropriate answers to practical questions, and can identify intellectual virtues as those that are expressed in appropriate answers to theoretical questions, where expression is a matter of the ultimate motivating factor in the relevant contexts, and where the role played by any other motives is an enabling one.³⁵

Consider, to illustrate, a case of moral courage: Carl is being bullied at work, and is considering reporting his tormentor to his line manager. However, this poses significant risks for Carl: he might not be believed, or his reputation might suffer as a result of informing on a colleague, or the colleague in question might increase the campaign of bullying as a result. Suppose that Carl, in face of these risks, goes ahead and makes the report. It is not implausible to think that Carl's behavior here displays or expresses courage: he faces a situation of threat or danger, but determines that the right thing to do is to make a report, and is motivated by the appropriate feelings to do so. Now of course, in order for this to be a genuinely courageous act, Carl must be in a decent epistemic position: he must correctly believe that he is being bullied and (e.g.) not just teased, that it is important for himself and for others in his position that he stand up to this, that there are significant risks if he does so, that the importance of standing up for himself is worth such risks, and so on. In these and other ways, Carl's thinking must be as it ought to be for him to display courage, as a result of his having a suitable epistemic motivation. Nevertheless, we don't refer to these epistemic motives and factors when we say that Carl's action expresses courage or that his making the report was a courageous thing for him to do. For Carl is not praised for his knowledge of his evaluative situation and of the importance of standing up for himself. These are not the things that we take to be admirable about Carl when he reports his bullying colleague, despite the fact that they are positive epistemic states. Instead, such knowledge and understanding *enable* him to be courageous: his having the relevant epistemic motives and coming to be in these states are the conditions that need to be met in order for his action to display a courageous motive, rather than (say) a foolhardy one.

We can make a similar case with respect to intellectual virtue. Consider a case of intellectual conscientiousness: Lucy is working late in the lab, checking important experimental data, and considers the possibility of skimming the results to see that they are roughly correct, so that she can leave early and head to the pub. Suppose that Lucy resists this temptation and stays in the lab to carefully check and double-check the data, because she realizes the importance of accurate data for the success of the experiment. It is plausible to say that Lucy's behavior displays the virtue of intellectual or epistemic conscientiousness: she faces a situation where there are temptations to do the wrong thing, but is motivated to stick to her intellectual task because she wants to

be sure that the data is accurate. It is this intellectual motive that is expressed by her behavior. Now in order for Lucy to do behave as she does, it might be important that she has certain moral virtues—it will help, for instance, if she is temperate so that she can resist her desire to go to the pub—and other practical motives, such as a natural curiosity in the subject to keep her attention fixed on the task at hand. Nevertheless, we don't refer to these feelings and motives when we say that her epistemic behavior was conscientious; and she is not praised for having these feelings. Instead, and once again, these feelings and motives enable her to be conscientious: her having the relevant moral motives, and coming to be in these states, are the conditions that need to be met in order for Lucy's action to display an intellectually conscientious motive, rather than (say) a careless one.

These are two instances of a more general point: that what is admirable and praiseworthy in acting and believing is the motive expressed, but other conditions are often necessary in order for the act or belief to be praiseworthy. Consider another analogy: suppose that I've done something morally wrong and then make a sincere apology. My apology, being sincere, expresses my regret and remorse, and to this extent my apologizing is praiseworthy. Now in order for me to make a sincere apology, and a condition of my expressing regret and remorse, it must be true that my apology wasn't given simply as a result of pressure put on me by someone else, since the absence of duress is a condition of sincerity. However, the fact that my apology wasn't made under duress *isn't* something that's admirable about my behavior. Instead, it's an enabling condition on my expressing regret, and hence on my making a genuine apology.

It seems to me, therefore, that we can appeal to the difference between the traits that actions and beliefs express, and the factors that enable the traits to be expressed, in order to distinguish between moral and intellectual virtues. Moral virtues are those traits of character that motivate appropriate behavior in response to the practical problems that various spheres of experience bring our way: the very spheres of experience, and others like them, that were listed earlier. In many cases such behavior will require the subject to be excellent from an intellectual standpoint. But this can be accommodated if we understand such excellences as things that enable moral virtue to be expressed and displayed. By the same token, intellectual virtues are those traits of character that result in appropriate belief in response to the intellectual problems that various other spheres of experience elicit. In many cases successful intellectual inquiries and resulting beliefs will require the right kinds of feelings and desires. But this can be accommodated if we understand such feelings as excellences enabling intellectual virtue to be expressed and displayed. On this picture, then, moral and intellectual virtues enable us to successfully answer different kinds of question or inquiry: *what should I do?* and *what should I believe?* As such, moral and intellectual virtues are thus marks of the successful actor and believer. This is as it should be: it would be rather strange if there were a difference between moral and intellectual virtue that didn't, ultimately, come down to a difference in the kinds of traits expressed in excellent acting and

thinking. What I hope to have done is to show how this commonsense idea is compatible with another idea: that excellence in thought often requires excellence in feeling, and vice versa.

NOTES

1. L. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
2. Two notable recent works, from which I've learned a lot, are Julia Driver, "The Conflation of Moral and Epistemic Virtue," *Metaphilosophy* 34 (2003): 367–383, and J. Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
3. Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, translated by M. Woods (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), Book 2, section 1219b. This idea is also familiar from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle notes that the rational part of the soul is subdivided, "one subdivision having [reason] in the strict sense and in itself, and the other having a tendency to obey as one does one's father." Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, translated by W. D. Ross, edited by J. Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).
4. Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, Book 2, section 1220a.
5. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, 2nd and revised edition, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1920), Article 3. More succinctly, in Article 2: "And so moral differs from intellectual virtue, even as the appetite differs from the reason."
6. This is something that Zagzebski stresses. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 148–149.
7. A. Damasio, *Descartes' Error* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 172–174.
8. T. Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind*, edited by B. Brody (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1969), 184–185.
9. Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind*, 76–77.
10. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 146.
11. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 149.
12. Julia Driver is also skeptical about the idea that the virtues belong to different parts of the soul or mind, such that intellectual virtues "speak to our rational capacities" while others, the moral, speak to our emotional. This is because many moral virtues involve an intellectual component, and many epistemic virtues an emotional one. "For example, curiosity may involve pleasure in new discovery." Driver, "The Conflation of Moral and Epistemic Virtue," 371.
13. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a.
14. Driver, "The Conflation of Moral and Epistemic Virtue," 371.
15. Again, this kind of argument is due to Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 149–151.
16. One of the first studies suggesting this was by Sarah Brosnan and Frans de Waal, "Monkeys Reject Unequal Pay." *Nature* 425 (2003): 297–299. Brosnan and de Waal suggest that a sense of fairness is "probably universal" and that an aversion to inequality can be found in many nonhuman animals. For instance, in one experiment, capuchin monkeys were averse to cooperating further with an experimenter if the monkeys observed the experimenter giving other capuchins equal rewards for less effort. The authors conclude that "these reactions support an early evolutionary origin of inequality aversion." For a recent overview of

further support for the idea, see Sarah Brosnan, "Justice and Fairness Related Behaviors in Nonhuman Primates," *PNAS* 110 (2013): 10416–10423.

17. Driver, "The Conflation of Moral and Epistemic Virtue," 371.
18. She writes that "the characteristics that allegedly distinguish the two kinds of virtue do not divide up the spectrum in anywhere near the desired fashion, and intellectual virtues ought to be treated as a subset of moral virtues in the Aristotelian sense of the latter. Although there are some rough differences in the degree to which these two kinds of virtue involve strong feelings and desires, I will argue that an intellectual virtue does not differ from certain moral virtues any more than one moral virtue differs from another, that the processes related to the two kinds of virtue do not function independently, and that it greatly distorts the nature of both to attempt to analyze them in separate branches of philosophy. Intellectual virtues are best viewed as forms of moral virtue." Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 139.
19. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 166.
20. Driver, "The Conflation of Moral and Epistemic Virtue," 374.
21. Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology*, 209–210.
22. Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology*, 210.
23. Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology*, 210.
24. Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology*, 211.
25. M. Slote, *Morals from Motives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 115.
26. Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology*, 215.
27. Driver, "The Conflation of Moral and Epistemic Virtue," 380.
28. Driver, "The Conflation of Moral and Epistemic Virtue," 374.
29. Driver, "The Conflation of Moral and Epistemic Virtue," 381.
30. Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology*, 216.
31. As we'll see, Baehr doesn't want to endorse this view about intellectual virtue, although he does wish to identify moral virtues in the purely formal terms described.
32. Driver, "The Conflation of Moral and Epistemic Virtue," 381.
33. M. Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13 (1988): 32–53.
34. Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," 35.
35. For a helpful discussion of 'favoring' and 'enabling,' see J. Dancy, *Ethics without Principles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

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CHAPTER 40

INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES AND TRUTH, UNDERSTANDING, AND WISDOM

JASON BAEHR

It is a familiar feature of virtues, whether moral, intellectual, or otherwise, that they aim beyond themselves, that is, that they have a characteristic end or goal. And yet there are several aspects of this feature that bear further scrutiny. For instance, what exactly is the nature of the relevant “aiming” relation? Is it primarily causal? Intentional? Or do virtues aim at their respective ends in some deeper metaphysical sense?¹ A further question concerns the ends themselves. At what exactly do virtues aim? This is the question I take up in the present chapter. My attention is limited, however, to *intellectual* virtues. Thus I consider: *What is the proper aim or end of an intellectual virtue?*

As with many philosophical questions, the answer to this one depends in a significant way on certain prior commitments or assumptions. Specifically, I argue that how we should think about the aim or end of intellectual virtues turns in no small part on our initial conception of what an intellectual virtue is—a matter about which there is little agreement in the relevant philosophical literature.² One of my central claims is that if we understand intellectual virtues as strengths of intellectual *character* that contribute to their possessor’s “personal worth” or admirability, then we should also conceive of them as aiming at *wisdom*—in particular, at *theoretical* wisdom, or *sophia*. As we will see, this represents a significant departure from standard ways of thinking about intellectual virtues.

I. "ORTHODOX" AND "UNORTHODOX" CONCEPTIONS OF INTELLECTUAL VIRTUE

We can begin by drawing a distinction between two accounts of what it is for something to be an intellectual virtue. The classification is not exhaustive. But it does map fairly well onto the two main ways in which virtue epistemologists have tended to think about intellectual virtues.³

According to the first conception, intellectual virtues are *by definition* a constitutive element of knowledge. In particular, they are whatever doxastic qualities or capacities an exercise of which contributes to the warrant or justification of a known belief. Accordingly, proponents of this conception accept some iteration of the view that knowledge is true belief produced by (and true on account of) an exercise of intellectual virtues.⁴

Notably, this view does not specify in advance what sorts of qualities or capacities might count as intellectual virtues. Intellectual virtues could be cognitive faculties like memory and vision; or they could be intellectual character strengths like curiosity, open-mindedness, or intellectual tenacity. Which specification is preferable depends on which qualities are best viewed as essential ingredients of knowledge. Presumably because we seem capable of acquiring some knowledge without exercising intellectual character strengths like curiosity or open-mindedness, proponents of orthodoxy⁵ have tended to think of intellectual virtues on the model of rudimentary cognitive faculties, though some very recent work suggests that this trend may be shifting.⁶ Given epistemologists' long-standing interest in defining knowledge, and given that certain seminal and influential approaches to virtue epistemology⁷ employed the suggested way of thinking about intellectual virtues, we can refer to this as the "orthodox" conception of intellectual virtues.⁸

On an "unorthodox" view of intellectual virtues, these qualities are not defined in terms of their logical contribution to knowledge. They gain their status as intellectual virtues by other means. For some proponents of an unorthodox conception, intellectual virtues are such because of their systematic *causal* connection with epistemic goods like truth or knowledge.⁹ For others, it is their contribution to human flourishing that explains their status as virtues.¹⁰ And for others still, the qualities in question are intellectual virtues because of their contribution to their possessor's personal intellectual excellence or worth, that is, because they make their possessor good or admirable *qua* person.¹¹

As this characterization suggests, unorthodoxy also leaves open which specific qualities or capacities might count as intellectual virtues. Yet here as well, proponents have favored a single view: in this case, that intellectual virtues are excellences of intellectual *character*. Some of these theorists have taken to exploring connections between virtues like intellectual carefulness, fair-mindedness, and intellectual courage, on the one hand, and other cognitive practices or goods like inquiry,¹² epistemic justice,¹³ and education,¹⁴ on the other. Others have developed models of the nature and structure of an intellectual virtue¹⁵ and of individual virtues like open-mindedness, intellectual

courage, intellectual humility, and curiosity.¹⁶ Proponents of unorthodoxy generally have given scant attention to reliable cognitive *faculties* like memory and vision.

To summarize: proponents of an “orthodox” conception of intellectual virtue stipulate a conceptual connection between intellectual virtues and knowledge. Intellectual virtues just are the qualities or capacities necessary for acquiring knowledge. Proponents of an “unorthodox” conception resist this stipulation. They take an independent interest in the concept of intellectual virtue and offer a range of accounts as to what gives intellectual virtues their status as virtues.

II. THE AIM OF INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES

We are now in a position to address the central question of this chapter: namely, what is the proper end or goal of intellectual virtues? At what do intellectual virtues, *qua* intellectual virtues, aim?

Unsurprisingly, the answer to this question depends on whether one is thinking about intellectual virtues along orthodox or unorthodox lines. An exploration of how and why this is the case will, I hope, shed significant light, not only on our options for thinking about the proper aim of intellectual virtues, but also on other aspects of these qualities, including their role within the broader epistemic landscape.

We can begin by considering what is likely the most widely accepted answer to our question: namely, that intellectual virtues aim at *true belief and the avoidance of cognitive error*. Given that it posits two distinct but equally important epistemic goals, we can refer to this as the “binary thesis.” This thesis has many subscribers. One of them is Ernest Sosa, who says, “An intellectual virtue is a quality bound to help maximize one’s surplus of truth over error.”¹⁷ Keith Lehrer makes a similar claim: “What is intellectual virtue? It is a virtue that aims at an intellectual goal. What might that be? To obtain truth and avoid error in one’s intellectual endeavors, on the present account, to accept what is true and avoid accepting what is false.”¹⁸

The binary thesis has considerable *prima facie* plausibility. Traditionally, many epistemologists have identified true belief and the avoidance of cognitive error as the “twin goals” of our epistemic states and processes.¹⁹ There is, then, something natural about also treating these goals as the proper aim of intellectual virtues. But can the binary thesis survive close scrutiny? This is the point at which differences between orthodox and unorthodox conceptions of intellectual virtue begin to emerge.

i. An Unorthodox, Personal Worth Conception of Intellectual Virtues

Let us begin with an unorthodox conception. Partly to keep matters simple, and partly because no other fairly nuanced account is more widely accepted among virtue

epistemologists, let us focus in particular on a conception of intellectual virtues according to which they are (1) excellences of intellectual character like open-mindedness, intellectual carefulness, intellectual thoroughness, and intellectual autonomy (2) that gain their status as intellectual virtues on account of their contribution to their possessor's "personal worth" or excellence, that is, on account of making their possessor good or admirable *qua* person.

We will have occasion later in the chapter to explore the notion of personal worth in greater detail. But some further clarification may be helpful here. Typically, we think of personal worth or admirability as a function of certain straightforwardly *moral* attitudes and behaviors, for example, a deep and sensitive compassion, a willingness to suffer harm or risk for the sake of another, a vigorous fight for social justice, and so on. However, contributors to personal moral worth do not exhaust contributors to personal worth *simpliciter*.

Imagine, for instance, a person with a deep and abiding commitment to epistemic goods. She desires to understand the world around her and the people and other creatures who inhabit it. She does not settle for mere opinion or hearsay. She is attentive, reflective, and inquisitive. She is also committed to believing what is true about herself, including about her less desirable or likable qualities. The same goes for her beliefs in areas like politics, religion, and morality. She is willing to subject these beliefs to close, honest scrutiny, to examine counter-evidence, and to give serious consideration to competing perspectives. She would rather believe what is true in these areas than to derive comfort from believing what is false. In short, this person's commitment to epistemic goods compels her to inquire, reason, and form beliefs in ways that are careful, thorough, fair, open, humble, honest, courageous, and the like.

Intuitively, such a person would be a better person or better *qua* person on account of her cognitive orientation and dispositions (compare her with someone who is indifferent to truth or knowledge and who thinks and forms beliefs in ways that are inattentive, sloppy, narrow-minded, dishonest, etc.). Yet, her excellence or admirability is not obviously or straightforwardly moral.²⁰ This suggests that personal worth or admirability has an *intellectual* or *epistemic* dimension; alternatively, it suggests that epistemic excellence has a *personal* or *volitional* dimension (that it is not strictly a function of "natural" epistemic excellences like sharp vision, a reliable memory, or even strong native intelligence). Further, as the example also suggests, this dimension maps nicely onto the domain of virtuous intellectual character.²¹

Let us refer to qualities that contribute to their possessor's personal worth or admirability as "personal excellences." Once we stipulate that intellectual virtues are personal excellences, problems arise for the binary thesis. One problem is a matter of "substance" or content, and the other is a matter of "form" or structure.

Consider the person who spends his years counting grains of sand at the local beach or memorizing names and numbers from phone books across the globe.²² Such a person might amass a very large quantity of true and only true beliefs. In the process of doing so, he might also regularly manifest dispositions to think or observe attentively, carefully, and diligently. However, if his dispositions to think or observe in these ways

are grounded in his appetite for true beliefs about the sorts of mundane and insignificant matters in question, then presumably there is something *deficient*—not excellent or praiseworthy—about this person’s attentiveness, carefulness, and diligence. Nor is the problem strictly a moral one. It is not merely that his time would be *better* spent cultivating deep friendships, helping the needy, and fighting for social justice. His attentiveness, carefulness, and diligence also seem problematic from the epistemic-cum-personal standpoint noted earlier. And the reason, it seems, is that they are rooted in a preoccupation with *trivial* truths.²³

We will look in more detail at this issue later; but for now I will assume that it is at least *prima facie* plausible that intellectual character traits rooted in a desire for epistemic trivia—even traits that can be described using language like “attentiveness” and “carefulness”—are not intellectual virtues, at least not when intellectual virtues are being conceived of as personal excellences.

To see an additional problem with the binary thesis, consider an ostensibly “epistemically significant” (vs. trivial) subject matter: the history of World War I, say.²⁴ Now imagine a person whose goal is to memorize as many first-order facts or “factoids” about the war as he can. He is a veritable wealth of information when it comes to questions like the following: When did the war begin? How many countries were involved? What were the major battles? How many casualties were there? What types of artillery were used? When did the war end? Despite having a vast number of true beliefs (and few if any false beliefs) about the war, his grasp of it is profoundly unsophisticated. When it comes to questions about *how* or *why* certain events took place, about what *would (likely) have* happened had certain prior events not occurred, or the ability to make important and illuminating *connections* between his various items of knowledge, this person is at a loss. In short, we can say that while he has a lot of knowledge about World War I, he possesses relatively little *understanding* of it.²⁵

We will have occasion to explore this point in greater detail later in the chapter. But here again: even if the person routinely shows carefulness, attentiveness, and diligence in her pursuit of the knowledge in question, these dispositions, considered as such, do not seem like good candidates for intellectual virtues conceived of as personal excellences. Specifically, an underlying preoccupation with mere “factoids”—even factoids about ostensibly epistemically significant subject matters—doesn’t seem sufficiently epistemically appropriate, praiseworthy, or admirable for the kind of attentiveness or carefulness that might arise from such an orientation to count as intellectual virtues in the relevant sense.

We have seen that the binary thesis, considered in connection with an unorthodox, personal worth conception of intellectual virtues, fails on two counts: (1) it doesn’t impose adequate constraints on the *content* of what intellectual virtues aim at; (2) nor does it make sufficient demands on the *structure* of this aim or goal. Concerning the former point, it fails to stipulate that intellectual virtues aim at a grasp of epistemically *significant* (vs. trivial) subject matters. Concerning the latter point, it fails to require that intellectual virtues aim at reflective *understanding* (vs. a first-order grasp of isolated facts).

ii. An Unorthodox, Reliabilist Conception of Intellectual Virtues

Before turning to consider how the binary thesis might fare with respect to an orthodox conception of intellectual virtues, a further unorthodox approach is worth considering. Julia Driver has defended a reliabilist account of intellectual virtues according to which a “character trait is an intellectual virtue iff it systematically (reliably) produces true belief.”²⁶ Driver does not offer a virtue-based account of knowledge; and she certainly does not *define* intellectual virtues as a constitutive, justification-conferring element of knowledge. Thus she subscribes to an unorthodox conception of intellectual virtues.

As indicated earlier, Driver thinks of intellectual virtues as good intellectual character traits (not as mere cognitive faculties). She does not, however, conceive of intellectual virtues as necessarily contributing to their possessor’s personal intellectual worth. Indeed, she emphatically rejects any substantive constraints on the motives, intentions, or desires of an intellectually virtuous person.²⁷

Driver’s account could easily be modified to include a commitment to the binary thesis. The resulting view would be that a character trait is an intellectual virtue just in case it systematically (reliably) produces true beliefs and avoids generating false beliefs. Would such an account be satisfactory? Or should a proponent of a reliabilist view of intellectual virtues also construe their aim in richer or more complex terms?

This depends on a couple of factors. First, it depends on whether true belief per se is epistemically valuable (even if not valuable enough or in the right way such that aiming at it necessarily contributes to personal worth in the manner described earlier). If true belief per se has at least some epistemic value, then dispositions that systematically lead to the production of true belief and the avoidance of false belief may indeed be intellectual virtues of a sort (even if they are not “personal excellences”).²⁸

Second, if true belief per se is not epistemically valuable (e.g., if only true belief about “epistemically significant subject matters” is epistemically valuable), the dispositions in question might still be intellectual virtues with respect to certain *domains*. True beliefs play an important role in many *practical* domains, epistemic and otherwise. The fine print in the microscope manual about how to operate a certain highly technical function of the device might be dull and insignificant from a general epistemic standpoint. Yet having true beliefs about this content might be essential to the lab worker’s epistemic success. True beliefs are also critical, of course, in many other practical and professional contexts, for example, in seeking food and shelter, forming meaningful relationships, and in fields like business, law, medicine, and education. In each of these areas, and in many more besides, the possession of certain true beliefs, including true beliefs about putatively epistemically insignificant matters, is crucial to navigating the terrain and achieving success.²⁹ Accordingly, dispositions of intellectual character that lead systematically to true belief and the avoidance of error can be considered intellectual virtues *in relation to* the domains in question.

We have seen that if one accepts an unorthodox conception of intellectual virtues, the binary thesis may or may not merit acceptance. Where unorthodoxy is combined with a personal worth conception of intellectual virtues, the thesis fails. But where it is combined with a strict reliabilist conception, its prospects are better.

iii. Orthodox Conceptions of Intellectual Virtues

I turn in the present section to whether the binary thesis is plausible given orthodoxy about intellectual virtues, that is, given the view that intellectual virtues are by definition ingredients of knowledge. Here as well, it turns out that matters are somewhat complicated.

Internalists about knowledge maintain that factors that justify a belief must be internal to the perspective of the knower. On one standard iteration of this view, a person knows that *P* only if she has *good reasons for thinking that P is true or likely to be true*.³⁰ Having a good reason in support of a known belief involves having a kind of illuminating reflective perspective on the belief in question—a perspective that provides the knower with some sense of *how* or *why* the belief is true or likely to be true. As such, knowledge has a reflective component, a component of reflective understanding.³¹

When conjoined with orthodoxy about intellectual virtues, this internalist account of knowledge warrants a rejection of the binary thesis. If intellectual virtues are a constitutive, justificatory element of knowledge, and if knowledge necessarily involves an element of reflective understanding—if it necessarily involves having some sense of how or why the known belief is true or likely to be true—then we should expect intellectual virtues to aim, not at truth or true belief in some unqualified sense, but rather at the kind of reflective grasp of truth required by internalism. We should expect an intellectually virtuous person to be concerned with, to strive for, or otherwise to be equipped to achieve such a grasp.³²

Compare this with an *externalist* view of knowledge, according to which the factors that justify a known belief need not be internal to the perspective of the knower. More concretely, consider a view according to which knowledge is belief that is true on account of having been produced by an exercise of intellectual virtues, where this does not require any kind of reflective perspective on the known belief.³³ Here the inclination is to think of intellectual virtues as aiming (in an unqualified sense) at true belief and the avoidance of cognitive error. While intellectual virtues may sometimes result in the kind of meta-perspective in question, given externalism, it would be a mistake to think of such a perspective as a necessary feature of the aim of intellectual virtues.

We have found (1) that if one accepts an orthodox account of intellectual virtues together with an internalist account of knowledge, then one will rightly reject the binary thesis; but (2) that if one accepts the conjunction of orthodoxy about intellectual virtue and externalism about knowledge, then it is at least possible that one ought to accept this thesis. In the former case, the binary thesis is problematic because it fails to include certain structural requirements on the aim of intellectual virtues. In the

latter case, the commitment to externalism about knowledge makes such requirements unnecessary.

One issue we have yet to consider is whether, if one accepts an orthodox conception of intellectual virtues, one should add any *content*-based constraints to an account of the aim of intellectual virtues, for example, whether one should think of intellectual virtues as aiming at true belief and the avoidance of false belief *about epistemically significant subject matters*. Such a view can seem appealing. Indeed, many efforts to distinguish epistemically significant true belief from true belief about trivial matters have occurred in the context of an attempt to specify the defining features of knowledge, including some virtue-based attempts.³⁴ However, this would be a mistake; or, in any case, it would be a mistake given certain generic views of knowledge that have prevailed since the modern era.

To see why, note that whether one knows that P doesn't seem to depend in any principled way on whether P is *about* an epistemically significant subject matter. Trivial matters are—at least in principle—just as knowable as epistemically significant subject matters. Accordingly, given a commitment to orthodoxy about intellectual virtues, it would be a mistake to exclude trivial truths from an account of the ends at which an intellectual virtue aims.

While the foregoing point is likely to strike most modern readers as compelling, a historical counterpoint is worth noting. Consider: would Plato or Aristotle agree that what we are here referring to as “trivial truths” are—as a matter of epistemic principle—just as knowable as “epistemically significant” subject matters? This is highly doubtful. These and certain other pre-modern philosophers conceive of knowledge as a rather exalted epistemic state, one that is not easily achievable and whose object is limited to certain metaphysically robust entities and relations (e.g., in Plato's case, the Forms; in Aristotle's, the necessary and unchanging features of reality).

Suppose this view is right. And suppose, plausibly enough, that it excludes epistemically trivial states of affairs from the possible objects of knowledge. These assumptions, together with a commitment to orthodoxy about intellectual virtues, warrant the introduction of a content-based constraint similar to the constraint identified earlier in connection with unorthodoxy. Further, if the Platonic or Aristotelian account of knowledge is accompanied by a commitment to internalism, this motivates a rejection of the binary thesis on both content-based and structural grounds.

While by no means the consensus view among contemporary epistemologists, such a view is not as foreign as one might expect. For instance, in the context of defending an account of knowledge that requires the manifestation of virtuous intellectual motives and actions, Zagzebski has occasionally flirted with such a view. Specifically, in response to the objection (noted earlier) that we appear to know a great deal absent any virtuous intellectual virtues or actions, Zagzebski has remarked (with apparent sympathy for but stopping short of endorsing the claim) that ordinary ways of thinking about knowledge may be too permissive.³⁵

Furthermore, over the past decade or more, epistemologists have paid a great deal of attention to questions about the value of knowledge. Much of this attention has

revolved around the so-called Meno problem, that is, the problem of explaining how or why knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief, especially when the value of the elements of knowledge other than true belief appear to be derivative from the value of true belief itself.³⁶ Underlying this problem is an intuition to the effect that knowledge is *always* or *categorically* more valuable than mere true belief. However, if knowledge can be had of subject matters or isolated facts that are utterly trivial and uninteresting, then it is far from clear that knowledge has the value in question. Accordingly, if one is convinced that knowledge really is supremely valuable vis-à-vis mere true belief, one might fend off the worry just noted by adopting a much more conservative view of knowledge, for example, a view according to which knowledge necessarily has a reflective component and is limited in its scope to epistemically significant subject matters.

Nevertheless, such a rigorous account of knowledge is a hard sell, for it rules out what appear—especially to modern sensibilities—to be some of the clearest and most forceful instances of knowledge. For example, claims like “I exist” or “I have hands” seem clearly to be knowable independently of any virtuous intellectual motives or actions (they appear to be knowable on the basis of the rather simple, mundane, and brute operation of our cognitive faculties). Indeed, that we know such claims has been taken as given in many influential anti-skeptical arguments. While the defender of a more demanding account of knowledge will dispute the intuitions underlying such reasoning, the more restrictive view of knowledge, and of the proper aim of intellectual virtues, is unlikely to gain much traction with a contemporary audience.

III. WISDOM

The primary focus of this chapter is the proper aim or end of intellectual virtues. We began with a lengthy consideration of the binary thesis, according to which intellectual virtues aim at true belief and the avoidance of cognitive error. We noted that if one accepts an *unorthodox* conception of intellectual virtues and thinks of intellectual virtues as “personal excellences,” then one ought to reject the binary thesis on both substantive and structural grounds. However, we also observed that if one accepts an *unorthodox* conception of intellectual virtues but conceives of intellectual virtues in reliabilist terms, this might make room for an acceptance of the binary thesis. Next we considered the implications of an *orthodox* conception of intellectual virtues, noting that if one embraces the conjunction of orthodoxy and internalism about knowledge, one will likely (and plausibly) opt for the addition of a structural requirement to the binary thesis. We also noted, however, that if one accepts orthodoxy about intellectual virtues but subscribes to externalism about knowledge, one will likely endorse this thesis.

In the remainder of the chapter, I want to look more closely at how we should think about the aim of intellectual virtues given a commitment (1) to *unorthodoxy* and (2) to the further view that intellectual virtues are strengths of intellectual character (e.g., open-mindedness, attentiveness, intellectual courage, etc.) that make their possessor

good or admirable *qua* person. Henceforth, unless otherwise specified, I will use the term “intellectual virtue” to refer to these strengths understood in this way. Earlier we saw both that this is a fairly standard way of thinking about intellectual virtues and that it makes the binary thesis especially problematic. This leads naturally to the question: If we assume that qualities like open-mindedness, attentiveness, intellectual autonomy, and intellectual humility are “personal excellences,” how should their aim or goal be understood if *not* in terms of the binary thesis?

Extant discussions of this topic are surprisingly thin, often occurring merely in passing.³⁷ Yet this is an important topic, theoretically and practically. As we noted at the outset of the chapter, it is a central and familiar feature of virtues (in general) that they have a proper aim, goal, or *telos*. Accordingly, if we hope to arrive at an adequate theoretical understanding of intellectual virtues (in particular), then we will need to get a handle on the end or goal at which they aim. Second, as admirable personal qualities, and as qualities that are at least conducive to (even if not constitutive of) knowledge and other epistemic goods, we have an interest in fostering intellectual virtues in ourselves and others. Plausibly, the quality of such efforts will depend in no small part on the extent to which they are grounded in at least a roughly accurate view of the end or goal at which intellectual virtues aim.³⁸

In the remainder of this section, I argue that the aim of intellectual virtues should be understood in terms of something like “theoretical wisdom,” or *sophia*. I begin by sketching an account of what I take theoretical wisdom to be. Next I offer some reasons for thinking of theoretical wisdom as the proper aim or end of intellectual virtues.

Elsewhere³⁹ I have defended the view that theoretical wisdom or *sophia* amounts to *deep explanatory understanding of epistemically significant subject matters*. Conceived of in this way, theoretical wisdom is a species of *understanding*—meaning, very roughly, that it involves a grasp of how or why certain features of reality fit together or are related to each other.⁴⁰ In doing so, it yields an *explanation* of its subject matter—hence the notion of “explanatory” understanding. Further, the kind of understanding in question is “deep” in the sense (roughly) that its possessor has a grasp of the *fundamental* concepts and principles relative to the issues or subject matters in question.

The core of this account can be developed as follows.⁴¹ Plausibly, theoretical wisdom is *domain-specific*: a person can be theoretically wise relative to one dimension or domain of reality or another. Theoretical wisdom also plausibly admits of *degrees*: a person can be theoretically wise to a greater or lesser extent. Given these assumptions, we can sharpen the preceding characterization as follows:

A person possesses theoretical wisdom or *sophia* relative to a given “epistemically significant” domain D to the extent that this person grasps (1) what is fundamental in D, (2) how the fundamental elements of D stand in relation to each other, and (3) how they stand in relation to other, non-fundamental elements of D.

This characterization is, of course, highly schematic. For instance, it leaves open what counts as “fundamental” in a given domain and what sorts of “relations” a grasping of

which might constitute theoretical wisdom.⁴² But this is as it should be, for these variables can be filled out in a variety of ways.

To illustrate, consider some possible replies to questions like “What ultimately makes us the persons we are?” or “Why are we here?” In response to the first question, a psychologist might call attention to certain early formative experiences and relationships, explaining subsequent psychological processes and behaviors in light of these. A metaphysician, on the other hand, might appeal to a very different set of psychological or metaphysical facts, tracing their relationship to certain other, “accidental” features of personal identity. In response to the second question, a cosmologist would likely focus on certain primordial physical facts and forces as the basis of her account, while an evolutionary biologist would give priority to a very different set of physical events and processes. In turn, these answers might differ radically from an answer offered by an ethicist or theologian. The former might call attention to certain fundamental moral concepts or principles, situating these vis-à-vis other, less fundamental ones. And the latter might appeal to the will of a personal deity to explain why we exist or how we ought to live.

Each of these answers purports to offer an account of the fundamental elements in a given epistemically significant domain and of how these elements are related to each other or to certain less fundamental elements. Yet the kind of “fundamentality” the answers appeal to and the kinds of relations they invoke differ from one answer or theory to another. For instance, the cosmologist’s fundamental facts are *physical*, the metaphysician’s are *metaphysical* or *logical*, and the psychologist’s are *mental*. Similarly, the kinds of relations appealed to range from *causal* to *metaphysical* to *psychological* to *normative*. This illustrates the diversity of epistemic states that might contribute to theoretical wisdom as I am thinking of it.

This diversity also gives rise to an important question. Responses to the sorts of questions noted in the preceding discussion, while sometimes complementary, can also be contradictory and therefore incompatible. Put another way, while some such theories presumably are true, others surely are false. But can a grasp of false or incompatible theories contribute to theoretical wisdom? Or is theoretical wisdom necessarily accurate or veridical?

Because we are thinking of theoretical wisdom as a species of understanding, this question can be rephrased in terms of whether understanding entails truth. In recent years, epistemologists have shed considerable ink addressing this question.⁴³ I cannot wade into this debate here. Instead I simply note that, on my view, explanatory understanding—and therefore theoretical wisdom—necessarily involves a truth component. This seems essential to understanding’s being a superior epistemic good. Were explanatory understanding consistent with systematic error, this would significantly undercut its normative status. However, this falls short of saying that for a given explanatory representation to contribute to a person’s theoretical wisdom, it must be *entirely* accurate. I leave open whether it is compatible with a certain degree of error.⁴⁴

To the extent that we possess a pre-theoretical concept of theoretical wisdom, I take it that the foregoing characterization, schematic though it is, fits reasonably well with this

concept.⁴⁵ In general, wisdom is closely associated with a grasp of how things work. We expect wise persons to have a kind of “higher view” or perspective on matters in virtue of which they are able to explain these matters, answer questions, solve problems, and so on. While ordinary ways of thinking about wisdom may tend in the direction of *practical* wisdom or *phronesis* (where wisdom involves, among other things, a grasp of how things work or fit together in the practical or moral domain), they also plausibly extend to our grasp of other features or dimensions of reality, features that do not have immediate practical or moral relevance. One can be wise about practical affairs; but one can also have wisdom about the nature of various aspects of reality and of how these aspects fit together or function. “Theoretical wisdom” is an apt label for this kind or variety of wisdom.

The suggested conception of theoretical wisdom also comports reasonably well with certain ancient notions of *sophia*. It resembles, for instance, Aristotle’s account of *sophia* in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. There Aristotle claims that *sophia* is a combination of *nous* and *episteme*, where *nous* involves a grasp of metaphysical first principles, and *episteme* consists of knowledge of what follows or can be derived from these principles. Given this conception of *sophia*, we would expect the wise person to have a deep explanatory understanding of the fundamental features of reality. Indeed, we might think of Aristotle’s conception of *sophia* as deeply similar to the account put forth here, except that its scope is limited to the metaphysical domain. For *nous* presumably involves something akin to a grasp of the fundamental structures of reality, and *episteme* a grasp of how other aspects of reality are related to or depend upon these more fundamental aspects.⁴⁶

Theoretical wisdom as characterized here is also a *prima facie* plausible way of thinking about the proper aim of intellectual virtues conceived of as “personal excellences.” Earlier in the chapter we saw that intellectual virtues thus conceived aim at an epistemic good that satisfies certain substantive and structural conditions. Specifically, we noted that the good in question must pertain to or be about “epistemically significant” subject matters and that it must involve an element of reflective understanding. On the present conception, theoretical wisdom clearly satisfies these conditions.

Nonetheless, to better appreciate the plausibility of this way of thinking about intellectual virtues, it will be helpful to look more closely at the basis of what we are here referring to as “personal worth.” In *A Theory of Virtue*, Robert Adams defends an account of moral virtue according to which it is a matter of “excellence in being for the good.”⁴⁷ As I have argued elsewhere,⁴⁸ Adams’s account of virtue can be recast as an account of personal worth (whether moral, intellectual, or otherwise). Specifically, we can think of one’s goodness or admirability as a person as depending on the extent to which one is (excellently) *for* the good, for example, to the extent that one desires, loves, strives for, protects, or delights in the good. Building on this account, we can think of “personal intellectual worth”—the kind of personal worth relevant to intellectual virtues—as a function of excellence in being for the *epistemic* good.

Underlying this general account of personal worth is the plausible idea that the admirability of a person’s “being for” a given end is (largely) a function of the *value* of the end

itself.⁴⁹ If the end is evil, then being for it clearly will not be admirable. If the end is at least minimally good, then being for it will be at least minimally admirable. And if the end is supremely good, then being for it will be supremely admirable.⁵⁰

This has important implications when we consider that intellectual virtues are *ideals*. A person can approximate virtues like curiosity, open-mindedness, and intellectual courage to a greater or lesser extent. Further, when possessed in their fullness, these virtues meet a very high normative standard. This explains the frequent discussion of “exemplars” in treatments of intellectual (and related forms of) virtue, for an exemplar of open-mindedness or intellectual courage, say, is someone who instantiates the quality in question in an especially “pure,” admirable, or praiseworthy way.⁵¹

Given that intellectual virtues contribute to personal worth, and that personal worth is (largely) a function of the value that one is “for” or aims at, the fact that intellectual virtues are *ideals* suggests that we should view them as aiming at a rather exalted or superior epistemic end. That is, we should construe the “epistemic good,” not in terms of “low-grade” epistemic states like mere true belief or the memorization of isolated bits of information, but rather in terms of an epistemic end that enjoys a high normative status.

Treating theoretical wisdom or *sophia* as the proper aim of intellectual virtues clearly satisfies this constraint, for “deep understanding of epistemically significant subject matters” is a clear case of a superior or “high-grade” epistemic good. Again, this way of understanding the aim of intellectual virtues is plausible *given* (1) that intellectual virtues are personal excellences, (2) that the personal excellence or admirability of “being for” or aiming at a given end is (largely) a function of the value of this end, and (3) that intellectual virtues are ideals.

I close by considering a possible objection. One might be worried that by thinking of the aim of intellectual virtues in such exalted terms, we will be forced to regard as *unvirtuous*—or at least as *non-virtuous*—a good deal of intellectual activity that evidently manifests intellectual virtues. If a person is disposed to think and inquire in ways that are open, fair, honest, and rigorous, and this disposition is rooted in something like a love of truth or knowledge, but the guiding conception of truth or knowledge is not so rich or expansive as theoretical wisdom, does the person in question fail to possess any intellectual virtues? Imagine a careful, fair, honest, and open inquirer who is simply trying to get at the fact of the matter about some fairly narrow (but epistemically significant) topic. She is not pursuing “deep explanatory understanding” of the topic. She simply has a question and wants to know the answer. Again, can we not view her intellectual activity as manifesting intellectual virtues or as bearing favorably on her goodness or admirability *qua* person?

I think that indeed we can. As noted earlier, intellectual virtues can be approximated to a greater or lesser extent; their possession is a matter of *degree*. Accordingly, to the extent that a careful, fair, honest, and open inquirer is motivated to acquire a true belief about some fairly narrow (but epistemically significant) subject matter, and to the extent that this belief might contribute to “deep explanatory understanding” of the relevant (or a related, sufficiently broad) subject matter, we can and should view this person as approximating or possessing a notable degree of intellectual virtue.

A similar point applies to cases in which a person's intellectual activity (as distinct from the *goal* of this activity) is expressive of virtues like open-mindedness and intellectual courage but does not reach the upper normative boundary of what such expressions might look like, that is, while not being identical to what a *fully* or *maximally* virtuous person would do in the situation. In cases like this, it would be a mistake to conclude that the person in question fails to manifest any intellectual virtues. A much more plausible conclusion—and one that is entirely consistent with the argument of this chapter—is that she fails to manifest the relevant virtues in their fullness or perfectly.

IV. CONCLUSION

We have found that the best way to conceive of the proper aim of intellectual virtues depends on many factors, not the least of which is one's initial reason or basis for invoking the concept of intellectual virtue. Nevertheless, we have also found that if we think of intellectual virtues as strengths of intellectual character, and in particular as character strengths that contribute to their possessor's excellence or admirability *qua* person, the notion of theoretical wisdom or *sophia* emerges as a plausible target. Admittedly, however, the discussion has left many stones either unturned or only partially examined. This includes questions about the nature and basis of "epistemically significant" subject matters, the nature and structure of understanding, the value of true belief, the relationship between understanding and truth, the nature of the epistemic dimension of personal worth, the scope of theoretical wisdom, and the relationship between practical wisdom and theoretical wisdom. These and related questions merit further exploration if we hope to achieve an even deeper understanding of intellectual virtues and their place in the broader cognitive economy.

NOTES

1. For a helpful overview of some of these options, see H. Battaly, *Virtue* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2015b), Chap. 1–3.
2. As my discussion will make clear, this is primarily the literature in *virtue epistemology*, as virtue epistemologists have had by far the most to say about the nature and structure of intellectual virtues. For overviews of the field, see J. Greco and J. Turri, "Virtue Epistemology," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by E. Zalta, 2015, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/epistemology-virtue/>; and H. Battaly, "Virtue Epistemology," *Philosophy Compass* 3 (2008): 639–663.
3. The first such way is known as "virtue reliabilism," and the second as "virtue responsibilism." Virtue reliabilists conceive of intellectual virtues (roughly) as truth-conducive cognitive capacities or faculties like memory, vision, and introspection. Virtue responsibilists conceive of intellectual virtues as excellences of intellectual character like open-mindedness, attentiveness, intellectual carefulness, and intellectual thoroughness. For more on the

- relationship between these approaches, see J. Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Chap. 4.
4. See, for example, E. Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Ch. 10, 13; and J. Greco, *Achieving Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Chap. 1.
 5. E. Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); J. Greco, *Achieving Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
 6. For more on the point that knowledge doesn't require an exercise of intellectual character strengths, see Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology*, Chap. 3. Notably, in some of Sosa's most recent work (e.g., *Judgment and Agency* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015a]; "Virtue Epistemology: Character Versus Competence," in *Current Controversies in Virtue Theory*, edited by M. Alfano [New York: Routledge, 2015b], 61–74), he gives what appear to be strengths of intellectual character a central and fundamental role in his account of "reflective" knowledge.
 7. E. Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective*. Chapters 10 and 13.
 8. The distinction between orthodox and unorthodox views is related to but different from the distinction between "traditional" and "autonomous" approaches to virtue epistemology that I have developed elsewhere (e.g., J. Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology*, Chap. 1). Among other differences, the former are views about the nature of an intellectual virtue, while the latter, as overall approaches to virtue epistemology, encompass much more.
 9. J. Driver, "The Conflation of Moral and Epistemic Virtue." *Metaphilosophy* 34 (2003): 367–383.
 10. R. Roberts and J. Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
 11. L. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); J. Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology*.
 12. C. Hookway, "How to Be a Virtue Epistemologist," in *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*, edited by Michael DePaul and Linda Zagzebski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 149–160.
 13. M. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
 14. J. Baehr, "Educating for Intellectual Virtues: From Theory to Practice," *Journal of the Philosophy of Education* 47 (2013): 248–262; J. Baehr (ed.). *Intellectual Virtues and Education: Essays in Applied Virtue Epistemology* (New York: Routledge, 2016).
 15. L. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*; J. Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology*.
 16. R. Roberts and J. Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology*.
 17. E. Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective*, 225.
 18. K. Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 210. Some authors specify the goal strictly in terms of true belief (e.g., J. Driver, "Moral and Epistemic Virtue," in *Knowledge, Belief, and Character: Readings in Virtue Epistemology*, edited by G. Axtell [Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000], 225). However, as W. Alston, *Beyond "Justification": Dimensions of Epistemic Evaluation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 29–32, and others have noted, this cannot be adequate, as it would appear to give a kind of *hypercredulity* the status of an intellectual virtue.

19. See M. David, "Truth as the Epistemic Goal," in *Knowledge, Truth, and Duty*, edited by Matthias Steup (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 151–169, for more on this point.
20. Of course, on a broad enough conception of "the moral," personal *moral* worth might include personal *intellectual* worth. See J. Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology*, Appendix, for more on this issue.
21. For a much more detailed development of these ideas, see J. Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology*, Chap. 6, 7.
22. See, e.g., E. Sosa, "For the Love of Truth?" in *Virtue Epistemology: Essays on Epistemic Virtue and Responsibility*, edited by Abrol Fairweather and Linda Zagzebski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 49; E. Sosa, "The Place of Truth in Epistemology," in *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*, edited by M. DePaul and L. Zagzebski (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003), 156; and Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology*, 155–159.
23. See D. Whitcomb, "Epistemic Value," in *The Continuum Companion to Epistemology*, edited by Andrew Cullison (London: Continuum, 2012), 276; and S. Grimm, "What Is Interesting?" *Logos and Episteme* 4 (2011b): 515–542, for more on the notion of trivial truths.
24. Throughout the chapter I invoke the notion of "epistemic significance." I will not develop an account of what gives a subject matter this status. Indeed, my argument is intended to be consistent with a wide range of such accounts. I will take for granted, however, that *some* kind of normative distinction between "epistemically trivial" and "epistemically significant" subject matters is plausible. This distinction is widely recognized in the literature. See, for example, A. Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 33, 98; A. Goldman, "The Unity of the Epistemic Virtues," in *Virtue Epistemology: Essays on Epistemic Value and Responsibility*, edited by Abrol Fairweather and Linda Zagzebski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 37–39; W. Alston, *Beyond "Justification": Dimensions of Epistemic Evaluation*, 32; and R. Roberts and J. Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology*, 157–159. For a recent comprehensive treatment of this and related issues, see A. Hazlett, *A Luxury of the Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
25. For more on the nature and structure of understanding, see S. Grimm, "Understanding," in *The Routledge Companion to Epistemology*, edited by S. Bernecker (New York: Routledge, 2011a), 84–94; and "Understanding as Knowledge of Causes," in *Virtue Epistemology Naturalized: Bridges between Virtue Epistemology and Philosophy of Science*, edited by A. Fairweather (Dordrecht, Holland: Springer, 2014), 329–345. I intend to leave it an open question whether understanding is a (uniquely valuable) species of knowledge. For more on this topic see J. Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); S. Grimm, "Is Understanding a Species of Knowledge," *British Journal of the Philosophy of Science* 57 (2006): 515–535; and A. Hills, "Understanding Why," *Noûs* 50 (2016): 661–688.
26. Driver, "Moral and Epistemic Virtue," 126.
27. Ibid.
28. Obviously I am opting for pluralism about kinds or concepts of intellectual virtue. For an exploration and defense of this view, see H. Battaly, "A Pluralist Theory of Virtue," in *Current Controversies in Virtue Theory*, edited by Mark Alfano (New York: Routledge, 2015a), 7–22; or J. Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology*, 89–90.

29. For more on this point, see E. Sosa, "Virtue Epistemology: Character Versus Competence," 71–74; and W. Alston, *Beyond "Justification": Dimensions of Epistemic Evaluation*, Chap. 2).
30. See, for example, L. BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 8; or P. Moser, *Knowledge and Evidence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 42–43.
31. Depending on the case, the reflective component may be relatively simple, as when a perceptual experience, say, provides the basis or reason for thinking that the corresponding perceptual belief is veridical.
32. Exactly what the binary thesis leaves out vis-à-vis reflective understanding is an open question. Arguably, it leaves out, at a minimum, a kind of rational intuition or insight into the relevant explanatory or other epistemic relations. For more on what this additional element might amount to, see L. BonJour, *In Defense of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
33. See J. Greco, *Achieving Knowledge*, or E. Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*, Vol. 1, Chap. 2, on "animal knowledge" for developments of this view.
34. See, for example, E. Sosa, *Knowing Full Well* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), Chap. 3.
35. L. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 273–278.
36. See, for example, L. Zagzebski, "From Reliabilism to Virtue Epistemology," in *Knowledge, Belief, and Character* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 113–122; and J. Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding*.
37. My own discussions of this topic (e.g., *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology*; "Educating for Intellectual Virtues: From Theory to Practice"; and "Four Dimensions of an Intellectual Virtue," in *Moral and Intellectual Virtues in Western and Chinese Philosophy: The Turn Toward Virtue*, edited by C. Mi, M. Slote, and E. Sosa [New York: Routledge, 2015], 86–98) illustrate this thinness. Typically, when specifying the aim of intellectual virtues, I have said little more than that they aim at distinctively "epistemic goods" like "truth, knowledge, and understanding," with little explicit consideration of how these states are related to each other, their relative conceptual priority, and what a more complete specification might look like. See also L. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 166–167.
38. An instructive example here concerns attempts to foster intellectual virtues in an educational setting. If I am right that intellectual virtues aim at a kind of deep understanding (see later discussion), it stands to reason that such attempts should incorporate a major focus on educating for deep understanding of the relevant disciplinary or academic content. Such a focus should be reflected, among other ways, in the curriculum and pedagogical practices that are employed. However, the centrality of educating for deep understanding to efforts of "intellectual character education" might not be obvious if one is unaware that deep understanding is central to the aim of intellectual virtues. See J. Baehr, "Educating for Intellectual Virtues: From Theory to Practice," 251–252.
39. J. Baehr, "Sophia," in *Virtues and Their Vices*, edited by Kevin Timpe and Craig Boyd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 303–323.
40. See S. Grimm, "Understanding as Knowledge of Causes"; and A. Hills, "Understanding Why," for more on this aspect of understanding.
41. See J. Baehr, "Sophia," for further discussion of these and related points.
42. It also leaves unspecified what is involved with "grasping" a given structure or relation. While an important and challenging question, I take it that the notion of "grasping" is

- sufficiently intuitively plausible for our purposes. See S. Grimm, "Is Understanding a Species of Knowledge," for a discussion of this point.
43. For a sampling, see J. Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding*; and C. Elgin, "Is Understanding Factive?" in *Epistemic Value*, edited by A. Haddock, A. Millar, and D. Pritchard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 322–330.
 44. See C. Elgin, "True Enough," *Philosophical Issues* 14 (2004): 113–131, for more on this point.
 45. For an argument that we do possess a pre-theoretical notion of something like theoretical wisdom, see D. Whitcomb, "Wisdom," in *Routledge Companion to Epistemology*, edited by S. Bernecker and D. Pritchard (London: Routledge, 2010), 95–105.
 46. For more on these and related points, see C. C. W. Taylor, "Aristotle's Epistemology," in *Epistemology*, edited by S. Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 116–142; and D. Conway, *The Rediscovery of Wisdom* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).
 47. R. Adams, *A Theory of Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6.
 48. J. Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology*, chap. 6, 7.
 49. I say "largely" because it may also be a function, as Adams suggests, of being for the good *in a certain way*, namely, "excellently." Briefly, this involves (at a minimum) being for the good *skillfully* (vs. incompetently) and with good *judgment* (vs. foolishly). See J. Baehr, "Four Dimensions of an Intellectual Virtue," for more on this point.
 50. For a development and defense of this and related principles, see T. Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Chap. 1–3.
 51. See R. Roberts and J. Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology*, for a discussion of several exemplars of intellectual virtue. For an account of virtue grounded in the concept of exemplars, see L. Zagzebski, "Exemplarist Virtue Theory," *Metaphilosophy* 41 (2010): 41–57.

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CHAPTER 41

VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY

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I. INTRODUCTION

THIS chapter will examine connections between virtue epistemology and psychology. Our interest is thus to explain, understand, and evaluate virtue theoretic forms of epistemic psychology. In section I, we provide a brief overview of virtue epistemology; we then discuss, in section II, the two main types of virtue epistemological theories currently on offer (responsibilism and reliabilism). In section III, we examine empirical challenges to responsibilism from social psychology (epistemic situationism) and some lines of response. We conclude in section IV by showing that a pressing problem for virtue reliabilism, namely providing an adequate account of epistemic agency, can be resolved by utilizing recent empirical work in the psychology of attention. We defend an empirically informed account of epistemic agency suitable for virtue reliabilism.

II. VIRTUE THEORETIC EPISTEMIC PSYCHOLOGY

Virtue epistemology (VE) is a normative and agent-centered perspective in the theory of knowledge. VE is agent centered because intellectual character traits, abilities, skills, or competences, all of which are properties of agents, are taken as central in defining intellectual achievements such as knowledge, understanding, or wisdom. VE is normative because attributions of virtue and vice (e.g., “S is conscientious,” “S is closed-minded”) express *evaluations* of agents. Important for our purposes here, VE makes the intellectual virtues of an agent sources of fundamental epistemic value.¹ This makes psychology

relevant to epistemology in a profound way. This chapter examines the psychology of epistemic virtues, in particular the role of agency in epistemic achievement.

Let's take a closer look at the "agent-based" direction of analysis characteristic of virtue epistemology, and specifically how psychological properties of agents become sources of epistemic value. Heather Battaly explains the difference as follows:

In *belief based* epistemology, beliefs are the primary object of epistemic evaluation, and knowledge and justification, which are evaluations of beliefs, are the fundamental concepts and properties in epistemology. In contrast, in *virtue epistemology*, agents rather than beliefs are the primary objects of epistemic evaluation, and intellectual virtues and vices, which are evaluations of agents, are the fundamental properties and concepts.²

According to belief-based epistemology, agents have epistemically praiseworthy properties only if their beliefs have epistemically valuable properties (e.g., being justified, rational, supported by evidence).³ If person-level excellences (e.g., skills, abilities, traits) are addressed at all, their epistemic value is derivative and does little theoretical work in defining important epistemic concepts. Virtue epistemology reverses this direction of analysis in favor of an "agent-based direction of analysis," which makes agents, rather than beliefs, the primary objects of epistemic evaluation—in particular, their intellectual virtues and vices.⁴ The agent-based direction of analysis makes agents central in this sense: epistemically normative properties of agents, whatever these ultimately turn out to be, are sources of fundamental epistemic value, and beliefs derive at least some of their epistemic value from these properties in the agent.

Virtue epistemologists all favor the agent-based direction of analysis. Call this a commitment to the Direction of Analysis Thesis (DAT):

(DAT) Some epistemically normative properties of beliefs are determined by epistemically normative properties of agents.

Commitment to DAT is not quite sufficient for a theory to count as a form of virtue epistemology. In any genuinely virtue theoretic epistemology, the relevant properties of agents in DAT must be *dispositional properties*.⁵ Because the epistemic value-generating properties in agents will be dispositional properties, we add another D to DAT:

(DDAT) Some epistemically normative properties of beliefs are determined by epistemically normative *cognitive-dispositional* properties of agents.

Dispositional properties of agents can include habits, tendencies, abilities, skills, and traits.⁶ It is important to have an array of psychological disposition types available for epistemic theorizing because the success conditions for basic perception, reasoning, and character manifestation are all quite different. In particular, these appear to present a spectrum of achievements with respect to the role of a believer's agency in epistemic

success; perceptual faculties require the least, inferential skills more, and character traits like open-mindedness most of all. Any adequate account of the epistemically normative properties of agents in DDAT will have to either specify the role of agency in success, or explain how the agent can be a source of value if their agency is not in play.

The role of agency in manifesting epistemic virtue is an important issue to which we will return, but we can already see a clear sense in which the properties of agents become central to epistemology under DDAT. Whichever disposition types a given theorist takes as central, the manifestation of an epistemic virtue will generate and transfer epistemic value from the agent to their doxastic states. The actual functioning of cognitive dispositions is doing real normative work here. While this clarifies one general source of epistemic value, it leaves us with many important questions. Which disposition types (e.g., faculties, skills, traits) will be proper objects of epistemic evaluation? What are the specific mechanisms through which these dispositions generate and transfer epistemic value? What *motivational* elements will the relevant dispositions have? Will the motivational constituents be desires, emotions, or intentions? How similar are dispositions to believe and dispositions to act? Is agency necessary for knowledge?

Let's call a theory that aims to answer these and similar questions a *virtue theoretic epistemic psychology* (VEP).⁷ A virtue epistemologist must have some VEP or other in order to account for the sources of epistemic value and positive epistemic standings recognized in her theory. The two main forms of virtue epistemology are *virtue responsibilism* and *virtue reliabilism*. Standard reliabilist epistemic virtues include good vision, a capacious memory, and skill in basic inductive and deductive reasoning.⁸ Standard *responsibilist* virtues include traits like open-mindedness,⁹ curiosity,¹⁰ and intellectual courage.¹¹ Perhaps the most important question for any VEP, certainly for reliabilists, is whether epistemic virtues must express *epistemic agency*.¹² Should a virtue epistemologist require that the manifestation of an epistemic virtue express agency, or can epistemic virtue be achieved without essentially involving the agency of the virtuous agent? Let's say that any virtue epistemology has a merely *agent-based* VEP if it does not require agency for manifesting epistemic virtue. Alternatively, any virtue epistemology that does require agency for the manifestation of epistemic virtue will have a stronger *agency-based* VEP.

One advantage of (merely) agent-based VEP is that it seems to avoid worries about an overly demanding epistemic psychology. If many epistemically productive cognitive capacities function reliably without introspection, deliberation, or any special agential effort, then requiring agency for virtue manifestation will exclude many intuitive cases of knowledge. Agent-based VEP is thus attractive for explaining our basic knowledge of the world.¹³ An advantage of agency-based VEP is that motivations are praiseworthy or blameworthy independent of their actual success or failure, and thus provide a source of epistemic value independent of the actual truth or falsity of belief. This is useful in addressing the "value problem," which demands an answer to the question "What makes knowledge more valuable than merely true belief?"¹⁴ Epistemic agency and epistemic motivation are good places to look for this because we can praise good epistemic motivations whether or not they achieve the truths they seek.

A well-known case of epistemic praiseworthiness in the absence of a reliable truth connection is Richard Foley's "new evil demon problem."¹⁵ According to Foley, the unsuspecting victim of a Cartesian Evil Demon who is faultless in her reasoning, but who is nonetheless never led to form true beliefs (because of the Demon), thereby should be seen as holding justified beliefs, just like a person who is *not* in a demon world and who reasons in the same faultless way to form many true beliefs. James Montmarquet (1992), in the process of arguing against reliabilist virtue epistemology, argues that the victim of a Cartesian Evil Demon can still be virtuously motivated, epistemically conscientious, and thus worthy of epistemic praise, despite having all or mostly false beliefs. The praise that an intellectual virtue brings to its possessor does not depend solely on the virtue being reliable in producing true beliefs, and thus points to a pluralist axiology (i.e., value pluralism) for virtue epistemology.¹⁶

A challenge for any VEP will be to set the proper level of agential involvement for virtue manifestation. On one hand, in cases in which true belief produced by a reliable cognitive ability involves little or no agency, the success is not creditable to the agent,¹⁷ and this appears to give up the praiseworthiness of the properties that are supposed to generate epistemic value in DDAT. On the other hand, requiring robust epistemic agency for epistemic success provides a clear source of epistemic value in the agent, but threatens to over-intellectualize epistemic norms, or otherwise place a great psychological (agential) burden on manifesting virtue, making epistemic achievements all too rare. This difficulty provides a reason to look further into the psychology of epistemic virtue.

III. EPISTEMIC PSYCHOLOGY, VIRTUE RESPONSIBILISM, AND VIRTUE RELIABILISM

i. Virtue Responsibilism

Here we further examine the epistemic psychology of the two main branches of virtue epistemology. As noted earlier, virtue responsibilists are interested in intellectual character traits, including open-mindedness, intellectual courage, curiosity, intellectual humility, conscientiousness, and rigor. Virtue responsibilists include Zagzebski,¹⁸ Code (1987), Montmarquet (1992), and Baehr (2011a). There is general agreement among responsibilists that a belief formed or retained through epistemically praiseworthy motivational states has some positive epistemic standing just in virtue of having that etiology (and more yet if the belief is true). Virtues of this kind involve conscious reflection, deliberation, and endorsement, as well as affective-motivational states. Responsibilists differ on whether epistemic virtue is a necessary condition for knowledge or for other epistemic achievements, such as intellectual flourishing, understanding, or wisdom, and thus will differ on which positive epistemic standings virtuous motives confer upon our cognitive states and activities.¹⁹

Since motivations are generating and transferring epistemic value here (whether it is for knowledge or other epistemic achievements), it appears that virtue responsibilism has an agency-based VEP. However, motivational states can be understood in many ways (desires, wants, needs, inclinations, intentions, and plans), so there are a number of possible epistemic psychologies within responsibilist VE. It will not be possible to investigate all of these here, but we can say that understanding the general motivation-types required for manifesting epistemic virtue is important because it provides insight into the specific mechanisms that generate and transfer fundamental epistemic value. One important difference between, for example, desires and intentions is that satisfying a desire does not require that the agent be the cause of acquiring what is desired, whereas a successful intention does. If I have a desire to know the capital of Belgium and a reliable source of testimony just happens to assert that it is Brussels, then my desire is satisfied. However, if I *intend* to come to know the capital of Belgium (by doing x, y, z) and a reliable source of testimony just happens to say that it is Brussels, I will have attained what I want, but my intention would not have succeeded (because my true belief did not come from doing x, y, z). Desires and intentions also differ in the conscious representation of goal states they require. Desires can be largely or wholly unconscious in ways that intentions cannot.

Let's now look at the epistemic psychology of Linda Zagzebski. While Zagzebski is properly seen as defending a "mixed virtue theory" because virtuous activity requires both a characteristic motivation and reliable success in achieving the desired end, the motivational element plays a fundamental role on her account.

A virtue, then, can be defined as a deep and enduring acquired excellence of a person, involving a characteristic motivation to produce a certain desired end and reliable success in bringing about that end. What I mean by a motivation is a disposition to have a motive; a motive is an action guiding emotion with a certain end, either internal or external.²⁰

Zagzebski's virtues do not just require that some good epistemic end is achieved; the end achieved must be an end that is actually desired by the agent. This places a significant constraint on the types of (externally) reliable processes that will be relevant to knowledge. Reliable processes that constitute knowledge must be ones that also satisfy an agent's motivations.

Motivations are also important on Zagzebski's account because they manifest as "action guiding emotions."²¹ The action guiding role of a motivation gives a responsibilist a clear way to account for subjective justification (justification from the subject's point of view) through the causal involvement of an agent's motives in the initiation and continuation of cognitive activity. Epistemic agents can be credited for the content, guidance, and control provided by epistemically good motivations, and this aspect of epistemic value is independent of the actual truth or falsity of beliefs, as noted earlier.

Unlike process reliabilist theories of justification (the view that a token belief is justified if it is the product of a type of belief-forming process that reliably produces true

beliefs), Zagzebski's virtue epistemology is unlikely to face a version of the Generality Problem.²² The putative problem here is that every belief token can be described as the result of many process types (seeing, seeing a cup, seeing a cup in the morning, seeing a cup from a distance in the morning), but only some of these types will be reliable. Process reliabilism provides no basis for individuating the process types relevant for evaluation here. Since Zagzebski understands relevant processes as those that reliably achieve the *actual aim desired by an agent*, she provides a basis for identifying the process types that matter. While any external success can be described as issuing from any number of slightly distinct motive contents, only one of these will be the actual motive content that initiates and guides any given token cognitive process.

While motivation-based VEP holds promise in many areas, there are at least two problems it raises. First, conscious motivation simply does not appear necessary for simple forms of knowledge, for example perceptual knowledge, knowledge from testimony, or knowledge from recent memory. Much of what we know comes from simply taking in the deliverances of the senses, the testimony of others, or the deliverances of memory, without any conscious motivation required. This makes a motivational requirement for knowledge appear too strong. A second potential problem for responsibilist VEP is the challenge from 'epistemic situationism.' This is an empirical challenge based on research in social psychology that parallels a challenge to the psychological presuppositions of virtue ethics. Philosophers have used social psychological research to challenge the empirical adequacy of the psychology of character traits (moral and epistemic). We will examine this in detail in the next section. We first turn to the other form of virtue epistemology, virtue reliabilism.

ii. Virtue Reliabilism

According to virtue reliabilism, the sources of fundamental epistemic value in the agent are not character traits, as with virtue responsibilism, but rather "faculties" like vision, memory, and basic forms of inductive and deductive reasoning. Knowledge is a true belief that is due to a reliable ability or faculty. Virtues of this kind consist of largely sub-personal cognitive dispositions that operate effectively with little to no conscious control. The founder of virtue reliabilism is Ernest Sosa. He provides this early definition of intellectual virtue:

An intellectual virtue or faculty is a competence in virtue of which one would mostly attain the truth and avoid error in a certain field of propositions F, when in certain conditions C.²³

An example of a virtue of this sort is accurate eyesight. As Sosa puts it,

If we include grasping the truth about one's environment among the proper ends of a human being, then the faculty of sight would seem in a broad sense a virtue in

human beings; and if grasping the truth is an intellectual matter then that virtue is also in a straightforward sense an intellectual virtue.²⁴

Virtues are here conceptually linked to environments and domains of inquiry rather than motivations. The virtuousness of a faculty in a given person is determined by her level of epistemic success *in appropriate conditions*, where this includes both environmental conditions and a range of relevant propositions. Thus, being unable to form a preponderance of true beliefs about the immediate environment through vision in pitch darkness does not count against the virtuousness of the faculty of vision in a person. Likewise, not being able to form true beliefs about the color of an object simply on the basis of hearing sounds in one's environment (excluding any sounds that happen to be verbal reports of the color of objects) is not a relevant failure of the capacity for hearing. In both cases, the point is that the failure of a cognitive faculty to achieve truth outside of normal conditions for its operation does not count against its status as a virtue.

What VEP can we see in Sosa's work? This is not easy to answer. In "For the Love of Truth?" (2001), he appears pessimistic that any sufficiently clear and theoretically useful account of the desire for truth *as such* and *for its own sake* can be provided. In *A Virtue Epistemology* (2007), he argues that belief constitutes a "domain of normative criticism" and truth is the organizing value of this domain. Just as "[t]he good shot is the central value that organizes the sport of archery and the criticisms proper to it,"²⁵ truth is the fundamental value that organizes all properly epistemic evaluation of belief. However, taking truth as a *formal* aim for grounding and organizing epistemic evaluation is quite different from requiring that truth must be taken as a *psychological aim* by epistemically virtuous believers. In the former case, epistemic evaluation is categorical because the authority of epistemic norms is independent of any specific desires of the agents to which they apply. The latter case appears to engender a commitment to epistemic agency.

A psychological, rather than formal, account of truth as an epistemic aim might be included in the "adroitness" condition of Sosa's "AAA" account of knowledge (2007), the other requirements being "accuracy" and "aptness." The accuracy of a belief depends just on its truth or falsity and does not necessarily involve a psychological aim of the agent in any way. Aptness is "accuracy due to adroitness," and this is a fundamentally causal connection between a capacity in the agent and an accurate belief. Adroitness is roughly equivalent to *skillfulness*, and it is reasonable to think that the manifestation of a skill requires motivation and agency of some sort.²⁶ What more can we know about the nature and function of epistemic motivations according to Sosa?

The motivational states required for adroitness are called 'virtuous attractions.' In cases of intuitive a priori knowledge, virtuous attractions "properly draw your assent to propositional contents about simple arithmetic, geometry, and logic" because of their perceived truth.²⁷ Intellectual attractions are also used to explain the fundamental epistemic capacity that enables us to *possess reasons*.²⁸ Attractions thus appear to be

basic motivational states that are sophisticated enough to be truth-directed. However, unlike Zagzebski, who clearly defines epistemic motivations in terms of action-guiding *emotions*, it is not clear which psychological state types Sosa has in mind here, and thus whether they are sufficient to confer credit to believers for any epistemic success they might generate and whether they would be recognized in an adequate epistemic psychology.

In his most recent book *Judgment and Agency* (2015), Sosa develops a full theory of epistemic agency and distinguishes between “judgmental knowledge” and “functional knowledge.” Both essentially involve “alethic affirmation,” that is, “an affirmation aimed at truth,”²⁹ rather than at any practical aim that affirmation might accomplish. Functional knowledge is alethic affirmation, but it is wholly below the level of consciousness, whereas “[g]enuine judgment is the *endeavor* to affirm with apt correctness.”³⁰ Judgment is thus not only alethic, but also *motivated* because “[e]ndeavors can and often do derive from freely determined choices.”³¹ Judgment is an intentional (mental) action with alethic intentional content (“affirming with apt correctness”). Judgment is a freely chosen, goal-directed intellectual endeavor.

Judgmental knowledge and functional knowledge appear to occupy two extremes of conscious, agential involvement. Judgmental knowledge is intentional and requires conscious representation, while functional knowledge is wholly below the level of consciousness. This may be problematic. If Sosa says that some form of agency is involved in functional knowledge, the creditworthiness of epistemic agency becomes problematic on his own account. If agency only comes into play with judgmental knowledge, which requires “second order alethic affirmations” to aptly affirm, then virtue reliabilism will have difficulty accounting for simple perceptual knowledge, and will essentially take on a central problem facing virtue responsibilism, as noted earlier.

IV. CHALLENGES TO VIRTUE RESPONSIBILISM FROM EMPIRICAL PSYCHOLOGY

In “Modern Moral Philosophy,” G. E. M. Anscombe (1958) exhorted moral philosophers to examine the psychological presuppositions of their normative theories. While Anscombe, Geach (1978), Foot (2002), Williams (1985), and others thought this favored a turn toward the virtues, the “situationist” critique suggests that it may be virtue ethics itself that falls prey to the demand for an adequate psychology. An increasingly sophisticated line of research dating back to Asch (1956), Darley and Batson (1973), Isen and Levin (1972), Milgram (1963) Zimbardo (1972), and continuing today with recent research from McCrae and Costa (1999), Kahneman (2011), and Ariely and Jones (2010), constitutes a mature field of social psychology, which might spell bad news for virtue

theory in both ethics and epistemology. When we attribute a trait to a person (x is generous, shy, or courageous), we attribute behavioral consistency across a diverse range of situations to them (indoors or outdoors, night or day, weekday or weekend). When a person manifests trait-consistent behavior across a diverse range of environments, this suggests that stable features of his personality are what cause and explain the regularity of his behavior, rather than the varying features of the environments. The crux of the situationist challenge is that research in social psychology (putatively) shows that the behavioral consistency predicted by trait possession fails again and again. To the contrary, environmental variables (often morally irrelevant ones) appear to explain behavior, not an agent's dispositions, traits, or abilities. The situationist uses this research to challenge the plausibility of character-based psychology.

i. The Situationist Challenge to Virtue Ethics

The situationist challenge in ethics started with Gilbert Harman's (1999, 2000) strong attack against the very existence of personality traits, followed soon after by Doris's (2002) weaker attack that only "narrow" trait attribution can be empirically supported. A narrow trait is stable, predictive, and explanatory, but only within a limited range of circumstances, as opposed to so-called global traits, which an agent manifests across most or all circumstances. For example, a person might have "battlefield courage," rather than courage *tout court* (without qualification), or "workplace honesty," rather than honesty *tout court*. According to Doris, the psychological research shows that people sometimes manifest narrow-trait-consistent behavior, and such traits are psychologically real. However, workplace honesty, for example, is much less praiseworthy than global honesty.³² Virtues, whether moral or epistemic, are praiseworthy traits, so narrow trait possession will not be sufficient for possessing virtue. Whether character traits do not exist at all, or only narrow character traits exist, situationists argue that human beings generally do not possess the traits posited by virtue ethicists.

There have been numerous responses to the challenge of ethical situationism.³³ Some fault may lie in the science itself, as the results of many studies have failed to replicate.³⁴ Fault may also lie with philosophers' interpretation of (let us grant) reliable data. Some critics of situationism³⁵ point out that virtues have always been defined in terms of manifestations *in relation to certain environments*, and have always sufficiently incorporated environmental considerations into virtue psychology. Virtues are, and always have been, ecological.

Perhaps the most sustained empirical defense of virtue ethics in response to the situationist challenge comes from Nancy Snow (2010) and Daniel Russell (2009), both of whom appeal to the cognitive-affective processing system (CAPS) traits based on the research of Walter Mischel and Yuichi Shoda (1999, 2008). Mischel and Shoda emphasize that people interpret the situations they are in and give them meanings that may or may not match the objective features of the situation. Thus, the behavioral predictions of a given trait (the behaviors that a person with the trait would perform in specified

circumstances) should be determined by how an agent construes the situations she is in, not the objective features of the situations, although these may of course overlap in any given case. Mischel and Shoda argue that people exhibit much greater levels of trait-consistent behavior when described in terms of CAPS traits.

ii. The Situationist Challenge to Responsibilist Virtue Epistemology

How does this apply to virtue epistemology? While virtue ethics and virtue epistemology may differ in many respects, responsibilist virtue epistemology shares the very character-based psychology targeted by situationist attacks against virtue ethics. The problem virtue responsibilists face is to avoid skepticism, while retaining an empirically adequate psychology. If traits such as open-mindedness, intellectual humility, and conscientiousness are only rarely possessed, and manifesting such traits is necessary for knowledge, then knowledge is rarely possessed according to virtue theoretic criteria. Many epistemologists will resist this skeptical view on the frequency of knowledge because it is plausible to believe that most people know a good amount.³⁶ If cognitive traits are more commonly possessed, but only as narrow dispositions (as defined earlier), their possession would not appear to be sufficiently praiseworthy. Thus, it has been argued that securing both empirical and normative adequacy will be very difficult for virtue responsibilists.

While sharing a common character-based psychology leaves virtue responsibilism vulnerable to the same empirical challenge as virtue ethics, for this very reason, there might be a shared empirical response. Virtue responsibilists might pursue an *epistemic* version of the CAPS traits discussed in the preceding. Virtue-consistent behavior (now for epistemic virtues) would be defined relative to how an agent construes epistemically relevant features of the situation, not the objective features of the situation itself. While the shared character-based psychology of virtue ethics and responsibilist virtue epistemology allows for this response, fundamental differences between ethics and epistemology might also make it problematic. Epistemology is largely concerned with factive achievements (getting things right about the world). Knowledge is a factive state because something must obtain in the world in order for a person to be in such a state. However, if a person consistently misreads her epistemic environment as calling for, say, open-mindedness, but the beliefs of her peers are all epistemically deficient, then there is no objective epistemic advantage to be had by being open-minded. Furthermore, the misreading of situations is itself an epistemic failure. It is arguable that internally consistent behavior does not manifest virtue if the construals this behavior is based on do not reliably track the features of the environment that determine when the exercise of a given virtue is actually called for. Epistemic CAPS traits would be non-factive in this sense, and this may be a problem for any attempt to model the epistemic response to situationism on the response available to virtue ethics.

V. EMPIRICAL SOLUTIONS FOR VIRTUE RELIABILISM

Here we consider how resources from empirical psychology can be mustered to resolve a pressing theoretical challenge for virtue reliabilism. Most virtue reliabilists agree that knowledge is a true belief that can be credited to the agent as a person-level success, a personally praiseworthy accomplishment. This commitment is useful in addressing epistemic luck, the value problem, the generality problem, and other epistemic desiderata. However, basic knowledge from vision, memory, and testimony appears to be too automatic and implicit to warrant person-level credit. If successful functioning does not involve the agent in some important way, then we are hard pressed to credit the agent for any success achieved. Virtue reliabilism must resolve an apparent tension between automaticity and credit.

The clearest way to resolve this tension is to show that basic forms of epistemic success manifest *epistemic agency*. An epistemic success due to the agency of an agent is an epistemic success that is creditable to an agent. Drawing on recent work in the psychology and philosophy of *attention*, we propose an agential epistemic psychology for virtue reliabilism that will support the needed credit attributions for basic epistemic achievements. We argue that when the agential aspect of attention is properly understood, the psychological processes typically invoked by virtue reliabilists will emerge as worthy of epistemic credit because of the role of agency.

The challenge to reliabilism can be put as follows (we will use “sub-personal” and “automatic” interchangeably here):

- (1) Any virtue theoretic success must be a success for which agent level credit is due.
- (2) Many epistemic successes are explained in terms of automatic (implicit) psychological processes.
- (3) An epistemic success caused by automatic (implicit) processes is not an agent-level success, and thus is not a success for which agent-level credit is due.
- (4) Thus, many epistemic successes are not virtue theoretic successes.

Clearly (4) is not a promising conclusion for virtue epistemology. (1) is accepted by Sosa, Greco, and most virtue epistemologists. Any naturalistically credible reliabilist virtue epistemology should endorse (2) because developments in cognitive psychology and neuroscience clearly show the ubiquity of automatic processes in successful cognition. (3) is then particularly important, and needs to be shown false or misleading in some way.

Let's assume here that *control* is a necessary and sufficient condition for epistemic agency. So, an epistemic process will express agency if and only if that process is controlled. Premise (3) will then say that a process cannot be both automatic and *controlled*. Accordingly, (3) will be revised as follows:

- (3*) An epistemic success caused by a process that is not *controlled* by an agent is not an agent-level success, and thus is not a success for which credit is due.³⁷

(3*) still suggests that automaticity is a threat to agency, but we now have a clear condition for agency, namely control. Given the ubiquity of automatic processes, it still appears that a disturbing amount of our mental life would be non-agential if (3*) is true, and the prospects for an agency-based reliabilist VEP would appear grim.

Given this refinement, we look to the nature of attention to show that agency, credit and automaticity can be incorporated into a reliabilist theory of epistemic virtue. Recent work on attention in cognitive psychology (including neurology) and philosophy, particularly in a series of essays by Wayne Wu,³⁸ suggests that attentional processes are solutions to ‘many-many problems.’ An agent confronts a many-many problem in any situation where he has some task at hand but multiple available options to initiate, guide, and complete the task. Initiating and guiding task-relevant activity requires selecting task-relevant options at many points in the process. We do this when we focus on part of our visual field to find our keys, search memory for a name, or initiate a movement in order to complete an action (grabbing a hammer). In each case, a successful attentional process requires input and output selection, both of which are agential, and guidance from input to output selection, which involves the control and integration of diverse psychological processes.

To appreciate a fundamental form of cognitive agency, Wu (2011b) asks us to imagine a species that has the capacity to represent three objects, but no capacity to *attend to* any one of them. This is similar to looking at a stadium full of people but not at any one person. This species can represent a field, but cannot select any portion of it as a determinate object of attention. That capacity in us (selective attention) which is lacking in them is a fundamental aspect of human attention, and it is clearly agential.

Wu (2011a) presents a more ordinary case of a person who intends to kick a ball, and in front of them is a football and a basketball. The available options for success include at least these four: kicking the football with the left foot, kicking the football with the right foot, kicking the basketball with the right foot, or kicking the basketball with the left foot. Taking any path through this “behavior space” requires anchoring attention in some specific target and continuing attentional focus and control. Attentional anchoring is a commitment to a distribution of cognitive resources for a particular purpose, typically some form of speech, action, or decision. Along the way to, say, kicking the football with the left foot, additional many-many problems arise while approaching the area encompassing the ball, and output selection presents many spatial regions to coordinate with foot and body movements to finalize the kick. A successful kick arises from accurate navigation within a behavior space and solutions to a number of many-many problems.³⁹

While kicking a football is an intentional action, an intention or desire can also function as a *standing way of directing and distributing attention* that causally influences person-level processing. Standing motivations direct and weight information automatically by diverting attention away from remote but logically possible scenarios and

toward one's immediate physical environment, or some task-relevant information. For the agent this satisfies the essential need to ignore (contextually) vast amounts of irrelevant information, thus leaving him with a manageable amount of relevant information to process. A standing intention can become consciously represented, but is typically implicit, and is efficient and valuable in part because it does not demand the cognitive resources necessary for conscious representation. Desires and intentions to form true beliefs are likely "standing" in this way.

Let's say that if an automatic process either causes or is caused by a controlled process (e.g., goal-directed anchoring), then it will be part of a larger "mixed" process, and mixed processes will be sufficiently controlled processes, and will thus manifest agency. Mixed processes are not only agential, but they are necessary for success in complex and cognitively demanding environments. No process that is *entirely automatic* will count as a controlled process, but there can be important automatic elements. In fact, some degree of automaticity is usually necessary for successful cognition and action. Any agential process will thus integrate sub-personal (automatic) processes with some controlled, person-level process (e.g., selection from a restaurant menu, kicking a ball, solving a problem). Again, a *wholly* automatic process is not agential.

We can now say that any process (p) is controlled (agential) if any automatic part of (p) is caused by a controlled part of (p) or causes a controlled part of (p). Recalling (3*), which says that a process cannot be both agential and automatic, we can now say that it is actually true when properly understood, since all automatic processes (as opposed to mixed processes) will be wholly automatic. The argument at the beginning of this section is only worrisome if a belief-forming process with any automatic element will be non-agential, but automatic cognitive processes are typically part of broader mixed, agential processes. Our proposal accommodates the ubiquity of automaticity, but shows this to be compatible with attributing agency for basic epistemic achievements. In the following we explain why this kind of agency is normative and sufficient to justify credit attributions.

A good bit of automaticity should be expected in reliable agents. Expertise in an area often "automatizes" certain elements through habituation, so automaticity in an activity should not in general be seen as a sign of diminished praiseworthiness. On the contrary, skill in a performance generally demands automaticity, as in cases of so-called effortless attention.⁴⁰ A novice pianist will pay conscious attention to the movements of the left hand, but such movements become automatic in the expert.⁴¹ The praiseworthiness of expertly reliable and spontaneous agency extends to all forms of epistemic achievements, from basic manual tasks and bodily performances to complex intellectual skills that involve abstract reasoning, like proving a mathematical truth.⁴² A characteristic of such performances is that they are associated with an experience of selflessness and happiness, termed "flow." Automatization will be pervasive in a truly virtuous agent, precisely as a sign of her virtue.

The findings on effortless attention provide an empirically informed way to explain intellectual virtues in terms of spontaneous and reliable cognitive routines⁴³ that have intrinsic normative value, and are guided by interests.⁴⁴ Theories of effortless attention

played a pivotal role in the Russian psychological school known as the “activity theory” that developed during the Soviet period.⁴⁵ Moreover, it has been argued that early Chinese thinking about virtue is best understood in terms of effortless action and attention, which also provides a scientifically based response to recent situationist challenges against virtue ethics.⁴⁶

Returning to our main problematic of reconciling automaticity and credit, we can say that if S manifests cognitive control in an epistemic success, S warrants credit for that success because S’s *agential powers to control and direct attention* are (at least partial) causes of her success. We have an account that strikes the right balance between requiring too much and too little agential involvement for knowledge. Our account of epistemic agency is not mysterious in any way because it is grounded in recent empirical work on attention, and it provides a clear explanation for the mechanisms that generate and transfer value in the agent, and all of this is compatible with the commitments of virtue reliabilism. Recalling our principle of DAT* with which we began the chapter, this agential epistemic psychology provides a clear account of how epistemic value is grounded in the agent, rather than her beliefs.

VI. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have examined the forms of epistemic psychology presupposed by reliabilist and responsibilist virtue epistemology, with an emphasis on the nature and role of epistemic agency. One difference between their respective epistemic psychologies appeared to be that responsibilists require epistemic agency for manifesting a virtue, whereas reliabilists do not. If the argument of the previous section is correct, the real distinction is between the different forms of epistemic agency in use because both epistemic psychologies are agency based. The agential profile for focused, deliberative, conative mental action required to manifest open-mindedness, intellectual courage, or rigor will be different from the agential profile for perceiving, remembering, and communicating, but they all involve forms of epistemic agency because of the forms of attention involved. Looking forward, since psychological facts about agency have a significant *normative* impact in virtue epistemology (given the Direction of Analysis), it is particularly important to explain how different forms of agency produce different forms of epistemic value. It is our hope that continued theorizing about epistemic psychology will shed further light on the foundations of epistemic normativity in virtue epistemology.

NOTES

1. Here “fundamental epistemic value” is similar to what Pritchard calls “final epistemic value” (D. Pritchard, “Recent Work on Epistemic Value,” *American Philosophical Quarterly*

- 44 [2007]: 85–110; D. Pritchard, “Knowing the Answer, Understanding and Epistemic Value,” *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 77 [2008]: 325–339), and Sylvan and Sosa call “foundational normativity” (K. Sylvan and E. Sosa, “The Place of Reasons in Epistemology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Reasons and Normativity*, edited by D. Star [Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming]). All are essentially *non-instrumental* forms or sources of epistemic value.
2. H. Battaly, “Virtue Epistemology,” *Philosophy Compass* 3(4) (2008): 641.
 3. A commitment to belief-based norms is shared by deontological internalism (R. Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge*, 2nd edition [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977]; M. Steup, “A Defense of Internalism,” in *The Theory of Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, 2nd edition, edited by L. Pojman [Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1999]); by process reliabilism (Alvin Goldman, “What Is Justified Belief?” in *Justification and Knowledge*, edited by George Pappas [Boston: D. Reidel, 1979], 1–25); by evidentialism (R. Feldman and E. Conee “Internalism Defended,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 38[1] [2001]: 1–18); and by adequate basing (M. Swain, “Justification and the Basis of Belief,” in *Justification and Knowledge*, edited by George Pappas [Boston: D. Reidel, 1979], 1–25) accounts of justification.
 4. J. Greco and J. Turri, J. (eds.), *Virtue Epistemology: Contemporary Readings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012); L. T. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Battaly, “Virtue Epistemology.”
 5. Zagzebski’s, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*, 137, account focuses on motivational states and does not requiring actually possessing full virtue. This appears to allow for non-dispositional epistemic success, but because she clearly defines motives as ‘emotion-dispositions,’ her theory appears to focus on dispositions of agents as well. T. Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), defends a non-dispositional form of virtue ethics, but does not extend this to virtue epistemology.
 6. There is a resurgence of interest in agent “powers.” See R. Groff, and J. Greco, *Powers and Capacities in Philosophy: The New Aristotelianism* (London: Routledge, 2013). Also relevant is a growing literature on skills and expertise and “knowing-how.” M. Stichter, “Ethical Expertise: The Skill Model Of Virtue,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 10(2) (2007): 183–194; J. Stanley, *Know How* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
 7. Perhaps the best approximation to a complete reliabilist epistemic psychology is E. Sosa, *Judgment and Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), which we discuss in section III.
 8. See especially E. Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*, Vol. I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); J. Greco, *Achieving Knowledge: A Virtue-Theoretic Account of Epistemic Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
 9. J. Baehr, “The Structure of Open-Mindedness,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 41(2) (2011b): 191–213.
 10. İ. İnân, *The Philosophy of Curiosity* (London: Routledge, 2013); D. Whitcomb, “Curiosity Was Framed,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 81(3) (2010): 664–687.
 11. R. C. Roberts and W. J. Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*.

12. Recent discussions of epistemic agency include B. Reed, "Epistemic Agency and the Intellectual Virtues," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 39(4) (2001): 507–526; K. Setiya, "Epistemic Agency: Some Doubts," *Philosophical Issues* 23(1) (2013): 179–198; P. Engel, "Epistemic Responsibility without Epistemic Agency," *Philosophical Explorations* 12(2) (2009): 205–219; Sosa, *Judgment and Agency*.
13. What Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*, calls "low grade" knowledge and what Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*, calls "animal knowledge")
14. There is a considerable literature on the value problem (also called the Meno Problem). See L. T. Zagzebski, "The Search for the Source of Epistemic Good," *Metaphilosophy* 34 (2003): 12–28; W. Jones, "Why Do We Value Knowledge?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34(4) (1997): 423–439; J. L. Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Pritchard, "Recent Work on Epistemic Value"; Greco, *Achieving Knowledge: A Virtue-Theoretic Account of Epistemic Normativity*. There is an interesting axiological debate over what Alvin Goldman calls "epistemic value monism"—whether truth is a sufficient, stand-alone value for epistemic evaluation. A number of essays on this topic are in the collection of essays *Epistemic Value*, edited by A. Haddock and D. Pritchard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
15. R. Foley, "What's Wrong with Reliabilism?" *The Monist* 68(2) (1985): 188–202.
16. See Haddock and Pritchard, *Epistemic Value*, chap. 2, for a nice discussion of epistemic value pluralism.
17. For example, Truetemp cases discussed by Greco, *Achieving Knowledge: A Virtue-Theoretic Account of Epistemic Normativity*, 185; and D. Pritchard, "Anti-luck Virtue Epistemology," *The Journal of Philosophy* 109(3) (2012): 247–279; and cases of easy knowledge from testimony, J. Lackey, "Why We Don't Deserve Credit for Everything We Know," *Synthese* 158(3) (2007): 345–361. Truetemp forms beliefs about the ambient temperature of his environment by checking a slightly faulty thermometer, but suppose a benevolent intervener is able to change the actual temperature of the room automatically to whatever slightly false reading that Truetemp received from the broken thermometer. Truetemp's beliefs about the temperature will be reliable in that environment and these beliefs will be due to his belief-forming abilities in a sense (it is only because he forms the beliefs that he does that the temperature is set to what it is, and thus that his beliefs are true). However, despite reliably achieving success from ability, *Truetemp does not appear to reliably achieve knowledge*, he is just lucky that the benevolent intervener is present. Otherwise his beliefs would all be false, even when formed by the same method. The other case, noted by Lackey, involves beliefs based on the testimony of others, i.e., simply being told something, which is a reliable source of knowledge, but in most cases such beliefs are acquired with such ease that we are hard pressed to assign skill or credit to any truth attained thereby, and if we do, it appears that the speaker, not the hearer, is deserving of credit for having the truth.
18. Strictly speaking, Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*, has a "mixed" virtue epistemology because virtue requires both reliability and proper motivation on her account, but the reliability element is fundamentally constrained by the motivational element, as we will discuss later.
19. For a nice discussion of the different aims of virtue epistemology, see J. Baehr, "Four Varieties of Character-Based Virtue Epistemology," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 46(4) (2008): 469–502.

20. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*, 137.
21. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*, 137.
22. R. Feldman, "Evidentialism," *Philosophical Studies* 48(1) (1985): 15.
23. E. Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective: Selected Essays in Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 138.
24. Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective: Selected Essays in Epistemology*, 271.
25. Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*, 78.
26. Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*, 79.
27. Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*, 57.
28. Sosa and Sylvan, "The Place of Reasons in Epistemology."
29. Sosa, *Judgment and Agency*, 85.
30. Our emphasis, Sosa, *Judgment and Agency*, 72.
31. Sosa, *Judgment and Agency*, 185.
32. J. M. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 112.
33. Including C. Miller, "Social Psychology and Virtue Ethics," *The Journal of Ethics* 7(4) (2003): 365–392; M. Merritt, "Virtue Ethics and Situationist Personality Psychology," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 3(4) (2000): 365–383; G. Sreenivasan, "Errors about Errors: Virtue Theory and Trait Attribution," *Mind* 111(441) (2002): 47–68; O. Flanagan, "Moral Science? Still Metaphysical after All These Years," in *Moral Personality, Identity and Character: Explorations in Moral Psychology*, edited by D. Narvaez and D. K. Lapsley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 52–78; N. E. Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory* (London: Routledge, 2010); D. C. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
34. This is a current and ongoing concern in social psychology. See, for example, S. E. Maxwell, M. Y. Lau, and G. W. Howard, "Is Psychology Suffering from a Replication Crisis? What Does 'Failure to Replicate' Really Mean?" *American Psychologist* 70(6) (2015): 487.
35. Flanagan, "Moral Science? Still Metaphysical after All These Years"; E. Sosa, "Situations against Virtues: The Situationist Attack on Virtue Theory," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences: Philosophical Theory and Scientific Practice* (2009): 274–290.
36. M. Alfano, "Expanding the Situationist Challenge to Reliabilism about Inference," in *Virtue Epistemology Naturalized*, edited by A. Fairweather (Heidelberg: Springer International, 2014), 103–122, calls this 'non-skepticism'.
37. Based on W. Wu, "Mental Action and the Threat of Automaticity," in *Decomposing the Will*, edited by A. Clark, J. Kiverstein, and T. Vierkant, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 255–261.
38. W. Wu, "Confronting Many-Many Problems: Attention and Agentive Control," *Noûs* 45(1) (2011a): 50–76; W. Wu, "Attention as Selection for Action," in *Attention: Philosophical and Psychological Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011b), 97–116; W. Wu, "Mental Action and the Threat of Automaticity." Others working in this area include J. Campbell, "What Is the Role of Location in the Sense of a Visual Demonstrative? Reply to Matthen," *Philosophical Studies* 127(2) (2006): 239–254; C. Mole, D. Smithies, and W. Wu (eds.), *Attention: Philosophical and Psychological Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
39. Even in cases where we simply, for no apparent reason, want to maintain attention to a specific feature of an environment, we will instantiate this basic agent-level process.

40. C. Montemayor and H. H. Haladjian, *Consciousness, Attention, and Conscious Attention* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 52–54.
41. Wu, “Mental Action and the Threat of Automaticity.”
42. M. Csikszentmihalyi and I. S. Csikszentmihalyi, *Optimal Experience: Psychological Studies of Flow in Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
43. M. Brownstein, “Rationalizing Flow: Agency in Skilled Unreflective Action,” *Philosophical Studies* 168(2) (2013): 545–568.
44. B. Bruya (ed.), *Effortless Attention: A New Perspective in the Cognitive Science of Attention and Action* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 219–222.
45. See Y. Dormashev, “Flow Experience Explained on the Grounds of an Activity Approach to Attention,” in *Effortless Attention: A New Perspective in the Cognitive Science of Attention and Action* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 287–333; the research of N. A. Bernstein, *Dexterity and Its Development*, edited by Mark L. Latash and Michael T. Turvey (Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1950), and A. N. Leontiev, *Activity, Consciousness, and Personality*, translated by Marie J. Hall (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978), is particularly relevant.
46. Edward Slingerland, “Toward an Empirically Responsible Ethics: Cognitive Science, Virtue Ethics, and Effortless Attention in Early Chinese Thought,” in *Effortless Attention: A New Perspective in the Cognitive Science of Attention and Action* (2010), 247–286.

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CHAPTER 42

VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE DEMOCRATIC LIFE

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I. INTRODUCTION

WHEN reflecting upon the revival of interest in virtue ethics in the 1990s, and in particular its implications for democracy and political life, Michael Slote remarked, “Virtue ethics has a proven record of siding with anti-democratic social/political ideals, and when one considers that neither Aristotle nor Plato favored democratic forms of government, one may well wonder whether ancient models can provide any sort of plausible contemporary basis for political philosophy or for ethics as a whole.”¹

In this chapter I examine how the virtue ethicist’s focus on what kind of person we should be can in fact yield valuable insights for democratic theory.² The virtue ethics tradition can help elucidate the link between democracy and human flourishing by drawing attention to democracy’s potential for cultivating and refining the “intellectual virtues.” Following Zagzebski, I see virtue epistemology as a branch of virtue ethics.³ Intellectual humility, fairness in evaluating the arguments of others, the social virtue of being communicative, and so on, are *constitutive* of the good life. To act effectively as a moral agent in the world, one must act from a position of *knowledge* (rather than ignorance). For virtue epistemologists, our cognitive life is a domain of legitimate moral inquiry. Democracy, understood as “a way of life,” helps guard against intellectual or epistemic *vice* (e.g., rashness, close-mindedness, acting from impulsive emotions, and so on). Thus, interconnections between democracy and virtue epistemology, especially epistemic virtues and vices, bear scrutiny.

My goal in this chapter is not to place the primary focus on any textual interpretation of Aristotle or any other specific virtue theorist. Instead, I begin by considering three common concerns often raised about democracy. These are what I call the Irrationality Problem, the Problem of Autonomy, and the Epistocracy Objection. Integrating insights from the Ancient Greeks (e.g., concerning virtue, *eudaimonia*, and the original mean of

“democracy”), John Dewey, and recent work in virtue epistemology, I canvass a virtue-based defense of democracy, one that conceives of democracy as an “*inquiry-based*” mode of social existence.” If this argument is persuasive, then attending to these three objections will prove to be a fruitful exercise in illustrating the different ways in which virtue epistemology could help enhance our understanding of democracy as a moral ideal. Democracy helps us cultivate and refine the “intellectual virtues” integral to flourishing as both individuals and as societies.

II. DEMOCRACY AS A VOTING RULE: THREE CONCERNS

Democracy has been defined, defended, and critiqued in a variety of different ways by diverse theorists and critics. Democracy is commonly equated with a “majority rule” voting mechanism, a mechanism that determines who shall govern. Defenders of democracy emphasize the different moral values democracy can help realize, such as equality, liberty, deliberation, or inclusion. And yet some have argued that voting is irrational,⁴ that majority rule is a political system which contravenes our individual moral autonomy,⁵ or that democracy permits the ignorant to rule.⁶

In his seminal book *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, published in 1957, Anthony Downs argued that it is *irrational* to vote. And if it is irrational to vote, it must also be irrational to become informed about politics. This follows, according to rational choice theory (RCT), because voting incurs a *certain cost* on the voter, but has no benefit given that one’s vote will not likely make any difference to the outcome of an election.

Consider, for example, Ted, a typical voter in an upcoming US presidential election. Suppose Ted has a preference for presidential candidate X to win the upcoming election. Ted likes X’s political platform. The principles and policies the candidate proposes to use as a guide for her term as president strike Ted as reasonable priorities to inform the presidential office. These policies are ones that Ted believes would help hard-working families—families like his. However, like most people, Ted lives a very busy life. He has a full-time job, children he cares for, do-it-yourself projects he hopes to finish in his home, old friends he has been meaning to catch up with for months, and so on. The election is tomorrow—should Ted vote? Ted’s voting will incur a certain cost (e.g., taking the time to vote) yet not yield him any likely benefit (his one vote will not determine the outcome of the presidential election). It is thus irrational for Ted to vote. Thus it appears that defenders of democracy face a problem. Let us call this the *Irrationality Problem*.

A second challenge to democracy comes from *philosophical anarchism*. In *In Defense of Anarchy*, Robert Wolff develops a philosophical anarchist objection to democracy. Wolff examines the alleged tension between autonomy and authority (the right to command, and to be obeyed). Moral autonomy, he argues (following Immanuel Kant),

requires us to take responsibility for making the final decisions about what to do. The requirement that we “self-legislate” our ends conflicts with authority’s requirement that we accept the commands of another. Wolff considers three attempts to reconcile the conflict between autonomy and authority: *unanimous direct democracy*, *representative democracy*, and *majoritarian democracy*. A unanimous direct democracy would be compatible with autonomy because it mandates that I must agree with every decision to be implemented in law, given that I have veto power to void any legislation I do not agree with. However, a unanimous direct democracy is simply not feasible, as there would seldom, if ever, be *unanimity* on complex policy questions. Furthermore, a direct democracy would be enormously demanding on the time and energy of the average person.

Representative democracy and majoritarian democracy help redress the latter concerns, but, according to Wolff, they only do so by contravening the demands of moral autonomy. He concludes that we should “embrace philosophical anarchism and treat *all* governments as non-legitimate bodies whose commands must be judged and evaluated in each instance before they are obeyed; or else, we must give up as quixotic the pursuit of autonomy in the political realm and submit ourselves (by an implicit promise) to whatever form of government appears most just and beneficent at the moment.”⁷

The third and final objection to democracy comes from Plato. In *The Republic*, Plato, via the character of Socrates, outlines the details of his just society. Plato’s account of a *polis* ruled by philosopher kings (who always pursue the truth) contains a scathing critique of democracy. Philosophers pursue the truth and possess the appropriate “psychic ordering” of the soul, with reason playing the primary role in their motivation and deliberations. The *demos*, or rule by majority, are motivated by their own appetites, and thus democracy is simply a political system that panders to the desires of the ignorant majority. Democracy, argued Plato, is like a ship that lacks a captain who has the knowledge of navigation. The true navigator, he remarks, “must study the seasons of the year, the sky, the stars, the winds and all the other subjects appropriate to his profession if he is to be really fit to control a ship . . .”⁸

What all three of these challenges to democracy—the Irrationality Problem, the Problem of Autonomy and the Epistocracy Objection—share is that they all equate democracy with a political system of majority rules voting. But this is a very narrow understanding of democracy. In “The Original Meaning of ‘Democracy’: Capacity to Do Things, Not Majority Rule,” Josiah Ober notes that the term *demos* refers to a collective body; and democracy was understood, in the original Greek meaning of the word, as “capacity to do things.” “‘Majority rule’ was an intentionally pejorative diminution, urged by democracy’s Greek critics.”⁹

The virtue-epistemological defense of democracy developed in this chapter is one that harkens for a return to this original Greek meaning of the word “democracy.” The original meaning of “democracy” as the collective capacity of a public to make good things happen in the public realm is very compatible with the understanding of *knowledge* employed today by many virtue epistemologists. The latter often define “knowledge” as “success from ability”¹⁰ or “a state of cognitive contact with reality arising out of acts of intellectual virtue.”¹¹ The fusion of the original Greek meaning

of democracy and the virtue epistemological construal of knowledge is perhaps best realized in the pragmatist's epistemic defense of democracy, especially the work of John Dewey. According to Dewey, a certain kind of social life—namely, conjoint communicated experience—is “a precondition for the full application of intelligence to the solution of social problems.”¹² To piece together a defense of democracy that invokes insights from the Ancient Greeks, Dewey, and virtue epistemology, we should begin by developing a response to the three concerns typically raised against democracy as a voting rule.

III. IS DEMOCRACY “RATIONAL”?

There are many distinct problems with Downs's economic theory of democracy, but perhaps the most striking shortcoming of the application of *homo economicus* to politics is its impoverished understanding of both democracy and of human motivation. RCT presumes that an agent has rational reasons to do something insofar as that specific action contributes to the agent's well-being, where “well-being” is understood as *preference satisfaction*. So RCT focuses on assessing the specific act of voting, and it employs an agnostic understanding of “interest” or “well-being.” In a situation of perfect information, a voter would compare what her expected utility would be for having any particular candidate win an election. The rational course of action is that which maximizes the voter's expected utility.

But a virtue epistemological analysis of these issues compels us to *reframe* the democratic project in a manner that draws attention to (1) democracy as a “way of life,” rather than simply a majority rules voting mechanism; and (2) a *perfectionist* versus preference satisfaction understanding of “well-being,” one that attends to our nature as reflective, social animals.

Rather than asking, “Is it rational for Bob to vote?” as RCT posits, a virtue epistemological approach will begin with the question “Would a virtuous person choose the democratic life?” The answer to this question would be “yes” if the choice of the democratic life is the life that would promote her *eudaimonia* at least, if not more, than any other (non-democratic) way of life. Non-democratic ways of life run contrary to the conjoint communicative experience typical of an aspiring society of moral and political equals. As such, they threaten the moral requirements of living a life of epistemic or intellectual virtue. For example, the non-democratic life of a hierarchical society threatens the virtues of intellectual humility, fairness in evaluating the arguments of others, and cultivating the adaptive intellect that emerges from connecting with many, and diverse, minds when contemplating what entails sage collective action in a constantly changing and challenging environment.

Because virtue epistemology places the primary focus on *the kind of person we should be*, especially the *epistemic life* we should live, it will reject both the *focus* and *substance*

of RCT's analysis of voting. It is a mistake to focus only on the reasons for engaging in formal political activity, like casting one's ballot. It is also a mistake to place the evaluative focus on a voter's *proximate* reason for voting or not voting without considering the more general motivations that follow from *human nature*.

According to perfectionism, human well-being consists in the development of our natural or essential capacities. The question "Would a virtuous person choose the democratic life?" thus helps frame the topic of inquiry in a way that overcomes the skewed focus of RTC. The focus is taken away from thinking of democracy as primarily a voting mechanism. Furthermore, the possible *reasons* for engaging in such a life transcend the agnostic fixation on the proximate causation for voting (or not voting), such as preference satisfaction. Instead, the focus is placed on attending to the capacities constitutive of our being human beings.¹³ The life of conjoint communicated experience positively enhances the human life in a variety of different ways. "Political and social participation has *intrinsic value* for human life and well-being."¹⁴ Furthermore, dialogue and debate about how to live, whether it be with family members over Sunday dinner, or coworkers on a coffee break, or with fellow citizens at a town hall meeting, helps humans develop and refine the "intellectual virtues" necessary to flourish, and doing this can be enjoyable.

There are obvious instrumental benefits that come from peaceful, communicative, and collective interaction with others—such as a reduction in warfare and violence, the enjoyment of basic rights and freedoms, and the collective action necessary to improve public transport, reduce mortality risks, improve public education, and so on. But the *intrinsic benefits* of the democratic way of life must also be emphasized, and help explain why it is rational for our species to engage in the democratic life. Ober aptly captures the Aristotelian link between democracy and eudaimonia when he states,

Political participation has non-instrumental, as well as instrumental, value for humans because of the kind of beings we are. It is because we are, as Aristotle saw, a political-animal kind of being that the opportunity for exercising a natural capacity for practicing democracy, defined in a minimal sense as "association in public decision," is for us a good-in-itself that is both inherently happiness-producing and necessary to our full happiness. It is necessary to our complete happiness because, along with (for example) our capacities to reason and to love, the capacity to associate ourselves in decisions through the medium of speech is constitutive of our distinctive kind of being.¹⁵

The process of evolution by natural selection did not shape *homo sapiens* to be "hedonic maximizers." If our species only experienced positive emotions like those of the sensory pleasures, we would not have survived for long in the kind of environment that humans have historically faced. Martin Seligman (2002), a pioneer in the field of positive psychology, distinguishes different kinds and levels of happiness. Hedonists who pursue the immediate positive feelings—like the pleasure of a food they enjoy or a compliment—seek the *momentary* happiness of what Seligman calls the "pleasant life." But these

pleasures fade quickly and thus do not have a lasting impact on the subjective well-being of actors. What Seligman calls the “good life” involves utilizing your signature strengths (e.g., wisdom and knowledge, humanity and love, and temperance) in work, love, and raising children to produce happiness and gratification. Enduring happiness, the kind one enjoys when one lives the truly “excellent life,” is realized when we lead a *meaningful life*. The meaningful life is a life in which we utilize our signature strengths and virtues in the service of something much larger than the self. Thus such a life requires that we become psychologically connected and continuous with others. The *full* life, argues Seligman, consists in living all three of the “pleasant life,” the “good life,” and the “meaningful life.”¹⁶

After spending years of studying what makes people happy, Seligman remarks,

What does Positive Psychology tell us about finding purpose in life, about leading a meaningful life beyond the good life? I am not sophomoric enough to put forward a complete theory of meaning, but I do know that it consists in attachment to something larger, and the larger the entity to which you attach yourself, the more meaning in your life.¹⁷

Contra to what Downs’s economic theory of democracy would have us believe, with its skeptical focus on the formal activity of voting, rational agents do have an interest in fostering interpersonal self-extension (i.e., holding many and diverse minds present in their own mind) because (a) it is *pleasurable*, and (b) because this will increase our *enduring personal and societal resources*.

The question “Why should I choose the democratic life?” must be answered by considering the kind of species *homo sapiens* actually is. The democratic way of life, by making us psychologically connected and continuous with others, is *enjoyable*, and it facilitates (moral and intellectual) *development*. Political behavior, like playful and loving behavior, has arisen out of the biological structure shaped and molded by our evolutionary and life history. A history where language and socialization, the ability to ponder the future of *groups* (rather than just individuals), and the capacity to accurately perceive, and appropriately respond to, the emotional states of others (in much the same way as we do to our own emotional states) had (and no doubt continues to have) *adaptive* benefits.

Democratic life is not only intrinsically valuable; being psychologically connected and continuous with others also facilitates the moral and cognitive development that helps individuals and societies flourish in an unpredictable and often challenging world. Because democratic decision-making is a deliberative process that involves people from (a) *diverse geographical locations*, (b) *diverse age groups*, and (c) *diverse socioeconomic backgrounds*, the “collective capacity of a public to make things happen in the public realm” (Ober, 2008, p. 8) is strengthened compared to how it would fare if the decision-making process were insulated from the accountability and criticism of such diverse viewpoints.

IV. AUTONOMY AND DEMOCRACY

The human desire for knowledge,¹⁸ deliberation,¹⁹ and planning (individual and collective) courses of action are best realized when we live lives conducive to the acquisition and refinement of “intellectual virtue” rather than “intellectual vice.” Democracy is a mode of life that permits us to become psychologically connected and continuous with many and diverse minds. As such, the democratic way of life is *rational* for us to pursue, as it is a way of life that is inherently happiness-producing (given human nature), as well as a way of life that helps cultivate and refine intellectual virtue. Exposure to varied stimuli can improve our moral and epistemic capacities. In this section I will examine how an account of *epistemic autonomy* can be deployed to further strengthen the case in favor of democracy.

Defenders of democracy might be tempted to refute Robert Wolff’s challenge to the authority of democracy by simply noting the track record that modern democracies have for promoting the autonomy of their citizenry compared to that of non-democracies (e.g., monarchy, dictatorship, theocracy, etc.). Because democracies are political regimes with a better track record for protecting fundamental legal rights like freedom of expression, freedom of religious conscience, and freedom of movement, one might be tempted to quickly dismiss Wolff’s challenge from philosophical anarchism as simply an academic “armchair” criticism of democracy. A comparative *institutional* analysis of democracy would reveal that it is a way of life much more conducive to individual autonomy (though perhaps not perfectly realizing autonomy as a moral ideal) than any other way of living that humans have tried in the past. I am very sympathetic to such an empirical rebuttal. But directly addressing Wolff’s philosophical challenge can also be helpful, as it brings to the fore the “habits of mind” that the democratic way of life can help cultivate and refine. And this has important ramifications for how we ought to conceive of the relation between autonomy and authority.

Rather than beginning, as Wolff’s analysis of autonomy and authority does, with an account of autonomy that presumes all forms of interference that are not consented to represent a *morally objectionable* affront to the autonomy of the person, virtue epistemology can begin from a more nuanced position. This nuanced position is an extension of the position we generally take with respect to paternalism and children. It is morally permissible for parents to intervene, in a paternalistic fashion, with their child’s actions because a child does not possess the cognitive capacities to reliably make sound decisions that will promote her opportunities for flourishing. Parents can compel their children (despite their protests!) to regularly attend school, participate in physical activities, show respect for others, and so on.

The parenting example is instructive because it suggests that autonomy is best construed as a mean state of character with regard to reliance on one’s own powers in acting, choosing, and forming opinions.²⁰ As such, to possess the virtue of autonomy is to

occupy the mean between the extremes of deficiency and excess. Children act autonomously when they avoid the extremes of arrogant self-sufficiency (excess) and over-reliance (deficiency) on others. The same thing can be said about adults. In the case of adults, the signposts for “deficiency” and “excess” are adjusted accordingly, to reflect the epistemic improvements typically associated with developing from childhood to adulthood. “Autonomy is a proper degree and kind of reliance on others, what is proper being determined by the end of the activity in which one is engaging.”²¹

A virtue-oriented analysis of autonomy and authority will thus place a great deal of emphasis on the *quality* of the capacity for virtuous decision-making, for both those who will be interfered with and those doing the interference. The interdependence between the volitional and cognitive aspects of autonomy are missed if one adopts, as Wolff does, an account of autonomy that presumes we are *epistemically self-sufficient* (in which case what I have called the “excess of autonomy” is taken to be the norm), and thus it fails to address the concern that a primary reason that we value thinking about matters for ourselves is that we want to maximize our chances of having a justified true belief.

In *Epistemic Authority*, Linda Zagzebski argues that if we trust ourselves epistemically, then we cannot systemically fail to trust others. She identifies a number of different forms of *epistemic self-reliance*. The most extreme form, which Zagzebski calls *extreme epistemic egoism*, maintains that “I have reason to believe *p* only when the direct exercise of my faculties gives me reasons for *p*.”²² Elizabeth Fricker describes this ideal of “intellectual autonomy” (which parallels Wolff’s argument in the political realm) this way:

[A] superior being, with all the epistemic powers to find out everything she wanted to know for herself, could live up to this idea of complete epistemic autonomy without thereby circumscribing the extent of her knowledge. Given the risks involved in epistemic dependence on others . . . , this superior being is, I suppose, epistemically better placed than humans are. That is, if she knew at first hand just as much as I myself know in large part through trust in others’ testimony, she would be epistemically more secure, hence both practically more independent, and—in some abstract sense—more autonomous than I am. In the same way that I might regret that I cannot fly, or live to be 300 years old, I might regret that I am not such a being.²³

Such ideals of intellectual autonomy are problematic because they fail to recognize the fact that the reasons we privilege our own faculties when ascertaining what to reliably believe also apply to other minds. And we ought to treat like cases alike. Autonomy requires *interdependence* with many and distinct minds because the volitional aspects of autonomy cannot be disconnected from the cognitional aspects. “In the epistemic domain [autonomy] requires believing certain things because an authority tells me to do so. In the practical domain it no doubt requires doing certain things because an authority tells me to do so.”²⁴ And thus Zagzebski emphasizes the importance of *reflective self-consciousness*, a kind of “cognitive filter” that helps us demarcate what is worth believing and what ought to be challenged, modified, or rejected.

The perfectionist account of rationality briefly sketched in the previous section, which highlights the epistemic benefits of being psychologically connected and continuous with many and diverse minds, can complement a virtue-based account of reconciling autonomy and authority. Paternalistic actions only constitute potentially morally problematic actions when they constrict the menu of options that rational, informed, *eudaimonia*-seeking agents would possibly construct. In other words, the menu of possible options that follow from decisions made from intellectual *virtue* (e.g., made after careful deliberation, attention to detail, the consideration of counter-arguments, etc.) versus intellectual *vice* (e.g., rashness, close-mindedness, impulsive emotions, etc.) ought to be treated differently in terms of the soundness of potential paternalistic interference in them. If the interference limits choices or actions that would be irrational for virtuous agents to select in the first place, and interfering in the choices of such actions would be an *all-things-considered* better outcome than non-interference, then such interference can be morally justified for the virtue theorist.²⁵

Too much reliance on others, such that a person never critically assesses, questions, or re-examines authority, is an epistemic *vice* rather than a virtue. Conversely, the *absence* of intellectual humility, to such a degree that a person eschews the opinions or feedback of knowledgeable others, is also an intellectual vice. The virtue of autonomy is realized when the proper degree and kind of reliance on others is achieved.

In *Democratic Authority*, David Estlund introduces the “Expert/Boss” fallacy to focus on a Wolff-like criticism of the relation between autonomy and the authority of democracy. Estlund begins by considering the parallel between medical and political decisions. Considering Estlund’s example is useful for my purpose, as I hope it will permit me to develop the case for the claim that the closer a democratic polity comes to approximating a virtuous actor that possesses *intellectual virtue*, the stronger the duty to accept democratic decisions and outcomes (in much the same way we have a duty to accept the medical decision-making of doctors who approximate decision-makers that possess the relevant epistemic expertise).

In the case of deciding to take a particular medical prescription, we would not want our decision to be made democratically. This could prove to have fatal consequences for us. Instead, we would defer to medical experts. If these experts recommend taking drug X for ailment Y, then we would take drug X because the people making this recommendation are the most competent judges to decide “what should one do when suffering from ailment Y.”

In the context of medical decision-making, argues Estlund, the right of doctors to make these decisions comes from the fact that we have given our consent. But politics is different “since most of us have never consented to the political authority of the government that rules over us.”²⁶ And so the question arises of what the normative basis of democratic authority is. For Estlund, the political justification cannot be of the form “political authority as expertise.” For this commits what he calls the Expert/Boss fallacy. “Someone’s knowledge about what should be done leaves completely open what should be done about who is to rule.”²⁷

But virtue epistemology, when applied to democratic governance, will not conceive of the Expert/Boss conflation as a fallacy. For the virtue theorist, we can determine what our moral duties are by asking what a virtuous person would do in the same circumstances. So a doctor's (moral) right to make a decision for us about which medication to take stems not (solely) from the fact that we have consented to this, but from the fact that medical experts possess the epistemic virtues required to determine what the best course of action is in such a situation. That is why we give medical consent to doctors (versus to our barber, plumber, or politician). We give consent to our doctors *because* they have knowledge, understood as "success from ability."

In the case of medical decision-making, we have a (self-regarding) moral duty to defer the judgment about which course of action to take to remedy an ailment to medical experts. A doctor possesses (or at least approximates) the epistemic virtues necessary for achieving health. Of course there are provisos attached to this. Much depends on the actual expertise and motivation of the doctor in question. In some cases there may be a duty to get a second opinion. Or if there is a basis for thinking that a doctor is making prescriptions simply to increase revenue for a pharmaceutical company, and so on, then she lacks the requisite virtues and we are not bound to follow her advice.

We can now draw an analogy with the authority of democracy. The authority of democratic lawmaking, for virtue epistemologists, must come from its "epistemic fitness" as both a way of life and as a political system.²⁸ Democracy provides opportunities for the development, and refinement, of both moral and intellectual virtue. The more numerous and varied points of contact of conjoint communicated experience, argued John Dewey, creates a "greater diversity of stimuli to which an individual has to respond."²⁹ Democracy capitalizes on the epistemic benefits of diversity. It creates a creative and inclusive environment for problem-solving. It also creates feedback mechanisms, such as periodic elections and protests, that permit the democratic polity to learn from experience and enhance its capacity to "succeed from ability."³⁰ Furthermore, democratic decision-making is *provisional*. It is open to revision in light of new moral insights and empirical discoveries. And this gives democracy an immense competitive advantage over non-democratic modes of life.

So what, then, is the *normative basis* of democratic authority? If I have not given my individual consent to democracy, how can I be morally bound to abide by its dictates? Part (though perhaps not all) of the basis is that democracy promotes *knowledge* (and it promotes knowledge better than any other way of life). A moral agent, according to virtue epistemology, must ask herself, "How should I live, epistemically?" And the answer to this question will focus on the appraisal of the choice of different "modes of life" (rather than just specific actions). The epistemically responsible life is one that celebrates Socratic pedagogy. A moral agent must be curious, active, critical, and willing to resist arbitrary authority and peer pressure. Which political arrangement is most compatible with this mode of "reflective living"? I believe democracy is the only serious contender. Like the authority of a medical doctor, a democratic government can, provided it passes a threshold of "rough approximation" to an agent with *phronesis* (moral and intellectual virtue), generate a (conditional) moral duty to obey.

Briefly returning then to Estlund's Expert/Boss fallacy, I do not believe that virtue epistemologists must see the conflation of these two issues as a fallacy. Assuming your doctor actually is an expert on your health, then she is your "boss" when it comes to medical decisions about your health. You have a moral obligation to follow her advice because there is a duty to do what a person with epistemic virtue would do. Does it follow then, that individual consent is not legally required in such cases? Am I suggesting that doctors ought to be given the authority to compel their patients to take prescriptions or undergo surgery they do not want to take or undergo? My answer is "no" to both questions. There could be a variety of other reasons, based on the moral and intellectual virtues, for not forcing people to act in accordance with *phronesis* in such cases. Doing so might constrain their ability to develop into independent and reflective moral agents. Compelling people to be virtuous in decisions about their own health can have many countervailing consequences (undermining their potential for virtue in other aspects of their lives). But this does not undermine the point that there is a moral duty and that one ought to consider the advice of one's doctor as advice from both an expert and a (*medical decision-making*) boss.

But then isn't the same true of democracy?, the critic will ask. Yes! The full development of the account I have in mind here would want to build safeguards and checks into the account of democratic authority. Such safeguards would include not only civil disobedience,³¹ but also constitutional checks, free press, and so on, that help guard against unvirtuous majorities. Democratic authority is *conditional*, and the strength of the duty to accept democratic legitimacy occurs along a *spectrum*. The closer a democratic polity comes to approximating a virtuous actor, the stronger the duty to accept democratic decisions and outcomes. But this is never a blind duty to concede one's epistemic responsibilities to the majority. Moral and intellectual virtues require the citizens of democracy to be active, critical, and reflective. Democratic law-making is always provisional, and it has constraints (imposed by the moral and intellectual virtues). And a fully developed virtue-oriented account of political obligation would incorporate these points.

V. WHY NOT EPISTOCRACY?

The virtue-based account of democracy developed in the previous sections of this chapter support the Deweyan account of democracy as an "*inquiry-based* mode of social existence." The pragmatist view of politics is at its very heart epistemic, for it treats morals and politics as a kind of deliberation or inquiry.³² "Dewey develops his conception of inquiry against the backdrop of a metaphysical vision of humans as embedded in an objectively precarious world and seeking a mode of activity which will allow them to overcome this precariousness."³³ I have argued, contra its critics, that democracy is a defensible "way of life" for humans because it is a *rational* way of life for us and one that gives rise to a limited and normatively attractive account of authority.

Plato's challenge from epistocracy questions the *epistemic foundations* of democracy. Plato believes that democracy is simply "rule by the ignorant." A society governed by the average (ignorant) person is a recipe for disaster. Plato's ideal society is one ruled by philosophers who pursue the truth, rather than simply pandering to the appetites of the *demos* (which is what he thinks democracy does). Plato's proposed measures to ensure that philosophers rule for the common good include abolishing private property and the family for the philosopher kings, in addition to strict educational guidelines and eugenic breeding.

Plato's proposed measures to secure the relation between "knowledge acquisition" and "good governance" reveal the limitations of his understanding of how *homo sapiens* acquire and refine intellectual virtue. With the benefit of a further 2,000+ years of human history, and empirical insights from anthropology, evolutionary biology, psychology, education, and so on, we no doubt now see many of Plato's proposed measures as rather naïve. While Plato's suggestion that society ought to simply harness the cognitive power of a homogenous group of "knowledge elites" might have some initial intuitive attraction, it is empirically suspect.

Plato's critique of democracy is illustrative of the severe limitations of a *conceptual-level* normative analysis of the institutions that ought to govern human affairs. Plato is perhaps the first, and best, example of a political philosopher who employs what the legal scholar Adrian Vermeule (2006) calls "the nirvana fallacy." This fallacy occurs when one takes an excessively optimistic view of one institution (in Plato's case, *rule by philosophers*) and an excessively pessimistic (or jaundiced) view of the other (for Plato, that is democracy). Plato believed that rule by philosophers was the best form of government because he believed that individuals like Socrates best exemplified the intellectual virtues needed to ensure that a polity pursued the truth, rather than pursuing what was merely popular, or pandering to the appetites of the *demos*.

In contemporary political philosophy, many philosophers still attempt to resolve the apparent tension between the liberal (i.e., constraints on the majority to protect individual rights) and democratic (i.e., self-government) aspirations of *liberal democracy* by engaging in a primarily conceptual-level analysis of what these ideals entail. It is thus not uncommon for champions of either constitutionalism or democracy to favor a particular institutional prescription, like judicial or legislative supremacy, on the basis that the integrity of one particular institution could reasonably be called into question when dealing with certain important societal issues.

Champions of judicial supremacy, for example, often express concern over the fact that legislatures, unlike judges, must be elected and thus are more likely to be swayed by the need to cater to public opinion if they hope to be re-elected. And when issues of principle are at stake, so goes the reasoning, the issues should be resolved by public officials who are *politically insulated* from such pressures.

But all institutions, just like all individuals, have potential virtues and vices, and an empirically informed normative theory will emphasize the importance of getting *credible* empirical information concerning the successes and limitations of distinct deliberative bodies. It is dangerous and imprudent to move from conceptual ideals to

operating-level rules. Rather than assume that judges (or philosopher kings, in the case of Plato), as opposed to legislatures, have a monopoly on the virtues most conducive to helping a polity flourish when issues of principle are at stake, a virtue epistemological approach favors a strategy of *dispersing power* among many different and diverse minds. Some issues might indeed be best left to the expertise of judges, but not others. And the key issue is *knowing* which, of the numerous issues facing complex modern societies, those are.

Legislative bodies have many distinctive epistemic features. Such deliberative bodies typically comprise individuals from different *geographical* territories, they typically have *diverse expertise* (e.g., professional backgrounds in law, medicine, business, etc.), and they are *accountable* to their constituents. So the many and diverse minds that legislatures represent provide an important body of knowledge that can greatly enhance society's ability to respond to the challenges of an unpredictable and challenging environment. However, legislatures, like any individual, can be swayed by pressures to conform, can act for spurious reasons, can be hasty, and so on (i.e., *intellectual vice*). Thus it would be imprudent to confer *all power* to legislative assemblies. For this would unduly constrict society's "menu of options." Thus it is prudent to subject democratic decision-making to some checks and balances, such as ensuring freedom of the press and some judicial oversight of democratic law-making. To avoid the dangers of the nirvana fallacy, which presupposes that one institution or particular branch of government is always best placed to resolve contentious societal issues (like constitutional matters), a virtue epistemological approach can prescribe that there be a separation of powers in a liberal democracy, and that it is best for a polity to steer the *mean* between legislative and judicial supremacy.³⁴

Champions of judicial supremacy are often quick to move from the fact that legislatures must be elected, and thus could just pander to the preferences of the majority, to the prescription that judicial review is the best route for pursuing constitutional change. But an empirically informed virtue-based institutional analysis will resist such a hasty conclusion. One must weigh the diverse expertise that legislatures have at their disposal against those of judicial deliberative bodies. When one considers the resources and expertise that the legislative and judicial branches of government in the United States (for example) have at their disposal, things tip more in favor of granting legislatures greater leeway in terms of resolving the contentious sociopolitical disputes that involve legal change and constitutional updating. Vermeule summarizes the differences between judiciary and non-judicial institutions in the United States:

In the twentieth century nonjudicial institutions of government grew much faster than the judiciary; consider that in 1999 the total federal judicial budget was \$3.9 billion; while the administrative budget of the national political branches alone ran to some \$80 billion—twenty-one times larger. Congress, the White House, and the federal administrative agencies, both executive and independent, together form an institutional system whose current scale and scope—measured by resources, revenue, personnel, outputs, or any other dimension—dwarf the scale on which courts

operate. This disparity ensures that the judiciary lacks the logistical capacity to review more than a small fraction of political-branch decisions.³⁵

The fact that the logistical capacity of the judiciary is severely limited, when compared to the non-judicial branches of government, means that its potential to significantly refine the intellectual virtues needed to navigate society through the challenges of a complex and changing world are constrained. This is not to eschew any role for the courts on contentious constitutional issues. But it certainly rules out the ambitious role that champions of judicial supremacy often attribute to the courts.

Deferring to the courts to resolve pressing social and political issues can narrow a society's collective capacity to make good things happen in the public realm precisely because courts are deliberative bodies that are composed of both fewer and more similar minds than are legislatures. The House of Representatives is composed of 435 members elected every two years from among the fifty states, apportioned to their total populations. The Senate is composed of 100 members, two from each state. The Supreme Court is composed of just eight Associate Justices and one Chief Justice, all of whom are appointed for life. Furthermore, "between 1960 and 2004, about 45 percent of the members [of Congress] were former lawyers, the rest were former business people, teachers, physicians, soldiers, and so forth. But contrast, all Supreme Court justices are lawyers."³⁶ In addition to being less numerous and serving longer terms, Supreme Court judges come from the same professional background. This means they have a much more limited "pool of knowledge" than do typical legislatures.

The "*inquiry-based* mode of social existence" account of democracy developed in this chapter prescribes that we take seriously the epistemic capacities of different deliberative bodies. This can be contrasted with a primarily conceptual or principled defense of democracy, which risks ignoring *who* constitutes such bodies, and the resources they typically have at their disposal to invest in addressing pressing societal concerns. Advocates of the latter typically move directly from abstract ideals of constitutionalism and the inviolability of rights to operating-level rules for legal interpretation, rules that privilege judicial updating of constitutional law over formal amendment.

VI. CONCLUSION

Despite what some of its critics maintain, I believe democracy can be defended as a rational way of life and one that *facilitates* (rather than impedes) both autonomy and knowledge. To fixate the evaluative focus of democracy on just formal political activities like voting is to adopt a very narrow understanding of democracy. In this chapter I have tried to show how virtue epistemology offers useful resources to democratic theory. Like virtue ethics, virtue epistemology places a primary focus on the kind of person we ought to want to become. To associate with others "as moral and political equals" in the democratic life is to commit ourselves to something larger than ourselves.

Defining democracy as an *inquiry-based* mode of social existence helps place the evaluative focus of democracy back on the original Greek meaning: on the collective capacity of a public to make good things happen in the public realm. The democratic life is *pleasurable*; it provides us with a way of life that engages our innate predisposition to deliberate with one another on how best to achieve ends. Democracy also helps cultivate and refine, by tapping into the wisdom of many and diverse minds, the moral and intellectual virtues needed to ensure that our politics flourish in a constantly changing and challenging world.

NOTES

1. M. Slote, "Virtue Ethics and Democratic Values," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 24 (1993): 5.
2. I am grateful to the members of the Queen's Political Philosophy Reading group for their helpful comments and suggestions on a draft version of this chapter. I am also thankful to the editor Nancy Snow for her useful feedback and questions on earlier versions of the chapter.
3. L. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), offers the following extensive list of intellectual virtues, many of which (such as "fairness in evaluating the arguments of others") in fact are, or entail, moral virtues as well:
 - (1) The ability to recognize the salient facts; sensitivity to details;
 - (2) Open-mindedness in collecting and appraising evidence;
 - (3) Fairness in evaluating the arguments of others;
 - (4) Intellectual humility;
 - (5) Intellectual perseverance, diligence, care, and thoroughness;
 - (6) Adaptability of intellect;
 - (7) The detective's virtues: thinking of coherent explanations of the facts;
 - (8) Being able to recognize reliable authority;
 - (9) Insight into persons, problems, theories;
 - (10) The teaching virtues: the social virtues of being communicative, including intellectual candor and knowing your audience and how they respond.
4. A. Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1957).
5. R. P. Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
6. Plato, *The Republic*, translated by Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Books, 2003).
7. Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchy*, 71.
8. Plato, *The Republic*, 488e.
9. J. Ober, "The Original Meaning of 'Democracy': Capacity to Do Things, not Majority Rule," *Constellations* 15 (2008): 3. Also see J. Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); and K. Raaflaub, "Democracy, Oligarchy, and the Concept of the 'Free Citizen' in Late Fifth-Century Athens," *Political Theory* 11 (1983): 517–544.
10. J. Greco, *Achieving Knowledge: A Virtue-Theoretic Account of Epistemic Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3.
11. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*, 270.

12. H. Putnam, "A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy," *Southern California Law Review* 63 (1990): 1671.
13. Here I follow Ober when he remarks, "By constitutive, I mean 'playing a primary role in making a thing what it is.' Although natural capacities presumably have genetic origins, I am concerned with what is constitutive in a morally relevant sense, rather than in a genetic sense." J. Ober, "Natural Capacities and Democracy as a Good-in-Itself," *Philosophical Studies* 132 (2007): 60.
14. A. Sen, "Democracy as a Universal Value," *Journal of Democracy* 10 (1999): 10; emphasis his.
15. Ober, "Natural Capacities and Democracy as a Good-in-Itself," 60.
16. M. Seligman, *Authentic Happiness* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 249.
17. Seligman, *Authentic Happiness*, 14.
18. Aristotle claims that it is in our nature to desire knowledge. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, revised text with introduction and commentary by W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 980a21.
19. According to Aristotle, "human nature includes an innate predisposition to deliberate with one another on how best to achieve ends." J. Ober, "Public Action and Rational Choice in Classical Greek Political Theory," in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Political Thought*, edited by Ryan Balot (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 82.
20. J. Benson, "Who Is the Autonomous Man?" *Philosophy* 58 (1983): 5.
21. Benson, "Who Is the Autonomous Man?" 9–10.
22. L. Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority, and Autonomy in Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 52.
23. E. Fricker, "Testimony and Epistemic Autonomy," in *The Epistemology of Testimony*, edited by J. Lackey and E. Sosa (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 243, cited in Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*, 89.
24. Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority, and Autonomy in Belief*, 250.
25. There are of course good reasons for not intervening too heavily in non-rational decision-making. Just as virtuous parents will permit their children some room to make mistakes, and thus the opportunity to learn (through the self-discovery of the costs of bad decisions) from those mistakes, so too will a virtuous polity permit room for self-discovery, education, and growth. The perfectionist polity need not be heavy-handed with respect to paternalism.
26. D. Estlund, *Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 3.
27. Estlund, *Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework*, 3.
28. C. Farrelly, "Virtue Epistemology and the 'Epistemic Fitness' of Democracy," *Political Studies Review* 10 (2012): 7–22.
29. J. Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 101.
30. E. Anderson, "The Epistemology of Democracy," *Episteme* 3 (2006): 8–22.
31. There may be circumstances where the majority decision reflects not the wisdom of "many" and "distinct" minds, but rather the *moral vices* of the majority. In such cases, an account of *civil disobedience* would come into play. See J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1971).
32. C. Misak, "A Culture of Justification: The Pragmatist's Epistemic Argument for Democracy," *Episteme* 5 (2008): 94–105.

33. M. Festenstein, "John Dewey: Inquiry, Ethics and Democracy," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Philosophy*, edited by C. Misak (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 92.
34. Elsewhere I have argued in favor of such a position. C. Farrelly, *Justice, Democracy and Reasonable Agreement* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); C. Farrelly, "Civic Liberalism and the 'Dialogical Model' of Judicial Review," *Law and Philosophy* 25 (2006): 489–532.
35. A. Vermeule, *Judging under Uncertainty* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 268.
36. A. Vermeule, *Law and the Limits of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 84–85.

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