

Value Approaches to Virtue and Vice:
Intrinsic, Instrumental, or Hybrid?

Timothy Perrine¹

Acta Analytica; DOI: 10.1007/s12136-022-00542-z

Abstract: According to one tradition, the virtues and vices should be understood in terms of their relation to value. But inside this tradition there are three distinct proposals: virtues are intrinsically valuable; virtues are instrumentally valuable; or a hybrid proposal on which virtues are either intrinsically or instrumentally valuable. In this paper, I offer an alternative proposal inside this tradition. I propose that virtues and vices should be understood in terms of the degreed properties of being virtuous and being vicious, which I analyze in terms of the value and disvalue of actions and attitudes. I defend my proposal as the best inside this tradition by showing how it is immune from standard problems the other three proposals face.

Key Words: Ethics of Virtue; Intrinsic Value; Instrumental Value; Value Approach to Virtue; Julia Driver;

In the last few decades, Western philosophers have a renewed interest in studying virtue and vice. Perhaps the dominant tradition in the west for studying virtue and vice is the *flourishing tradition*, which understands virtue and vice in terms of agents have a flourishing life.² This tradition is associated with the work of authors like Aristotle, Aquinas, Julia Annas, and Rosalind Hursthouse. But it is not the only tradition that studies virtue and vice.

According to the *value tradition*, virtue and vice are understood in terms of value and disvalue. This tradition is associated with the work of authors like Mill, Moore, Ross, Julia Driver, and Thomas Hurka. However, members of this tradition disagree about how best to understand virtues and vices. Some argue that virtues are traits of agents that are intrinsically valuable; others argue that virtues are traits of agents that are instrumentally valuable; and, unsurprisingly, some seek a hybrid view on which virtues are traits of agents that are *either* intrinsically valuable *or* instrumentally valuable.

In this paper, I offer my own proposal for virtue and vice inside the value tradition; I call it the *Indirect Proposal*. Instead of analyzing virtue or vice directly in terms of intrinsic or instrumental value, I offer an indirect analysis. I described two properties of character traits that come in degrees—virtuousness and viciousness. These properties are analyzed in terms of the intrinsic/instrumental value/disvalue of their characteristic actions and attitudes of character traits. I then analyze virtue as having a high degree of virtuousness and low or no viciousness. Conversely, I analyze vice as having a high degree of viciousness and low or not virtuousness. I argue that my indirect proposal is superior to the existing three because it avoids problems that

¹ For helpful comments, I thank Ben Cross and an anonymous reviewer.

² Following standard procedure, I use ‘flourishing’ as shorthand for *eudemonia*. However, Aristotle sometimes uses divine language when describing *eudemonia* and so ‘blessed’ may also be an appropriate short-hand (see, e.g., I.7 1098a; I.8 1099b; I.9 1099b-1100a; I.10: 1100a-1101a; IX.9 1169b-1170b; X.8 1178b). The fact that so many authors use quasi-naturalistic language like ‘flourishing’ over divine language like ‘blessed’ presumably reflects shifts in attitudes about religion. Lastly, for reasons of space, I focus on Western traditions over Eastern traditions.

they face. Proponents of the value tradition should accept my proposal for understanding virtue and vice over these other standard proposals.

In section I, I more fully describe the value tradition's approach to virtue and vice, identifying and illustrating the three standard proposals—intrinsic, instrumental, and hybrid. In section II, I develop my own indirect proposal. I show how my proposal is distinct from each of them, though it does share some affinities with the instrumental and hybrid proposals. In section III, I briefly address several standard problems that are raised by authors on each side.

I. Virtue, Vice, and Value

There is a family of virtue properties. These includes properties like *being a virtue* and *being a vice* as well as more holistic properties like *having a virtuous character* or *having a vicious character*. But these are not the only evaluative/normative properties there are. There are also value properties such as *being of intrinsic value* or *being of instrumental disvalue*. There are also deontic properties such as *being required* or *being permitted*. And other evaluative/normative properties yet such as *being a reason to act*, *being ideal*, *flourishing*, etc.

An important question is whether virtue properties should be understood or analyzed in terms of other evaluative/normative properties or not. Virtue primitivism, as I call it, maintains that virtue properties should not be understood or analyzed in terms of other evaluative properties. Virtue properties are evaluative/normatively primitive or basic. Virtue non-primitivism maintains the contrary: virtue properties should be understood or analyzed in terms of other evaluative/normative properties.

Here I assume virtue non-primitivism. But even given that assumption, there are a number of different ways to understand or analyze virtue properties. One leading approach is a *flourishing* approach, associated with Aristotle and Neo-Aristotelians. It analyzes virtue properties in terms of a connection to flourishing. An alternative approach is a *deontic* approach, associated with Kant's work. It analyzes virtue properties in terms of a connection to deontic properties, such as how agents are obligated to act. In this paper, I will not argue against these approaches here. Rather, in this paper, I will be assuming a *value* approach.³

According to a value approach, virtues properties should be understood or analyzed in terms of value properties. In order to better understand value approaches, a brief discussion of axiology is necessary. First, I assume that there is such a thing as “intrinsic” or “final” value.⁴ At first approximation, something is of intrinsic value if and only if it is appropriate, right, or correct to value it in and of itself or for its own sake. By ‘value it,’ I have in mind a wide range of pro-attitudes such as: liking, desiring, caring about, advocating for, promoting, taking pleasure in, etc. Further, if something is of intrinsic value, it is appropriate, right, or correct to value it in and of itself or for its own sake as opposed to valuing it because of its connection to something else. The contrary to intrinsic value is intrinsic disvalue. Analogously, at first approximation, something is of intrinsic disvalue if and only if it is appropriate, right, or correct to disvalue it in and of itself or for its own sake. By ‘disvalue it,’ I have in mind a wide range of con-attitudes such as: disliking, avoiding, despising, being against, taking displeasure in, etc.

³ In this paper, I assume non-primitivism *and* a value-based approach to analyzing virtue. In a companion piece to this paper, I criticize other approach that assume non-primitivism but do not accept a value-based approach, such as flourishing or deontic approaches. However, the results here are relevant to other traditions that want to partly, but not wholly, analyze virtue in terms of value. (E.g., even a Neo-Aristotelian like Annas partly analyzes virtue in terms of value; see Annas (2011: chp. 7).)

⁴ I'll use the term ‘intrinsic value’ instead of ‘final value’ in what follows as it is the more common one in the value tradition. I see this as mere terminological preference. However, I don't assume that intrinsic value supervenes on intrinsic properties.

In addition to intrinsic value and disvalue, there is instrumental value and disvalue. The overall instrumental value of something is determined by the intrinsic value and disvalue of its consequences, specifically, its causal consequences. When something is of instrumental value, it is appropriate, right, or correct to value it, although it may not be appropriate, right, or correct to value it for its own sake. Conversely, when something is of instrumental disvalue, it is appropriate, right, or correct to disvalue it, although again it may not be appropriate, right, or correct to disvalue it for its own sake.

So I have articulated a fourfold distinction—a distinction between intrinsic value/disvalue and a distinction between instrumental value/disvalue. So far these distinctions do not tell us what is *of* value. A full-blown axiology would identify what things are of intrinsic value and disvalue. I will not offer a full-blown axiology here. However, I will note that I accept—but will not defend here—what is sometimes called “higher-order” theories of intrinsic value.

Crudely put, on higher-order theories of intrinsic value, what attitudes we adopt towards things of value/disvalue can, themselves, be of intrinsic value/disvalue depending upon the value/disvalue of the object they are about. Specifically, if the relevant attitude is an appropriate one—matching the value/disvalue of the object—then adopting that attitude is, itself, of intrinsic value; whereas if the attitude is inappropriate—opposing the value/disvalue of the object—then adopting that attitude is, itself, of intrinsic disvalue.

For instance, suppose that something is of intrinsic value. If one agent, Valery, values it, then Valery is adopting an appropriate attitude towards that thing of value. On higher order theories of value, then it follows that Valery’s valuing attitude is, itself, of intrinsic value. By contrast, suppose Dietrich disvalues this thing. Dietrich is adopting an inappropriate attitude towards that thing of value. On higher order theories of value, it follows that Dietrich’s disvaluing attitude is, itself, of intrinsic disvalue. (See Perrine (2020: 488-491) for further discussion and citations.)

Let us now turn more fully to value approaches to virtue. According to them, virtue properties should be understood in terms of value properties. The literature has, thus far, clustered around three proposals.⁵ The first proposal is partly motivated by the idea that virtuous agents have good or valuable attitudes, whereas vicious agents have bad or disvaluable attitudes. More specifically, the first proposal is:

- *Intrinsic Proposals.* Virtues are intrinsically valuable traits of agents. Vices are intrinsically disvaluable traits of agents.

Hurka (2001, 2006) illustrates an *Intrinsic Proposal*. Hurka embraces a higher-theory of value, so that attitudes towards things of value and disvalue can, themselves, be of intrinsic value and disvalue. Virtues are attitudes towards things of value that are themselves of value; vices are attitudes towards things of value that are of disvalue (cf. (2001: 20ff)). (As Hurka himself documents, other intrinsic proposals can be found in various intuitionists such as Rashdall (1885: 224-5) and Ross (1930: 134ff.); see Hurka (2014: chp. 10) for additional citations and discussion. Another intrinsic proposal is Calder (2007).)

A second proposal is partly motivated by the idea that virtuous agents do good or valuable things, whereas vicious agents do bad or disvaluable things. More specifically, the second proposal is:

⁵ One author who does not neatly fall into this tradition is Adams (2006). Adams understands capital “V” virtue—a holistic virtuous character—in terms of excellence in being for the good (or valuable) and claims it is of intrinsic value. But his account of the relationship between Virtue and the virtues is complex in ways that would take me too far afield to address.

- *Instrumentalist Proposals*. Virtues are instrumentally valuable traits of agents. Vices are instrumentally disvaluable traits of agents.

Driver's (2001) illustrates an *Instrumentalist Proposal*. On her view, "a virtue is a character trait that produces more good (in the actual world) than not systematically" (2001: 82, emphasize removed, cf. xviii). This proposal has three elements. First, the account is non-maximizing in that a character trait can be a virtue even if it does not maximize the good (cf. 2001: xvii, 73-4). Second, the account is systematic in that whether or not a character trait is a virtue or vice is determined by its systematic effects, not the effects of a single case (cf. 2001: xix, 67, 82; 2012: 148). Finally, it is an actualist account. It is the actual systematic effects of a trait that determine whether a trait is a virtue or vice (cf. 2001: 78ff). While Driver, like most authors, focuses on virtues, it is clear she holds the analogous view for vices. A vice is a character trait that produces more disvalue (in the actual world) than not systematically. (Other instrumentalist proposals are provided in classic works in consequentialism such as Moore (1903: section 103-108) and Mill (1861: chp. 4), cf. Mill (1843: Book VI, Chapter XII, section 7).)

Lastly, one might like the motivating ideas of both *Intrinsic Proposals* and *Instrumental Proposals*. That is, one might try to give both facts about intrinsic value/disvalue and instrumental value/disvalue a role in explaining what the virtues and vices are. More specifically, the last proposal is:

- *Hybrid Proposals*. Virtues are either intrinsically or instrumentally valuable traits of agents. Vices are either intrinsically or instrumentally disvaluable traits of agents.

Russell (2007) defends a *Hybrid Proposal*.⁶

Before moving on, I want to make one clarifying comments about the metaphysics of these three proposals. I have distinguished between these approaches in terms of how they understand the relationship between virtue properties and value properties. By themselves, the proposals do not tell us the metaphysics of virtues and vices—what kinds of things have the property of being virtues and vices. However, it is natural to see character traits as being the kind of thing that are primarily of instrumental value. And given a higher-order theory of value, it is natural to see attitudes as being the kind of thing that are primarily of intrinsic value. Thus, on *Instrumental Proposals* it is natural to identify virtues and vices with character traits. And, in fact, this is what Driver (and others) do. Conversely, on *Intrinsic Proposals*, it is natural to identify virtues and vices with higher-order attitudes. And, in fact, this is what Hurka (and others) do. However, it is important to be clear that these are further steps between the "pure" proposals themselves. They are plausible developments of those proposals.⁷

II. Value Proposal for Virtue and Vice

In this section, I present my own value-based proposal for virtue and vices, the *Indirect Proposal*. First, I briefly describe character traits. Second, I characterize two degreed properties of being virtuous and being vicious in terms of intrinsic/instrumental value/disvalue. Third, I characterize virtues and vices in terms of these degreed properties before comparing my proposals with others. As will become clear, I call this proposal the *Indirect Proposal* since it characterizes virtue and vice in terms of value and disvalue but in a more indirect way than the standard proposals.

A. Character Traits

⁶ Actually, a better term for this proposal is *Disjunctive Proposal*; but it is too late for rebranding.

⁷ For instance, Ross (1930: 134), as well as Brandt (1959: 344-5) claimed that virtuous attitudes *and* dispositions are intrinsically valuable. This means he still accepts *Intrinsic Proposal*, but his metaphysics of virtue differs from (e.g.) Hurka's on which virtues and vices are attitudes.

I assume a standard approach on which character traits are clusters of dispositions to have certain characteristic activities, given some stimulus conditions (cf. Miller (2013: chp. 1)). Characteristic activities include actions and attitudes (including beliefs, desires, and emotions.) Character traits are individuated partly on the basis of their stimulus conditions and partly on the basis of their characteristic activities. Being kind and being talkative are different character traits partly because they have different stimulus conditions—they are triggered and manifest in different situations. But even if character traits share the same or similar stimulus conditions, those character traits may be individuated on the basis of their characteristic activities. Indeed, the idea of a stimulus condition may help us understand Aristotle’s suggestion that virtues are a mean *between* two vices. Each virtue and its associated vices have the same stimulus conditions—what further differentiates them are their characteristic activities in responding to those conditions.

Character traits are dispositions that manifest characteristic activities (actions and attitudes) in stimulus conditions. But there are two ways of understanding the relationship between having a character trait and manifesting characteristic activities in stimulus conditions. On a *categorical* understanding, an agent has a character trait only if they surpass some threshold of manifesting that character trait’s characteristic activity in stimulus conditions. On a *continuous* understanding, an agent has a character trait the degree to which they would manifest that character trait’s characteristic activities in stimulus conditions. The continuous understanding is more pre-theoretically plausible. It seems more natural to think of a person, say, Tian, as being timid to a certain degree, where that degree may change over time.⁸

B. Degree of Virtuousness and Viciousness

Character traits may have the property of being virtuous or vicious. These are degreed properties. A given character trait may be more virtuous (or vicious) than other. For instance, a revengeful wrath is more vicious than a moderate annoyance. Likewise, a thoroughgoing selflessness is more virtuous than a mild concern for others. Sometimes a person “gives in” to a character trait, changing its virtuousness or viciousness. A person who gives in to their envy is likely to have a character trait with a higher degree of viciousness than a person who does not.

Character traits are dispositions to manifest characteristic actions and attitudes in stimulus conditions. The characteristic actions and attitudes of various character traits may be of either intrinsic value/disvalue or instrumental value/disvalue. For instance, a kind action is frequently instrumentally valuable; a cruel joke is frequently instrumentally disvaluable. A sympathetic concern with another’s well-being is frequently intrinsically valuable; schadenfreude over another’s success is frequently intrinsically disvaluable.

The virtuousness and viciousness of a character trait is determined by the overall value of its characteristic actions and attitudes in stimulus conditions. Specifically, the virtuousness of a character trait is determined by whether those characteristic actions and attitudes in stimulus situations are of intrinsic/instrumental value. The greater the overall value of the characteristic actions and attitudes of the character trait the greater the virtuousness of that character trait. Conversely, the viciousness of a character trait is determined by whether those characteristic

⁸ The “situationalist” challenge to character traits urges that there are not any global character traits that reliably manifest across a wide range of stimulus conditions (see Doris (1998, 2002), Merritt (2000) for classic statements). I won’t discuss this challenge at length since there are several responses to this challenge and each of them are consistent with my claims here. For instance, one might maintain that there are no global traits, but merely more localized traits; or one might hold that there are global traits but only had to a weak degree; or that there are character traits but they are “mixed” (what I would call “imperfect traits”). Each of these responses is consistent with my proposals for virtues and vices.

actions and attitudes in stimulus situations are of intrinsic/instrumental disvalue. The greater the overall disvalue of the characteristic actions and attitudes of the character trait the greater the viciousness of that character trait.

I have characterized virtuousness and viciousness of a trait in terms of the value/disvalue of characteristic actions and attitudes *in stimulus conditions* and not in terms of the value/disvalue of the character trait *simpliciter*. This characterization is intentional. It is possible for a character trait to be quite virtuous or vicious and yet never actually manifest. Self-sacrifice is normally considered a virtue, even if a person does not actually have to sacrifice their life or things dear to them. Or consider another extreme example. Imagine a misanthrope living alone in the woods. Given his misanthropy, he would eagerly and unhesitatingly kill anyone who wandered unto his property. Fortunately, no one ever does. His misanthropy is a great vice, even though he never manifests it. It is a great vice because of the actions and attitudes he is disposed to have. If the virtuousness and viciousness of a trait were determined by the trait itself—instead of its manifestation in stimulus conditions—then such traits may not be virtues or vices. But that's mistaken.

An agent can have a character trait to higher or lower degrees. People can become more kind, more anxious, more talkative or less cooperative, less patient, less cruel. Frequently, when an agent has a character trait to a higher degree, the character trait's virtuousness or viciousness might change. Here is an illustration. Suppose you have a coworker who is cruel to you, willing to make nasty jokes at your expense and call you rude names. But suppose overtime the coworker is now disposed to also interfere with your projects by, e.g., undercutting your authority in front of your students. Your coworker has become more cruel; he has that character trait to a higher degree. Additionally, his character trait is also more vicious than it was before. This is not an accident. The characteristic actions and attitudes of cruelty are of disvalue. By increasing the degree to which he is cruel, he is also thereby increasing the degree to which his character trait is vicious.

Degree of virtuousness is understood in terms of producing actions or attitudes that are *either* of intrinsic value *or* instrumental value. Thus, a character trait may have a high degree of virtuousness if it produces one or the other or both. Conversely, degree of viciousness is understood in terms of producing actions or attitudes that are *either* of intrinsic disvalue *or* instrumental disvalue. Thus, a character trait may have a high degree of viciousness if it produces one or the other or both.

C. *Virtues and Vices*

Having characterized virtuousness and viciousness, we can now turn to my proposals for virtue and vice. My proposals are:

- *Indirect Proposal.* A virtue is a character trait with a high degree of virtuousness and little to no degree of viciousness. Conversely, a vice is a character trait with a high degree of viciousness and little to no degree of virtuousness.

Recall that virtuousness and viciousness are defined in terms of the relevant trait's characteristic attitudes and actions in stimulus conditions. Thus, on these proposals, a character trait is a virtue when, in relevant stimulus conditions, the character trait is disposed to predominately have attitudes and actions that are of intrinsic/instrumental value and not have attitudes and actions that are of intrinsic/instrumental disvalue. (And conversely for vices.)

I call this proposal indirect because virtue and vices are not directly analyzed in terms of value and disvalue but in terms of an intermediate pair of properties that are, themselves, analyzed in terms of value and disvalue. This type of analysis is not unique to this case. Consider

a simple way of analyzing wealth in basic economics. First, it is common to distinguish between, on the one hand, income and assets (e.g. valuable items such as properties) and, on the other hand, liabilities (e.g. owed loans). Income and assets are degreed—one can increase one’s income or assets over time. Likewise, liabilities are degreed as well—one might owe more debt over time. Second, whether a person is wealthy depends upon both of these degreed properties. A person with high income and assets and little to no liabilities is wealthy. By contrast, a person with little income and great liabilities is not wealthy. And a person with little to no income but little to no liabilities is not wealthy either. Etc.

Now some traits might have some degree of virtuousness and viciousness. Given *Indirect Proposal*, these traits are not virtues or vices. Nonetheless, they need not be entirely neutral. We might call them “imperfect traits.” For instance, blind loyalty might be an imperfect trait. Being loyal may be valuable in various contexts; but being blinded by loyal also means ignoring other morally salient concerns, which may be disvaluable in other contexts. Another potential example might involve character traits associated with modern chivalry. Such character traits might produce valuable actions of helping others; but they may also produce disvaluable attitudes, specifically, towards women. Or, lastly, consider an extreme moral fervor. For instance, John Brown had an extreme moral fervor against slavery. His fervor caused him to have valuable attitudes and actions such as strongly disliking very bad things. But it also caused him to engage in acts of violence and terrorism. Speaking for myself, I am not morally indifferent to Brown’s character trait. But I do not think he had a virtue or a vice. Rather, his extreme moral fervor had some degrees of virtuousness and some degree of viciousness.⁹

One might wonder about the methodology of characterizing virtues and vices in terms of degrees of virtuousness and viciousness. Specifically, one might worry that our ability to think and theorize about the virtues and vices is better than our ability to think and theorize about virtuousness and viciousness. However, there are several benefits to characterizing virtues and vices in this way.¹⁰

First, it is antecedently plausible that the normative significance of virtues and vices come in degrees: some virtues seem better than others, some vices seem worse than others, and a person’s particular virtue or vice might get better or worse over time. Thus, having degreed properties to analyze or understand virtues and vices is plausible. Second, it is not plausible to analyze virtuousness or viciousness in terms of the virtues and vices. The most natural analysis would be that the degree of virtuousness a character trait has is the degree to which it instantiates a virtue, and conversely for viciousness and vices. But this analysis is too restrictive. For instance, it may be that some character traits have a low degree of virtuousness without instantiating a virtue. Additionally, some character traits may have some degree of both virtuousness and viciousness. But it may not be the case that such impure character traits realize both a virtue and a vice. Lastly, it may be that our most secure knowledge of the virtues and vices consists of a list of paradigms of virtues and vices as well as the psychological profile—the stimulus conditions and characteristic activities—of those paradigms. But even so, if virtue primitivism is false, then there is an explanation of the normative status of those characters as virtues and vices. And so it is appropriate to use other properties—like virtuousness and viciousness—to help explain why

⁹ My thinking on this topic has been helped by Spencer Case; see Case (2021). It may be better to think of Brown as having a cluster of character traits, instead of just one. This doesn’t undermine the basic point I intend to make with this case, namely, that some character traits are not indifferent and not yet virtues or vices.

¹⁰ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising these issues.

those character traits are virtues and vices. Here—as elsewhere in life—the order of understanding and the order of explanation need not line up.

D. Relation to Other Proposals

There are important differences between my *Indirect Proposal* and the three earlier proposals. The first difference is ideological in nature. My proposal utilizes three clusters of normative properties: virtue/vices, virtuousness/viciousness, intrinsic/instrumental value/disvalue. These other proposals utilize two clusters of normative properties: virtue/vices, intrinsic/instrumental value/disvalue. More specifically, my proposal analyzes virtues/vices in terms of virtuousness/viciousness, which are in turn analyzed in terms of intrinsic/instrumental value/disvalue. In this way, my proposal uses more terms to refer to more properties.

Second, the degree of virtuousness and viciousness of a character trait is not characterized directly in terms of the value/disvalue of the trait itself. Rather, it is characterized in terms of the value/disvalue of actions and attitudes that would manifest in stimulus conditions. Thus, on my view, it is possible that a character trait is a virtue even if it itself is not of intrinsic or instrumental value. Such a possibility is not permitted by any of the existing proposals. However, on my proposal, a virtue or vice that was not itself of any value or disvalue would be a trait that rarely, if ever, manifested. Presumably such character traits are rare. For agents are periodically or even frequently in the stimulus conditions for their character traits.

Third, on the *Indirect Proposal*, character traits *themselves* are not of intrinsic value. Thus, most character traits will be of instrumental value—if a virtue—and disvalue—if a vice. This makes the *Indirect Proposal* closer to *Instrumental Proposals* than *Intrinsic* or *Hybrid Proposals*. Nevertheless, there is an important difference between my view and Driver's prominent instrumentalist proposal. For Driver, agents' attitudes are not of any intrinsic value or disvalue (2001: xviii, 68). Thus, for her, character traits are instrumentally valuable only because of the value of their actions. However, I accept higher-order theories of value on which agents' attitudes *can be* of intrinsic value/disvalue. Thus, my view is more inclusive than hers.

Lastly, my *Indirect Proposal* has some affinity with *Hybrid Proposals*. For, like that proposal, facts about *both* the instrumental value of actions *and* the intrinsic value of attitudes determine which character traits are virtues. But I account for their relevancy indirectly in terms of degrees of virtuousness and viciousness. As I'll argue below this supports my proposal over current *Hybrid Proposals*.

III. Standard Issues and Objections

A new proposal doesn't necessarily mean improvement; perhaps it groups together all of the problems of previous proposals while avoiding the features that made them worth thinking about. I'll argue that isn't the case here; my proposal is able to navigate many of the issues and objections that others have raised for the other three proposals. Thus, if the proper way to understand virtue is in terms of value, then we should accept my proposal.

First Issue. On my *Indirect Proposal*, virtues and vices are character traits that are, at best, of instrumental value/disvalue. *Instrumentalist Proposals* have similar implications. But some may object to both types of proposals that virtues are desirable and vices undesirable (cf. Hurka (2006: 72ff). In response, obviously character traits are desirable when they are of instrumental value. They just need not be desirable in and of themselves. Thus, for this objection to succeed against *Instrumentalist Proposals* and my *Indirect Proposal*, it needs to be argued that virtues are not just desirable but desirable *in and of themselves*. And that does not strike me as intuitively plausible. Further, it is perfectly consistent to maintain that manifestations of character traits are intrinsically valuable, even if the character trait itself is only instrumentally valuable. Then

having the character trait and manifesting the character trait would both be desirable, but only the latter would be desirable in and of itself. So claims about the desirability of virtue and undesirability of vice do not provide a compelling objection to my *Indirect Proposal* or *Instrumental Proposals*.

Second Issue. Relatedly, on my proposals and some *Instrumental Proposals*, virtues are of instrumental value. But some might object that character traits that are merely of instrumental value are not admirable, whereas virtues are admirable (cf. McElwee (2015: 63ff)). To further motivate this objection, we might distinguish between traits we have reasons to admire and traits we have reason to promote and foster. The objection might be that character traits that are merely of instrumental value, when in stimulus conditions, are ones we have reasons to promote and foster but not admire.

However, even if a trait is merely of instrumental value, it may still be admirable. In fact, we already use the language of admiration when describing traits that are presumably only of instrumental value (e.g., ‘I really admire your cooking skills,’ ‘it is really admirable how punctual you are!’). To be sure, we might not admire such traits very much and perhaps admire them more if they also have additional attitudes of intrinsic value. But all of that is distinct from whether some individual character trait is admirable to some degree or not. So traits that are merely of instrumental value can be admirable. This objection fails against both my own *Indirect Proposal* and some *Instrumental Proposals*.

Third Issue. A common objection to Driver’s *Instrumentalist Proposal* is that it simply gets the extension of virtue and vice wrong (cf. Hurka (2001: 8-9, 22), Slote (2004: 29ff.) Calder (2007: 204ff.), Annas (2011: 110-1), McElwee (2015: 67)). This objection can naturally be extended to my own proposals. The most promising version of this objection appeals to character traits that are both of instrumental value (when in stimulus conditions) *and* contain morally problematic attitudes. A simple example is a shop clerk who never cheats his customers, always giving the right change, but only because he is afraid he would lose the customers if he didn’t and not because it is what they deserve. Here the clerk has a character trait that is, presumably, of instrumental value—benefiting both him and his customers—but he also has less than ideal attitudes that accompany it. A more extreme example is Driver’s examples of the Mutor’s (2001: 55-6). These beings have a very intense desire to beat children at a very specific age; further beating children at this age is of great instrumental value in that society. Nonetheless, the Mutors are not motivated by this instrumental value. While Driver claims this very specific trait is a virtue, many are skeptical.

This objection succeeds against Driver’s specific *Instrumental Proposal*; but my *Indirect Proposal* is immune from it. For if the character trait manifests instrumentally valuable actions *and* disvaluable attitudes—whether instrumentally or intrinsically—then it is to some degree virtuous and to some degree vicious. But then, on my proposals, it is an imperfect trait and not a virtue or vice. On my view, the value and disvalue of both actions *and attitudes* are relevant to the degrees of virtuousness and viciousness of a character trait. For I accept higher-order theories of value, on which our attitudes can also be valuable or disvaluable.

This response is not *ad hoc*. My response to these types of cases is similar to my response to the case of John Brown earlier. I am not indifferent to these types of character traits. I am glad that the shopkeeper gives correct change; given the extreme circumstances of the Mutor society, I want there to be people with such traits. Nonetheless, I am also disappointed by the clerk’s attitude; and I am appalled by the Mutor’s attitudes. A more nuanced evaluation of these

character traits is needed. An appeal to the idea of an imperfect character trait seems necessary and helpful.

Fourth Issue. The previous objection to Driver's specific *Instrumentalist Proposal* succeeds. But it can also be redeployed against the *Hybrid Proposal*. Let us stick with the example of the Mutors. Their character trait produces actions of instrumental value. Thus, given the *Hybrid Proposal* their character trait is a virtue. But it also produces attitudes that are of intrinsic disvalue. Thus, given the *Hybrid Proposal* their character trait is a vice. Thus, given the *Hybrid Proposal* their character trait is *both* a virtue and a vice. But, the objection goes, that is absurd.

This objection succeeds against the *Hybrid Proposal*. But it fails against my own *Indirect Proposal*. Given my proposal, what follows is at best that the Mutors' character trait has some degree of virtuousness and some degree of viciousness. And that disqualifies it from being either a virtue or a vice on my proposal.

But there is a worthwhile lesson here. On *Hybrid Proposals*, virtues are things that are either instrumentally valuable or intrinsically valuable. What is appealing about *Hybrid Proposals* is that facts about *both* intrinsic and instrumental value play a role in determining when a trait is a virtue. But this simply disjunctive way is too implausible. A more sophisticated approach is needed. My proposals provide a more sophisticated approach. On my *Indirect Proposal*, both intrinsic and instrumental value play a role in determining the degree of virtuousness of a character traits; but whether or not such a trait is a virtue is partly determined by other factors as well, such as its viciousness.

Fifth Issue. Driver defends an actualist account, on which it is the actual results of character traits that determines whether it is a virtue or vice. Earlier I briefly argued against an actualist approach. But Driver may object to my proposal as follows. Suppose two agents have the same character trait that has some high degree of viciousness. And suppose the first agent is frequently in the stimulus conditions for the character trait, while the second isn't. Then the first agent will have more actions and attitudes that are of disvalue than the second agent. Nonetheless, given my proposal, both agents have character traits that are equally vicious, despite the fact that one agent bring about more disvalue.

However, I do not find this result unintuitive or objectionable. It does seem to me that both agents have a character trait that is equally vicious, it is just that one of them uses it more. Here is an analogy. Imagine two cars that have the same break-alert system that informs the driver of when they need to start slowing down suddenly. But the first car is driven by an incautious person and the second is driven by a cautious person. Both break-alert systems are equally safe; it is just that the first gets more use.

Thus, I am drawing a distinction between the virtuousness and viciousness of a character trait and how frequently that character trait manifests. We have reasons to care about both. We have reasons to hope that our character traits and those of others become more virtuous. But we also have reasons to see to it that, given our character trait may be less than ideal, that we avoid the stimulus conditions for them.

IV. Concluding Remarks

According to the value-tradition, virtues and vices should be understood or analyzed in terms of their relation to value and disvalue. So far, the literature has clustered around three types of proposals, what I call *Intrinsic Proposals*, *Instrumental Proposals*, and *Hybrid Proposals*. In this paper, I offer an alternative proposal, the *Indirect Proposal*. My proposal has a number of advantages. First, it retains the idea (partly motivating *Intrinsic Proposals*) that virtue involves valuable attitudes and vice disvaluable attitudes. Second, it retains the idea (partly motivating

Instrumental Proposals) that virtue involves instrumentally valuable actions and vice instrumentally disvaluable actions. However, third, it combines these motivating ideas in a better way than current *Hybrid Proposals*. If the virtues and vices are best analyzed in terms of value, then they should be analyzed in accordance with the *Indirect Proposal*.

Bibliography

- Adams, Robert. (2006). *A Theory of Virtue*. Clarendon Press.
- Annas, Julia. (2011). *Intelligent Virtue*. Oxford University Press.
- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Many Editions.
- Brandt, Richard. (1959). *Ethical Theory*. Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Calder, Todd. (2007). "Against Consequentialist Theories of Virtue and Vice." *Utilitas*. 19.2: 201-19.
- Case, Spencer. (2021). "Moral Extremism." *Journal of Applied Philosophy*. 38.4: 615-629.
- Doris, John. (1998). "Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics." *Nous*. 32.4: 504-530.
- Doris, John. (2002). *Lack of Character*. Cambridge University Press.
- Driver, Julia. (2001). *Uneasy Virtue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Driver, Julia. (2012). *Consequentialism*. Routledge.
- Hursthouse, Rosalind. (1999). *On Virtue Ethics*. Oxford University Press.
- Hurka, Thomas. (2001). *Virtue, Vice, and Value*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hurka, Thomas. (2006). "Virtuous Act, Virtuous Dispositions." *Analysis*. 66.1: 69-76.
- Hurka, Thomas. (2014). *British Ethical Theorists from Sidgwick to Ewing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McElwee, Brian. (2015). "The Value of the Virtues." *Utilitas*. 27.1: 61-81.
- Merritt, Maria. (2000). "Virtue Ethics and Situationist Personality Psychology." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*. 3.4: 365-383.
- Mill, John Stuart. (1843). *System of Logic*. Many Editions.
- Mill, John Stuart. (1861). *Utilitarianism*. Many Editions.
- Miller, Christian. (2013). *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory*. Oxford University Press.
- Moore, G. E. (1903). *Principia Ethica*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Perrine, Timothy. (2020). "Consequentialism, Animal Ethics, and the Value of Valuing." *Journal of Applied Philosophy*. 37.3: 485-501.
- Rashdall, Hastings. (1885). "Professor Sidgwick's Utilitarianism." *Mind*. 10.38: 200-226.
- Ross, W. D. (1930). *The Right and the Good*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Russell, Luke. (2007). "What Even Consequentialists Should Say About the Virtues," *Utilitas*. 19.4: 466-486.
- Slote, Michael. (2004). "Driver's Virtues." *Utilitas*. 16.1: 22-32.