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# Teach the Children Well

## *On Virtue and its Benefits*

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### Abstract

What connection is there between living well, in the sense of living a life of ethical virtue, and faring well, in the sense of living a life good for the agent whose life it is? Defenses of a connection between exercising the virtues and living a good life often display two commitments: first, to addressing their answer to the person whose life is in question and, second, to showing that virtue is what I call a reliability conferring property. I challenge both commitments. I propose we take up the question from the dialogical point of view implicit in contexts where one person (an “ethical trustee”) is charged with the care of the character of another (an “ethical trustor”) and argue that virtue is what I call a status conferring property. Ethical trustees benefit their trustors by inculcating the virtues because in doing so they bestow on them a status that is necessary for a good life.

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## Keywords

ethical virtue – eudaimonism – character – Rosalind Hursthouse – trustee

## Introduction

What connection – if any – is there between living well, in the sense of living a life of ethical virtue, and faring well, in the sense of living a life that benefits the individual whose life it is? The philosophical motivations for taking up the question already are evident, of course, in Socrates' famous encounter with Thrasymachus.<sup>1</sup> Contemporary philosophers drawn to virtue-centered ethical theories echo those philosophical motivations when they attempt to present an attractive conception of the ethical life, one that has a plausible story to tell of the connection between living virtuously and its goodness for the individual who does so.<sup>2</sup>

Contemporary philosophers more generally are less attuned to certain practical implications of a failure to establish a connection between living virtuously and the goodness of the virtuous agent's life for her. The practical implication that concerns me here is one that should concern anyone charged with the ethical education of another, particularly that of the young. Transporting the philosopher's failure to answer Thrasymachus to contexts that I shall call those of ethical trusteeship invites the radical conclusion that ethical trustees have good reason to worry that they fail to benefit or, worse, risk harming their ethical charges when they choose to set them on the path of virtue.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Plato, *The Republic*. Grube, GMA trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> The division of ethical theories into those that employ an "attractive" conception of ethics and those that employ an "imperative" conception is endorsed by Henry Sidgwick in his *The Methods of Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 1967). For more recent discussions of the distinction as it relates to contemporary ethical theory, see Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, Introduction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) and Charles Larmore, *The Morals of Modernity*, Chapter 1 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Among contemporary moral philosophers generally, Christine Korsgaard stands out as one who requires an answer to a modern version of Thrasymachus's challenge (Korsgaard's "normative question") to address the "first-person deliberative standpoint." See especially Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 14, 16.

In the case of philosophers who defend virtue-theoretic moral theories, those "less attuned" to the practical implication I emphasize here include those who reject eudaimonism (i.e., the view that exercising the virtues is at least partially constitutive of the good life for a

To anticipate, I do not endorse such doubt. Rather, I begin by noting this practical implication of the philosopher's failure in order to throw into relief just how discordant a familiar philosophical doubt is from what I take to be my readers' common practice. That practice, I take it, reflects optimism that there is a connection between living virtuously and faring well. However vulnerable our beliefs in such a connection are to philosophical doubt and however imperfect our own strivings toward honesty, justice, charity, and the like may be, what most of us practice in our roles as ethical trustees belies a confidence that such a connection is, in fact, there to be found.<sup>4</sup>

At its most ambitious, my aim is to show that the optimism that underwrites the practice of those who strive to discharge their duties as ethical trustees is not a misplaced optimism. In its less ambitious form, my argument addresses only those already sympathetic to a virtue-theoretic, eudaimonistic ethical theory: For them, I attempt to illuminate the precise *kind* of connection

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person). For an example of the latter, see Christine Swanton *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). Likewise noteworthy here is the failure of certain forms of naturalism to bridge a gap between the status of virtuous persons as good persons and the contribution of their virtuous activities to their own good, such as I find in Philippa Foot's *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001). Foot, however, gestures in the direction of the perspective I explore below when, for example, she invites us to consider our refusal to say that those who facilitate others' vice thereby benefit them (94).

The shift in perspective I employ on behalf of the virtue ethicist is more prominent in some of the literature on well-being, notably in the so-called "crib test" discussed by Fred Feldman in his *Pleasure and the Good Life: Concerning the Nature, Varieties, and Plausibility of Hedonism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) and, more recently, Matthew Braddock, "Constructivist Experimental Philosophy on Well-Being and Virtue," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 48:3 (2010): 295–323. My defense of the shift in perspective is indebted, as I note below, to Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

- 4 In the United States, this confidence is codified in state law. Some state laws concerning child protection, for example, include among sufficient reasons to designate a child "in need of protection of services" the fact that the child is "without necessary food, clothing, shelter, education, or other required care for the child's physical or mental health *or morals* because the child's parent, guardian, or custodian is unable or unwilling to provide that care" (MN Statutes 2006, Chapter 260C. Child Protection; emphasis mine). Such laws treat care directed toward the child's moral development as a necessary constituent of the child's welfare interests – a necessary constituent the absence of which the law views as sufficient to warrant the state in usurping a role that is otherwise a parent's right to perform. Of course, it is the confidence in the necessity of moral cultivation for child welfare that I mean to endorse here, not the actual practices of a child protection system that is, unsurprisingly given its scarce resources, in many ways broken.

between living well and faring well such a theory should defend and *how* one might best go about defending it.

To get that defense off the ground, I begin by challenging two assumptions. Referring to the question of the perspective from which we ask and answer our question as the perspective question, I first challenge the assumption that the perspective from which our question is most pressing, and so to which a compelling answer must be addressed, is the generic first-person perspective of just any person whose life is at issue. We should not conceive the task of conveying the attractions of the virtuous life as the task of conveying the attractions of such a life to any and all comers. I suggest that we instead consider the dialogical perspective of the person I call the ethical trustee in relation to the person I call the ethical trustor.<sup>5</sup> From this perspective, the question whether there is a connection between living virtuously and faring well presses the question whether, in inculcating the virtues in their trustors, trustees discharge their fiduciary duty to benefit them. To anticipate, I conclude that the claim that the virtuous life is of benefit to the person whose life it is *is* supported by the demonstration that it is the life that a ethical trustee should, as ethical trustee, choose for those in his or her care for their own sakes.<sup>6</sup>

Second, I challenge the view that the way in which being virtuous confers a benefit on the virtuous agent – if, that is, it is to do so – is by equipping the agent with traits of character that reliably produce the benefits in question.<sup>7</sup> Turning to this latter question, which I call the question of conferral, I urge

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5 Among virtue ethicists, Rosalind Hursthouse has done the most to highlight the importance of considering our question in the context of the parent–child relationship, a move for which she credits R. M. Hare. I expand here on Hursthouse's suggestion both by providing theoretical motivation for the shift in context and in using the resulting trustee-trustor heuristic to defend an argument that clarifies and builds upon that which Hursthouse offers. See Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), especially pp. 176ff.

6 For a defense of the view that we must understand the normativity of welfare in terms not of a first-person perspective on one's own life but of what he calls “the second person standpoint” see Stephen Darwall, *Welfare and Rational Care* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). My ethical trustees further resemble those who occupy Darwall's second person standpoint in that ethical trustees care for their trustors for the trustors' own sakes.

As Darwall makes clear, the move to the second person standpoint does not settle substantive questions about what comprises an agent's welfare. Here I suggest that reflection on the trustee-trustor relationship helps illuminate such substantive questions.

For the suggestion that we employ a similar perspective in order to empirically investigate whether folk intuitions support the view that virtue is necessary for well-being, see Braddock 2010.

7 Hursthouse 1999, for example, lends itself to this interpretation – an interpretation advanced by David Copp and David Sobel, “Morality and Virtue: An Assessment of Some Recent Work

that we reject a view of virtue as a reliability-conferring property in favor of a view on which virtue is a status-conferring property. I propose that living virtuously equips the virtuous person with a normative status that is necessary, though not sufficient, for faring well. To anticipate: The normative status of the virtuous person benefits such persons in large part due to the standing it affords them vis-à-vis both others and their own reflective selves—in particular, with respect to others' and their own reactive attitudes. Finally, attending to this status also may help illuminate the thought that the virtuous agent but not the vicious has a legitimate expectation of the cooperation of the world in the pursuit of good ends, such that when circumstances conspire to thwart the full flourishing of the virtuous, the appropriate target of complaint is not the agent but the world.

I begin by clarifying the issue I aim to address in Section 1. I then turn to the assumptions that motivate the perspective and conferral questions. In Section 2, I consider and reject two lines of thought supposed to lend support to asking and answering our question from the perspective of the person whose life is at issue. I thereby attempt to ease any initial misgivings about the alternative perspective I explore in Section 3: that of an ethical trustee in relation to an ethical trustor. I bring my answer to the conferral question into relief by, first, surveying some alternative proposals in Section 4 and, in Section 5, contrasting it with a position attributed to Rosalind Hursthouse.

## 1 Clarifying the Question

In speaking of faring well, or living a life that benefits the person whose life it is, I refer to one's living a life that is *good for* one. I regard talk of faring well as interchangeable with talk of what philosophers such as Aristotle intended by eudaimonia (or flourishing) and what we more colloquially refer to as being in one's interest or enhancing one's well-being or welfare.<sup>8</sup> Finally, my heuristic of the ethical trustee reflects the commitment that the kind of life that should be

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in *Virtue Ethics*, *Ethics* 114:3 (2004): 514–554. As I explain below, however, Hursthouse has available another answer to the conferral question.

8 I avoid talk of happiness here because, as modern ethical philosophers often note, it too often imports an emphasis on subjective life satisfaction, which is at best only part of what constitutes faring well in the sense I intend. As Hursthouse aptly puts it; “When we hope that our children will grow up to be happy and have happy lives, we hope for more than that they will lie around all day in a drug-induced haze of contentment.” Hursthouse (1991), p. 10.

our concern in pursuing the connection between living virtuously and living well is a life that one should choose for those in one's care for their own sakes.<sup>9</sup>

Second, faring well is subject to both limits and degrees. Some minimum threshold of recognizable goodness must attach to a life if one plausibly is to regard its subject as faring well. Moreover, certain goods are necessary if a life is to reach the threshold. A child unloved by his parents who grows and dies never having known affection is not plausibly said to have fared well, no matter the abundance of material goods (health, wealth, and so on) he may have enjoyed. True, his life might have been worse without the latter; their enjoyment does not suffice, however, to make his life a good one. The human being is a social animal and reciprocated love the most valuable of relationships in which one human being may stand to another. As such, a human life without love lacks something necessary for the goodness of that life. This is not to deny that a degree of good health and material goods are likewise necessary if a life is to be a good one. One's virtue alone is no more sufficient for the goodness of a life than is an abundance of material goods.

Once some threshold of goodness is achieved, we may speak of one as faring well – both during some period of a life or over the course of an entire life – and yet it be true that he or she could be faring, or have fared, even better. To jump ahead for a moment, on my view one fares *best* when one is virtuous (honest, just, and the like), one possesses an adequate supply of basic goods (such as health, wealth, and so on),<sup>10</sup> and one's virtue is met with recognition (in a sense to be explained). It is a consequence of the view I'll defend that the person who lacks virtue – i.e., who is vicious in some or all respects – lacks what is necessary to fare well in my sense.

Third, it is worth emphasizing that my ultimate concern in how one fares is a concern to assess a life as a whole. Viewed in this way, the fact that one's honesty, for example, leads to a bad result in some context where a lie would have gained something does not suffice to support the claim that the agent fares less well in being honest than the agent might have done were he or she prepared to lie. I respond to the worry that it would be better (in welfare terms) were the virtuous person able to lie in such circumstances, first, by arguing that it is better (again, in welfare terms) that the virtuous person exercises the virtues

9 Again, in this respect, my ethical trustee occupies a perspective on well-being endorsed by Darwall (2002). See, too, Feldman (2004), and Braddock (2010).

10 That is, an adequate supply of what Aristotle calls the external goods. See his *Nicomachean Ethics*, T. Irwin, trans. 2nd Edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1999), 1098b12, 1099a31, 1129b2, 1153b21, 1178b33.

and, second, by noting that as a virtuous person, the lie will not come without a cost to herself.

Finally, although I am assuming that justice, honesty, charity, benevolence, and the like are in fact virtues, the assumption does not beg the question with which I am concerned here. I share the view that the claim that these character traits are virtues is established not by showing that they benefit their possessor but by showing that they make individual members of the kind of rational, social animals that we are good members of our kind.<sup>11</sup> It is a further question, one that *is* my concern here, whether the virtues thus individuated benefit the individual who exercises them. It will suffice for my purposes here if one grants me a single excellence whose necessity for human flourishing is uncontroversial – say, trustworthiness. Because we all need that there be trustworthy people if human beings are to get on well in the world; trustworthiness makes an individual human being a good instance of the human kind.<sup>12</sup> Whether or not being trustworthy benefits the trustworthy person him or herself, however, remains a further question, the one that is my concern here.

## 2 The Perspective Problem

When philosophers pursue the connection between living virtuously and faring well, their default often is to consider the question from the perspective of the individual whose life is at issue.<sup>13</sup> This may appear to be both the most natural perspective to take on our question and an innocuous one. It is neither.

11 For a defense of such a view, see Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (New York: Clarendon Press, 2001). I also believe this to be the correct interpretation of the position Hursthouse defends in her (1999), Chapters 9 and 10.

12 One inclined to doubt here is well advised to reflect on the standing presumptions that must be in place if one is to get by in the most mundane of daily tasks: navigating one's way in an unknown city, traveling as a stranger's passenger, and so on.

13 This is the classic form in which Thrasymachus presents his infamous challenge to Socrates in the *Republic*, for example: Thrasymachus expects an adequate answer to address *him*. Although not concerned with virtues *per se*, Christine Korsgaard's conception of "the normative question" likewise supports the view that our question is especially pressing from the first person perspective. See, again, Lecture I in her *Sources of Normativity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). For helpful treatment of the options for addressing such a perspective, see Mark Overvold, "Morality, Self-Interest, and Reasons for Being Ethical," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 44:4 (1984): 493–507. Compare Brad Hooker, "Does Ethical Virtue Constitute a Benefit to the Agent?" in Roger Crisp, ed. *How Should One Live?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998): 141–156.

On my diagnosis, the practice of privileging this perspective in answering our question has two main sources. First is the thought that ethical questions, concerned as they are with choice and action, both confront one and press one most forcefully as they pertain to one's own case. When the particular question at issue is whether it benefits a person to be ethically virtuous, then, the resulting assumption is that the question most naturally and most earnestly arises as one wonders whether it would benefit *oneself* to be ethically virtuous. In a familiar philosophical example, one finds oneself tempted and pressed to consider why one should do the honest, just, or courageous thing rather than reap the fruits of ill-gotten gain.<sup>14</sup> Considering the connection between living virtuously and faring well in such contexts requires we consider it from the perspective of the one whose life is at issue.

Second, one might suppose that the truth of claims concerning what is *good for* an individual must be capable of recognition by the individual him or herself.<sup>15</sup> On this line of thinking, something is good for me only if I – or perhaps some idealized version of myself – would recognize it to be such (because I just *do*, or some suitably idealized version of myself *would*, desire it or otherwise form some pro-attitude toward it).

Neither type of consideration in fact tells in favor of privileging the perspective of the one whose life is at issue in investigating our question. To be sure, we all have experienced moments when the allure of virtue appears to pale in comparison with the attraction of vice. In such times, we might ask ourselves a version of the philosophical question whose answer we're now pursuing: "Why do the just, or honest, or charitable thing?" one may ask. "What, after all, is in it for me?" Consider, however, the ways in which things realistically proceed in the face of such temptations. Significantly, this depends on the character of the person asking the question. Suppose, for example, that one is an honest person. One day, confronted by some material advantage to be gained by, say, committing fraud at the office, a coworker urges that you consider throwing honesty to the wind. If one is an honest sort, among the considerations that will weigh with one is that one would thereby regard one's colleagues as owed the truth only when it suits one's ulterior ends, that one will be in no position to object when one's coworker recommends to others deception in the service of whatever expediency, and so on. Such facts, I take it, convey the sense in

14 See, for example, the "knaveish lawyer" in Korsgaard 1996, pp. 73–76.

15 Such a view is defended by so-called internalists about a person's good. For a defense of such a view, see, e.g., Connie Rosati, "Internalism and the Good for a Person," *Ethics* 106 (January 1996): 297–326.

which virtue is sometimes said to constitute a “proof against rewards” a proof, that is, against the rewards of vice.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, in attempting to establish that living virtuously is necessary for faring well in a sense that constitutes a benefit to the one whose life it is, one cannot avail oneself of the premise that an ill-gotten gain in fact is no gain. I don’t mean to endorse any such premise. There is *something* to be said, after all, for the Tahitian holiday financed by the corporate fraud. For all that, the point remains that the urgency of our question when asked from the perspective of the person whose life is at issue typically is muted once the ethical character of such a person is brought to bear on its answer. (An ethical character that will long ago have begun to take shape once one is in a position to reflect on the question.) If one’s character approaches that of an honest person, I’ve suggested, the lie will come at a price – regardless of how successful it may be in securing some benefit as understood independently of that price.

This argument cuts the other way, of course. Suppose, instead, that one is a mendacious sort of person. From the perspective of such a person, the supposed rewards of honesty might not appear attractive. Vice, no less than virtue, constitutes a “proof against rewards” – only in this case it is a proof against the rewards of virtue.

Whether considered from the perspective of the honest person or the mendacious person, then, the answer to the question of whether the balance of reasons one recognizes speaks in favor of telling the lie – so that the pleasures of a Tahitian holiday gained by fraud constitute, from that person’s perspective, a net contribution to the goodness of a life – is constrained by facts about the character one brings to the question. Once we appreciate this fact, we should not so readily assume that our question of the connection between living well and faring well is most profitably addressed to the perspective of the individual whose life is at issue irrespective of such considerations of character. Reflection on the question cannot profitably proceed in such contexts *ex nihilo*. Perhaps the person whose honest action is an expression of (mere) continence will need to be reminded of the value of being able to view one’s colleagues as deserving the truth or the value of being in a position to object when one’s coworker recommends a deception in the service of some ill-considered expediency. Alternatively, someone who wishes to steel the mendacious fellow for vice will probably succeed so long as he is able to present the pleasures of the Tahitian holiday without arousing attention to the risks of being charged with fraud.

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16 McDowell defends such a view in his (1979).

The mendacious fellow is a tougher case for those instead concerned to persuade him that he would lead a better life – *better for him* – were he to be honest. But unless we stipulate that an adequate answer is supposed to suffice to bring just anyone around to conceding that living virtuously benefits one – quite independently of the values and commitments one brings to the question – the toughness of the mendacious fellow’s case does nothing to support the conclusion that his assent to a connection between living virtuously and faring well is required in order to show that such a connection exists.

Consider now the second thought supposed to lend support to privileging the perspective of the person whose life is at issue in pursuing our question. This thought rests on a particular view of an individual’s good, one that holds that something is good for a person only if, roughly, the person would – perhaps only under suitably idealized conditions – care about that thing. Such subjective conceptions of an individual’s good have this much in their favor: If we suppose that the fact that something is good for an individual must be capable of providing him or her a motivating reason to pursue it, then taking an individual’s good to consist in those things that he or she would care about or desire can provide the requisite reason. In this way, too, an individual’s good becomes something the successful pursuit of which brings what Rosalind Hursthouse has called “the smile factor” in its train.<sup>17</sup>

Such subjective accounts of an agent’s good suffer three main problems. First, subjective views run afoul of the same constraint whose violation is thought to plague competing, moralized accounts of an individual’s good: namely, the constraint that the account respect the intuition that even the virtuous person on the rack suffers an assault on his or her welfare. On a subjective account of an agent’s good, it may be the case that an individual – a masochist perhaps – would care about or desire being on the rack and, hence, that a life spent on the rack would thus be good for the masochist. This conclusion, however, is no less counterintuitive than that faced by the thoroughly moralized account of an individual’s good. Any compelling account of an individual’s good should accept as a condition of adequacy the ability to support the conclusion that the life on the rack is bad irrespective of whose life is in question.

Second, subjective views of an agent’s good allow what is a part of what it is to fare well, namely, the kind of satisfaction that accounts for the “smile factor,” to usurp all of a heterogeneous domain. I do not deny that whether a person is satisfied with his or her life (in a sense registered by the “smile factor”) matters to an assessment for how he or she is faring. What I deny is that it is the only or most important thing that matters for such an assessment

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<sup>17</sup> Hursthouse, Chapter 8.

and that, independently of what satisfaction is taken *in*, it invariably signals contributions – as opposed to losses – to the smiling individual's good.

Third, although it might be a plausible constraint on what an individual has a normative reason to pursue that the purported reason relate in some way to considerations capable of motivating that individual from the first-person perspective, the case for a parallel constraint on an individual's welfare does not enjoy the same support. Supposing that only rational beings act for reasons, one might argue that it is part of the concept of a reason for acting that it be capable of engaging the deliberative perspective of the individual to whom the reason is said to apply. It is not similarly plausible to suggest that only rational beings have a welfare. Subsequently, the concept of a being's welfare does not enjoy the connection with rational agency that arguably supports privileging the first-person perspective on the question of what an individual has reason to do.<sup>18</sup>

In short, neither considerations concerning the practical import of our question nor considerations concerning the concept of individual welfare are decisive in privileging the perspective of the one whose life is at issue in pursuing its answer.

### 3 Shifting Perspective

I have drawn attention to the fact that once one is in a position to reflect on the question of what connection – if any – there is between living virtuously and faring well, one has undergone key formations of character that constrain the appeal that claims about the virtuous life and its purported benefits will have for one. Once we attend to this fact, an alternative perspective on our question suggests itself: the dialogical perspective that puts one charged with the cultivation and care of the character of another in conversation with that other. What promises to be one of the most earnest of ethical exchanges – certainly more earnest than ethical monologues or dialogues between the moral philosopher and the skeptic or already ethically corrupt – is the exchange between such ethical trustees and the trustors who find themselves in the trustees' care. A paradigmatic example of the kind of exchange I have in mind is that between parent and child, though its key features are present more generally in any number of fiduciary relationships.

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18 Stephen Darwall draws attention to this feature of the concept of welfare in his (2002). On Darwall's view, it is not irrational of me to forfeit something that is good for me if I do not value myself for my own sake.

I intend the term “ethical” in the title of “ethical trustee” in a descriptive sense, i.e., to mark the fact that the role concerns itself with instructing those in one’s care in living an ethically virtuous life.<sup>19</sup> I intend the use of the term “trustee” to mark the fact that the perspective the ethical trustee takes on this topic is the perspective of one who is charged with looking after the welfare of his or her trustors. Trustees are to care for their trustors for their own sake and be guided by benevolence in instructing them. Insofar as ethical trustees discharge the latter responsibility, they equip their trustors with an education that is necessary to ensure that they, the trustors, fare as well as possible. In the absence of a connection between living virtuously and faring well, the ethical and the trustee responsibilities of ethical trustees (as defined) are such that they cannot be coherently discharged together.

Although I introduce the term “ethical trustee” as a term of art, it is a role that should, I have noted, be familiar to many of us. Again, to take what I regard as a paradigm case, parents are ethical trustees of their children. Of course, there may be parents who do not in fact take on this role with respect to their children, whether for selfish or for altruistic reasons. A selfish parent, for example, may allow concerns for the parent’s own welfare to precede or displace the welfare of the child. An altruistic parent might take one’s charge as a parent to be that of raising children who are ethically good in the sense of making the lives of *others* go better however dreadful the consequences for the children’s own welfare. Neither of these parents fulfills the role of ethical trustee as I understand it.

I do not see the selfish or altruistic parent examples as particularly troubling for the philosopher drawn to a virtue-theoretical ethical theory. Although I assume most of us charged with the care of the young take ourselves to be ethical trustees, it is also a regulative ideal. The ideal ethical trustee will herself be virtuous and, as such, will exercise the virtue of benevolence and avoid the vices of avarice and selfishness. And although altruistic motivation is, of course, consistent with the exercise of virtue, benevolence demands that one not neglect a child’s own welfare even in raising her as an instrument for maximizing some impartial good.

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19 Thus, I do not assume that those who occupy this role must themselves possess the virtues of character. This presses the question of what, if anything, is gained by my recommended shift in perspective. One might ask, that is: If ethical trustees might themselves fail to be virtuous – and hence need not themselves appreciate the benefits of the virtuous life – what traction have I gained by addressing them in that role? This question neglects the dialogical character of the argument I go on to defend. In particular, it neglects the fact that the truth value of the 4<sup>th</sup> premise of that argument turns on whether or not a *trustor* has a *legitimate* complaint against his/her ethical trustee.

A more troubling possibility appears to lurk in my shift in perspective, however. A virtuous trustee, although unselfish, nonetheless will be concerned not to corrupt her own virtue. However, in some circumstances benefitting her ethical charges will put the ethical trustee's virtue at risk. For example, Rebecca Stangl recently has drawn attention to situations in which a virtuous person is capable of achieving some important good for others only by way of pursuing a course of action that poses a threat to her own ethical virtue.<sup>20</sup> Consider Stangl's case of Nancy the would-be nurse.<sup>21</sup> Were Nancy to go into nursing, she would undoubtedly relieve a lot of pain and suffering (which Stangl treats as a non-moral good in contrast to the moral good of virtuous activity). Nancy correctly fears that being a nurse would make her a more callous and less compassionate person, to the detriment of her ethical character. Adapting Stangl's example for my purposes, compare a Nancy who is charged with the care of Sarah, a deeply pained and suffering young child who finds herself unable to leave a life of addiction, petty crime, and being pimped. Were Nancy to look out for Sarah, accompanying her to the drug dens and standing watch as she services johns, Sarah would be better off than were Nancy to abandon her. Moreover, Nancy reasonably expects that showing Sarah her unconditional love is a necessary first step toward Sarah's ethical improvement. However, Nancy correctly fears that doing this for Sarah would eventually render her callous, ungenerous, and bitter, to the detriment of Nancy's own ethical character. Although Stangl's example illustrates "moral risk" as presenting a trade-off between others' non-moral good (i.e., the reduction of their suffering) and Nancy's moral good (i.e., her virtue), the moral risk relevant to my example involves a trade-off of Nancy's virtue to secure Sarah's virtue for Sarah's own sake. In the latter case, the ethical trustee confronts a conflict – between the demands of perfectionism and those of benevolence – no less troubling than that confronted by Stangl's original Nancy.

Now, Stangl resolves the conflict that concerns her by noting that after we have secured a decent minimum of non-moral goods for others, we can attend to developing our own virtue.<sup>22</sup> This solution apparently is easier in coming in Stangl's situations of moral risk because, she notes, it often is more difficult, and sometimes counterproductive or otherwise inappropriate, to presume to cultivate others' *virtues*. This response is not available to me, of course, concerned as I am with contexts where the ethical trustee, as such, is charged with

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20 Rebecca Stangl, "Taking Moral Risks and Becoming Virtuous," in *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*. Ed. Christian Miller, R. Michael Furr, Angela Knobel, and William Fleeson. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015): 215–232.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 216. Stangl adapts the example from one due to Thomas Hurka.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 228.

cultivating another's virtue. Indeed, in Stangl's terms, the conflict that confronts my view is not strictly a conflict between benevolence and perfectionism but, rather, between one's own perfectionism and benevolent concern for the perfection of another.

An easy way out of the conflict that confronts my view would be to insist that part of the regulative ideal of an ethical trustee is that he so identifies with his trustor that any improvement in the latter's virtue constitutes an improvement in his own – and any corresponding improvement in the trustor's good likewise contributes to the trustee's good. Although easy, such a solution amounts to simply stipulating that it is impossible for an ethical trustee to sacrifice her virtue for the sake of the virtue of her charge. As I think this is possible, the easy solution is not available to me. Instead, I favor an approach that admits that cultivating a trustor's virtue might be impossible unless the ethical trustee puts her own virtue at risk. Although this will imply that the ethical trustee may thereby live, and fare, less well than otherwise, nothing in a virtue-theoretic ethical theory should lead us to expect exemption from such sacrifices. That said, an already fully virtuous Nancy perhaps will prove more resilient in her virtue than our concerns about these risks acknowledge.

Finally, as I have noted above, what actual ethical trustees understand their role to require will be shaped by the trustee's own character and values. Given this, it would be a mistake to suppose that by moving from the perspective of the person whose welfare is at issue to the perspective of a trustee charged with his or her care, one gains some traction on the task of providing an account of the connection between living well and faring well capable of motivating just anyone. In shifting perspective, I continue to reject taking on that task. Instead, the shift to the dialogical perspective serves, first, to constrain our question in a way that bears more directly on a context of real practical import and, second, to help us appreciate the practical implications of philosophical arguments concerning our question in that context. In short, a shift in perspective is needed if we are to place the question of the connection between virtue and welfare in a context where it finds its most natural home.<sup>23</sup>

Considered from the perspective of an ethical trustee confronted with justifying oneself to one's trustor, the question of the connection between living virtuously and faring well invites the question whether, in inculcating the virtues in those entrusted to their care, ethical trustees succeed in discharging the required benevolence toward them. I now want to argue that the answer to that question is yes. My argument for that conclusion proceeds as follows:

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23 Here I agree with Darwall (2002), especially pp. 14–19.

1. Ethical trustees must be benevolent toward those entrusted to their care.
2. Ethical trustees must see to it, insofar as it is within their control, that those entrusted to their care have what is necessary to fare well (this is the content of the requirement referred to in premise 1).
3. An ethical trustor has a legitimate complaint against an ethical trustee (qua ethical trustee and so far as the associated requirement of benevolence is concerned) if and only if the trustee has culpably failed to equip the trustor with what is necessary for faring well.
4. Ethical trustors whose trustees inculcate in them the virtues (justice, honesty, charity, benevolence, etc.) have no such complaint against their ethical trustees.
5. Therefore, in inculcating the virtues in those in their care, ethical trustees succeed, insofar as it is within their control, in benefiting them.

I take it that premise 4 is the most controversial. Before turning to premise 4, however, some comments on the other premises are in order.

First, recalling that the parent–child relationship is a paradigm case of the ethical trustee–trustor relationship as I understand it, and noting that some parents may conceive of their parental role as one of raising their children to be ethically good people irrespective of the welfare of the children themselves, one might reject premise 1. In response, it is important to distinguish cases where parents appear to hold such a view but in fact have a conception – perhaps a religious conception – of how their children will eventually meet their rewards for their virtue. Absent such a conception, my view is that such parents simply do not care for their children for their, the children’s, own sakes and, hence, are not qualified to fulfill the role of ethical trustee as I understand it. Perhaps such parents think of themselves as occupying some other, more important or noble, role with respect to their children. I think such parents are mistaken but I need not argue that here. My argument applies only to ethical trustees as I have described them, a description that I trust resonates with many, if not all, of those who find themselves in the position of parent or otherwise an ethical mentor.

Regarding the second premise, provided one recognizes a requirement of the kind mentioned in premise 1, one might argue that it is a requirement to provide not only what is necessary but what is sufficient for faring well. However, given what I submit is the proper view of the significance of the responses of others and of so-called external goods to the goodness of a life for the agent whose life it is, ethical trustees will not have it within their power to secure these latter goods for the trustor. Such a strengthening of the requirement thus

would place upon ethical trustees demands it is unreasonable to expect them to meet.

Turning to premise 3, it should not be understood as denying that an ethical trustor (one's child, for example) may have a legitimate complaint against a person who is their ethical trustee (their parent, for example) due to the fact that the parent has neglected some *other* responsibilities they have with respect to the child. For example, I take it that a good parent must ensure that the child learns certain mundane facts ignorance of which is likely to lead to grave consequences, such as the fact that fire burns or a red traffic light means a driver must stop. Furthermore, some of the responsibilities that the ethical trustee will have with respect to the ethical trustor are such that just anyone must recognize them to avoid legitimate complaint. Suppose, in an uncharacteristic but nevertheless intentional display of anger, an ethical trustee hits the trustor. Then surely the trustor has a legitimate complaint.<sup>24</sup> We can understand this complaint either as a specific instance of a complaint that would be legitimate in response to anyone who presumed to hit the trustor or as a complaint whose legitimacy turns on features of the role of ethical trustee itself. On the first interpretation, the complaint does not provide a counterexample to premise 3 because it is not addressed to the trustee in his or her role as trustee – it is not a legitimate complaint made of the ethical trustee qua ethical trustee. On the second interpretation, the complaint does not provide a counterexample because, viewed as an action of an ethical trustee, the action is a culpable failure of the trustee to comport him- or herself in the way necessary to provide a compelling exemplar of the virtues it is her role to impart – it is a complaint, made of the ethical trustee qua ethical trustee, the legitimacy of which satisfies the necessary and sufficient conditions of premise 3.

So far, I hope, so good. What, then, of the more controversial premise 4? On my view, premise 4 is supported by an account of the status that having and exercising the virtues confers on the virtuous. Understanding the virtues as status-conferring in the way I will articulate provides the most plausible response to the conferral problem.

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24 I thank Christian Miller for the example and for urging me to address this point. Note that the distinction in complaints here is similar to a distinction in complaints made at law: namely, the distinction between bringing a complaint against a person in their “individual capacity” and bringing a complaint against the same person in their “official capacity.”

#### 4 Inculcating Virtue and Conferring Benefits: Three Proposals

What, then, can I say in defense of the premise that ethical trustors whose trustees educate them in justice, honesty, charity, benevolence, and the like have no legitimate complaint against their ethical trustees (at least insofar as their role as trustees' and charge to benefit their trustors is concerned)? Consider first some things that philosophers drawn to an ethics of virtue do often say with regard to a connection between living virtuously and faring well.

Consider first

IDENTITY: One's being virtuous just is one's faring well.<sup>25</sup>

IDENTITY entails the truth of premise 4 but it does so only by making the implausible move, in my view, of adopting a thoroughly moralized conception of faring well, one according to which an apparent gain ill-gotten is in fact no gain at all and apparent sacrifices in pursuit of virtue no real loss.

A second candidate proposes not that living virtuously and faring well are one and the same thing but that living virtuously nonetheless is sufficient for one's faring well.

SUFFICIENCY: One's being virtuous is sufficient for one's faring well.

SUFFICIENCY, obviously, invites the same criticism as IDENTITY.

Against the background of IDENTITY and SUFFICIENCY, a recent proposal suggested by the work of Rosalind Hursthouse appears initially more promising.<sup>26</sup> I say the proposal is suggested by Hursthouse's work because

25 In holding that the virtuous life just is the best life, the ancient Stoics endorsed IDENTITY. For a modern defense of such a view, see Lawrence C. Becker, *A New Stoicism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). John McDowell is another long-standing proponent of IDENTITY. See, for example, McDowell "The Role of *Eudaimonia* in Aristotle's Ethics," in Amelie Rorty, ed. *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 359–76 and "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62 (1979), 331–50. I am aware that the little I say here in response to IDENTITY and SUFFICIENCY is inadequate as an argument against these views. However, it seems to me that IDENTITY and SUFFICIENCY are much less threatening competitors for grounding the truth of premise 4 than are competing views of how living virtuously might be necessary (though not sufficient) for faring well. In any case, it is proposals of the latter sort – particularly as suggested by the work of Hursthouse – that most interest me.

26 Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

although it has been offered as an interpretation of her view,<sup>27</sup> Hursthouse's work admits of an alternative interpretation that makes better sense of her strategy. The latter interpretation also offers a more adequate account of the connection between virtue and welfare, an interpretation to which I appeal in developing my positive view in the next section.

According to a solution to the conferral problem attributed to Hursthouse, one concerned to live a good life has reason to pursue a life of virtue because being virtuous is one's "best bet" for faring well:

(RELIABILITY): One's being virtuous is one's "best bet" for faring well.

Hursthouse emphasizes that her view is not to be understood as claiming that living virtuously is, strictly speaking, necessary for faring well. She takes the strict necessity claim to be falsified by the fact that the wicked may, as the Psalm has it, flourish like the bay tree.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, Hursthouse suggests that the exercise of the virtues is the most reliable path to faring well. Employing an analogy between an ethical regimen and a medical regimen, Hursthouse argues that a wicked person who flourishes like the bay tree no more falsifies her claim that the path of virtue is the best bet ethical regimen for faring well than does the existence of the 115 year old lifetime smoker falsify the physician's claim that non-smoking is one's best bet for staying healthy. Comparing the long-lived smoker with a Nazi who escapes to South America to live, remorseless, the life of Riley, Hursthouse writes:

Logically, [the Nazi's] existence no more impugns the correctness of [the claim that] 'The virtues benefit their possessor' than the existence of the few centenarians who have regularly smoked and consumed remarkable quantities of alcohol impugns the correctness of my doctor's saying 'A regimen of not smoking, moderate alcohol intake, regular exercise, etc. benefits those who follow it.' *What is needed, to discredit the answer, is not just a few cases, but a clearly identifiable pattern* (1999: 173–74, italics mine).

27 For example, one finds a view that resembles what I here call the RELIABILITY proposal attributed to Hursthouse in a review essay on recent work in virtue ethics. See David Copp and David Sobel, "Morality and Virtue: An Assessment of Some Recent Work in Virtue Ethics," *Ethics* 114:3 (2004): 514–554.

28 "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree." *King James Bible*, Psalm 37:35.

Given the nature of the reasoning Hursthouse employs in defending her proposal, a natural interpretation of her understanding of the sense in which the virtues are one's best bet for faring well is, just as the wager metaphor suggests, a statistical sense. Like the centenarian smoker, her Nazi is a statistical outlier. The centenarian and the wicked have no reasonable or legitimate expectation – in the sense of a statistically legitimate expectation – to fare well precisely because only statistical outliers among the centenarians and wicked fare well.<sup>29</sup> The existence of long-lived smokers and remorseless Nazis thus does nothing to challenge virtue's status as a reliability conferring property: the few centenarian smokers and happy Nazi's notwithstanding, opting for a regimen of virtue is a more reliable bet than is a regimen of vice for faring well.

According to RELIABILITY, then, the virtuous person has a legitimate expectation – again, a statistically legitimate expectation – to fare well; statistical outliers notwithstanding. Considered from the perspective of the ethical trustee faced with justifying him- or herself to a trustor, that statistically legitimate expectation supports confidence in the necessity of the path of virtue for avoiding undue risk of harm to one's trustor. Provided trustees are correct about the statistics, their trustors have no legitimate complaint against them. Getting the statistics correct or, if incorrect not culpably so, is also necessary if the trustee is to escape such complaint.

Ascribing this view to Hursthouse, critics have objected that it does not establish the requisite connection between virtue and flourishing. David Copp and David Sobel, for example, write:

[O]ne obviously could admit that it is true as a generalization that the virtues tend to benefit their possessor while denying that a life of full virtue is the best strategy for everyone in every circumstance. So long as one can accurately predict in which cases the generalization does not hold, one interested in flourishing should presumably not aim at full virtue in such situations, and good parents should not aim to raise their children to be fully virtuous in such situations. And it does seem to us, as we argued above, that there are kinds of situations where, predictably, being less than fully virtuous is the best route to flourishing, or at least, to living the best life for oneself.<sup>30</sup>

29 On the nature of the reasonable expectation in question, see especially Hursthouse 1999, pp. 184–85.

30 Copp and Sobel, p. 529.

The problems with the view that Copp and Sobel would have us ascribe to Hursthouse do not end there. First, the reliability view has implausible implications concerning practice, in particular, one's practice as it concerns the role of ethical trustee. What we might call the criticism from practical implications should be of particular concern to Hursthouse, given that she intends her employment of the parent–child heuristic to provide an *ad hominem* appeal to well-intentioned parents.<sup>31</sup>

Ethical trustees can be expected to teach those in their care not to tell lies (and otherwise to value the truth), to wait their turn to ride the carousel rather than pushing to the head of the line (thereby instilling the rudiments of respect for others and standards of fair play), and to give Katya back her mittens (a mini-lesson in justice). Ethical trustees can be expected to do all of this, moreover, without seeking any data about how the liars, the cheats, and the otherwise unjust are faring or in what numbers – and all the while suspecting that there are plenty of them and they are getting along just fine by their own lights. The practical upshot of RELIABILITY is that we have reason to worry whether such trustees are derelict in their duties: why aren't they out there in the field, surveying the rise and fall of the lots of the virtuous vis-à-vis the wicked and adjusting their counsel accordingly?

One might respond on behalf of RELIABILITY that such trustees, at least those with whom we are likely to be most familiar, operate in a context where there is a background assumption, and a correct one, that no clearly identifiable pattern of vice rewarded is forthcoming. Indeed, Hursthouse treats as counterfactual circumstances where the Nazi living remorseless the life of Riley is not a statistical outlier. Nonetheless, what an account of the connection between virtue and welfare has to say about counterfactual circumstances may be revealing. My worry is that in the counterfactual circumstances where Nazis or more mundanely vicious people remorselessly enjoy themselves in numbers sufficient to establish the kind of pattern Hursthouse suggests is possible, the reliability view says that those ethical trustees who inculcate the virtues in their charges would thereby do them harm. I think this is the wrong account of the counterfactual case, for reasons that I elaborate below.

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31 See here, again, Hursthouse, p. 176. That Hursthouse intends such an *ad hominem* appeal, moreover, precludes one from offering a kind of two-stage theory response to the objection on her behalf. That is, it precludes the response that while reliability provides a criterion for the virtues benefiting one, it is a separate question what practical rules of thumb ethical trustees should pursue if they are to benefit their trustors in inculcating the virtues.

Second, RELIABILITY has theoretical implications that urge its rejection. What we might call the objection from logical space<sup>32</sup> argues that this response to the conferral problem elides a distinction between having a *statistically* reasonable or legitimate expectation and having a *normatively* reasonable or legitimate expectation. For example, I take it that we all have a normatively legitimate expectation that our fellow citizens honestly report their earned income in their tax filings. This is something for which we properly hold fellow citizens to account. For all I know, however, this is not a statistically reasonable expectation – because, for all I know, the majority of citizens cheat on their tax filings. In contrast to the case of a statistically reasonable or legitimate expectation, the logic of a normatively reasonable or legitimate expectation is such that the claim to such an expectation is not impugned by statistics – whether or not those exhibit “a clearly identifiable pattern” of smiling villains, Nazi or otherwise.<sup>33</sup>

Given these problems, we should expect Hursthouse herself to have qualms about the RELIABILITY view. Indeed, I think Copp and Sobel are incorrect to ascribe it to her. The “best bet” analogy that fuels the RELIABILITY interpretation is an analogy that Hursthouse offers to disarm those opponents who think that pointing to a few apparent cases of the wicked flourishing is sufficient to falsify her claim that the virtues benefit their possessor. Thus disarmed, the opponents are then subject to an *ad hominem* argument that doesn’t rely on any appeal to the kind of statistical expectation of flourishing that RELIABILITY affords to the virtuous.

## 5 Acting Well and the Normative Expectation of Faring Well

If I am correct about the inadequacies of the reliability view of how virtue is connected to welfare, should we conclude that premise 4 is, after all, false? Here is why I think not: the correct answer to the conferral problem is given not by RELIABILITY but by:

32 I owe the suggestion for dubbing this the “logical space objection” to Gary Ebbs.

33 There is in fact another implied objection here: namely, that the failure of the proposed connection between living virtuously and faring well in the counterfactual case of the predominance of smiling Nazi’s would ultimately render Hursthouse’s view insensitive to the nature of what is prompting the smiles. But this is precisely one of the shortcomings her view was to avoid; all but the crudest forms of hedonism about welfare suppose that the quality of what one takes pleasure in or finds satisfying matters to an assessment of whether it contributes to the goodness for oneself of one’s life. We should expect from Hursthouse’s account no less.

STATUS: One's being virtuous is necessary and sufficient for having a particular normative status, namely, the status of having a legitimate claim to fare well, which status is itself necessary for faring well.

The most important thing to note about STATUS in contrast to RELIABILITY is that it holds that the expectation of faring well that being virtuous confers is a normative as opposed to a statistical expectation – for it is the notion of a normative expectation that I intend the mention of a “claim” to introduce. A normative expectation in the sense I intend it here differs from a statistical expectation in that the legitimacy of a normative expectation is defeated not by appeal to statistics but by demonstrating that the expectation makes an unfair demand.<sup>34</sup>

On my view, the legitimate normative expectation that virtue confers on the virtuous person constitutes a legitimate normative expectation *to fare well* in large part due to the standing the status affords her vis-à-vis others' and her own reactive attitudes. The reactive attitudes are responses to persons' “qualities of will” – including, on my understanding of them, relatively enduring intentional dispositions or traits of character.<sup>35</sup> Philosophers typically include among their number respect, guilt and resentment, gratitude, and certain forms of love. I would add shame and contempt.<sup>36</sup> These attitudes are terribly

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34 Here I follow R. Jay Wallace. See his *Responsibility and the Ethical Sentiments* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1996), ch. 4. Recall that it is not here in dispute whether the virtuous person possesses traits of character that make him or her a good member of our kind, in that he or she possesses traits of character that it is necessary for individual members of the kind of rational, social animal that human beings are to possess if human beings as a kind are to get on well in the world. Given that, demonstrating that the virtuous person's normative expectations make unfair demands might proceed by a strategy aimed at demonstrating that, for example, the virtuous person thereby makes an exception for him- or herself or that the nature of the recognition from others that the normative expectation is an expectation of is not in fact fitting the virtuous person, among other strategies.

35 The term ‘reactive attitude’ understood as responses to another’s “quality of will” was first introduced by P.F. Strawson in his modern classic, “Freedom and Resentment,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1962), reprinted in *Free Will* ed., Gary Watson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982): 59–80.

36 I discuss the nature of contempt as a reactive attitude in Mason, “Contempt as a Moral Attitude,” *Ethics* 113:2 (January 2003): 234–72. I defend the status of contempt’s first person analogue, shame, in “On Shamelessness,” *Philosophical Papers* 39:3 (November 2010): 401–425.

Although Stephen Darwall recently has defended an account of the reactive attitudes according to which they are all ‘second-personal’ forms of addressing (implicitly or explicitly) demands to their targets – a suggestion he sometimes takes to exclude attitudes such as contempt and shame from the class – I believe that forms of contempt

important to us as social animals. Indeed, if P.F. Strawson is correct, and I think he is, one could not even conceive of oneself and others as persons in the absence of regarding oneself and others as being within their scope. What virtue guarantees with respect to the reactive attitudes of others (and indeed one's own) is not that – for example – our charity will more likely be greeted with gratitude than not nor that our nobility in difficult circumstances will in fact garner other's respect. Rather, virtue provides us a claim on these responses from others, a claim not vulnerable to being falsified by statistical observations about what responses others are in fact likely to manifest.<sup>37</sup>

Why suppose that possessing such a claim is *good for* a person? One explanation of its goodness lies in the fact that certain valuable relationships – because they are constituted by attitudes towards persons as meriting those attitudes – could not be the relationships they purport to be were the attitudes not in fact responsive to their warranting conditions. Consider, for example, that relationships such as a friendship or a loving union are relationships constituted by mutual respect and esteem. Respect and esteem are attitudes towards others as warranting forms of positive appraisal. A friend or partner who “respects” or “honors” another in the absence of the other in fact having a claim on those attitudes is more properly described as humoring the partner.<sup>38</sup>

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and shame are no less accountability-seeking responses than are resentment and guilt, for example. See Darwall *The Second Person Standpoint* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), especially Chapter 4.

37 The nature and scope of the claim may well vary with the virtue in question. For example, the just person has a claim on each individual that he or she honor the reciprocity that justice demands; the person who exercises the virtue of true friendship, in contrast, has a claim on the esteem and respect that partially constitute the best form of friendship but that is not a claim that places just anyone under the demands in question.

Paul Bloomfield has recently defended the claim that the immoral forfeit the (recognition) self-respect that is necessary for living a good life. Although recognition respect is not, on my view, a reactive attitude, Bloomfield suggests that it is and, thus, his argument suggests he shares common cause with the more expansive claim that I introduce here: namely, that the immoral forfeit legitimate normative expectations concerning their own and others' so-called positive reactive attitudes. For Bloomfield's view, see his *Virtues of Happiness: A Theory of the Good Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), especially pp. 76–77.

38 That is, so long as the one who “respects” or “honors” herself is correct about what merits respect and honor. In the case where the friend or partner is wrong – for example, in the case of a nasty person who respects one who is even nastier – the respect or honor may be genuine. However, it is no less deficient.

Recall, too, that the reactive attitudes are not on my view responses *only* to character traits. Even the merely continent person who does the honest thing is thereby a fitting target of *some* positive appraisal. That said, mere continence is a less ideal quality of will and, so, merits a lesser positive reactive attitude than that fitting the fully virtuous.

The point extends, as well, to one's relationship to oneself. A "self-esteem" insensitive to one's actual merit amounts to self-deception; a "pride" blind to the worth of one's pursuits is illusory.

The value that the status of being virtuous confers on one does not benefit one only extrinsically, via the elicitation of others' valuable attitudes, however. Possessing the relevant claim even in those circumstances where it remains unacknowledged by others is in itself good for the virtuous person. It is so because of the value of the experience and, often, knowledge of having oneself responded appropriately to the values that call for one's own virtuous response.

Finally, the status that being virtuous confers affords the virtuous special standing not only with respect to themselves and individual others but, as it were, with respect to the world. I do not mean here to ascribe some odd sort of agency to the nonhuman world. The relevant world here is the whole of the social world, that is, the whole of humanity. It is this status that underlies and illuminates the thought that the virtuous agent but not the vicious has a claim on the recognition of the world in the pursuit of good ends, such that when circumstances conspire to thwart the full flourishing of the virtuous, the appropriate target of complaint is not the agent but that world. Drawing for herself the implications of RELIABILITY concerning one's standing with respect to an uncooperative world, Hursthouse writes:

We think that (for the most part, by and large), if we act well, things will go well for us. When it does not, when *eudaimonia* is impossible to achieve or maintain, that's not 'what we should have expected' but tragically bad luck (1999: 185).

What one *wants* to be able to say, however, is that there are times when all three of the following are true: (1) things do not go well for us, (2) things not going well for us is precisely as we should have expected, and (3) nonetheless, that is our tragically bad luck. It is not open to the proponent of RELIABILITY to say this.

One *wants* to say this, I suggest, in those cases where, despite the fact that the odds were against one's succeeding in the pursuit of one's good ends, that failure is not one that is properly laid at the door of the virtuous agent. Consider, for example, an agent who exercises the virtue of charity and sets out to solicit the aid of others in ending poverty in his little corner of the world. Suppose that, given the history of such endeavors in his environs, a reasonable person would predict that most of his fellows will find some excuse not to contribute, that he'll exhaust himself in his efforts, and so on. Contrast with

this fellow one who sets out to exercise his chicanery in pursuit of the perfect crime. Given the bungling character of the local police, and so on, a reasonable person would predict that our thief will meet with success. Suppose now that our charitable person fails in the pursuit of his good end and our thief succeeds in the pursuit of his bad end. The claim that the virtuous person has on the cooperation of the world in pursuit of his good end is registered in our regret that the world did not behave as it should, no matter how predictably it behaved and the conviction that the thief acted rashly however accurate his assessment of his odds.

According to STATUS, in short, our charitable agent does not suffer “tragically bad luck” if we mean by that the kind of bad luck displayed in the case of one who loses a bet despite the odds being in one’s favor. Rather, the language of luck as applied to the case of virtuous aims thwarted by an uncooperative world registers our sense that it is the *world* – not our *agent* – that has not conducted itself as it should.

Consider, by way of analogy, what one might say in the case of an epistemically virtuous agent whose well-grounded induction fails to predict that the sun will not rise tomorrow. As Strawson says of such a case: “The chaotic universe is not one in which induction would cease to be rational; it is simply one in which it would be impossible to form rational expectations to the effect that specific things would happen.”<sup>39</sup> What Strawson means to argue is that claims about the rationality of inductive reasoning are properly understood as claims about the application of a certain belief procedure. In a chaotic universe, it is true, that procedure is no longer successful. It does not follow, however, that some other, non-inductive, procedure would be better for forming opinions about specific happenings that lie beyond present observations. Moreover, the counsel to “expect nothing but irregularities” in a chaotic universe itself relies on a higher-order induction.

In short, and to mimic Strawson: “The ethically chaotic universe is not one in which the virtuous person’s expectation to fare well ceases to be legitimate; it is simply one in which it would be impossible to act with legitimate normative expectations of one’s social world.” To be sure, the relevant universe in the case that is my concern is not, as in Strawson’s case, the natural world and the relevant expectation is not a statistical but a normatively legitimate expectation. The lesson I intend from Strawson, nonetheless, is this: It is not as if the ethically chaotic universe is one that allows the vicious to exploit normative

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39 P.F. Strawson, *Introduction to Logical Theory* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1952), Chapter 9, p. 262. I am indebted to Gary Ebbs and Patrick Maher for the reference.

expectations in a way that the virtuous cannot. In the ethically chaotic universe, *no one* can successfully act with normative expectations.

A defense of STATUS in hand, we have the needed support for premise 4 in the argument I introduced in Section 3. I conclude, then, that in inculcating the virtues in those in their care, ethical trustees succeed, insofar as it is within their control, in benefiting them

### Conclusion

STATUS implies that the wicked, whatever the appearances, cannot fare well. They cannot because they lack the normative status of warranting – from themselves no less than others – those forms of regard that constitute the most valuable of human relationships. I don't know much about bay trees but I do know that they are not rational, social animals; and for rational, social animals the kind of claim that virtue involves is necessary if our life is to be a good human life.

It is more difficult to deny that the wicked fare better than the virtuous person whose status is unacknowledged or abused by others, perhaps indeed by the whole social world. In closing I suggest some support for this more controversial claim.

Although the virtuous person whose status goes unrecognized by others resembles the wicked in lacking the kind of valuable relationships with others whose presence contributes so much to the goodness of a life, the person of virtue unrewarded has at least this: the experience and, perhaps, the knowledge of her merit. In comparison with the virtuous person whose merit is acknowledged by others, the person whose virtue goes unrecognized fares less well. However, although from the perspective of one who cares for her such comparison should prompt an associated concern to promote social circumstances that would enable her to fare better, it should not cause us to underestimate the intrinsic value of such merit. If I am correct about its intrinsic value, we have added support for the claim that even persons of virtue unacknowledged by others have no legitimate complaint against their ethical trustees. If, in addition to the intrinsic value of her proper engagement with a life of ethical worth, the virtuous person possesses the knowledge that hers constitutes a proper engagement with a life of ethical worth, she will extend her proper esteem of things of value to her own character.

For remaining doubters, I can only reiterate the *ad hominem* argument addressed to the ethically decent in their role as ethical trustees: What alternative

is there whose value is so great that it would justify educating those in your care into vice? Philosophers, of course, are accustomed to dismissing *ad hominem* appeals but I suggest that when one takes oneself to be addressing ethical trustees concerned to benefit those in their care for their own sakes, such *ad hominem* appeals are precisely to the point.