

VIRTUOUS MOTIVATION

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Imagine four wealthy people who write a check to a worthy charity for the same, substantial amount of money. Minerva writes the check because she cares about the people served by the charity and wants to make their lives better. Albus writes the check because he believes it's the generous thing to do and he wants to do what is generous. Gilderoy writes the check because he wants his name to appear on the charity's annual published list of benefactors. Petunia writes the check because she wants to spite her sister, who gave her the money for the purposes of paying off her credit card debt.

There is some sense in which all four of them have done the same action, an action that seems morally good or right.¹ And yet it's also obvious that their varying motivations make a moral difference, if not to our evaluation of their actions, then certainly to our evaluation of them as agents. We tend to think that it matters not just that people do the right thing, but that they do the right thing for the right reasons. Minerva's motivational structure seems morally admirable. So does Albus's, although we might hesitate over his focus on the virtuousness of the action. Gilderoy's motivations, being self-centered and narcissistic, seem morally deficient. As for Petunia, we might describe her motives for giving money as downright vicious, despite the beneficial effects of the action itself. It's clear that these agents differ considerably in their motivational structure and moreover, differ in a way that calls for articulation in moral terms.

Evidently we need a way of drawing moral distinctions among different motivations that agents might have in performing a particular action. Figuring out what makes certain

motivations morally admirable is, however, only part of the philosophical puzzle about motivation. There is also the question of whether and how moral judgments motivate people to act at all. Imagine a fifth agent, Cornelius, who judges that he ought to write the check to the charity but who nevertheless fails to write it. How do we explain Cornelius's motivational failure? Did he not really judge that he should write the check? Is it possible for him to be utterly unmoved by that judgment? Or might he have been motivated, but insufficiently so? Suppose that Cornelius does end up writing the check because it's the right thing to do, but only grumpily because he'd rather spend the money on his vacation. What do we say about his motivational structure?

The topic of moral motivation in general is obviously a large one. In this essay, I will focus on the narrower issue of what specifically virtuous motivation looks like, where 'virtuous' is not simply a stand-in for 'moral.' I will use the phrase 'virtuous motivation' to describe the motivational state of a virtuous person acting virtuously. On the picture I will present, it is possible to be motivated by moral concerns without succeeding in being virtuously motivated. The motivational structure of a virtuous agent is shaped in distinctive ways by the fact that she is virtuous. In what follows I articulate and defend this robust notion of virtuous motivation.

Lurking in the background of any discussion of moral motivation are metaethical disputes about moral psychology and the nature of moral reasoning. A Humean will think differently about virtuous motivation than a non-Humean; a motivational internalist will think differently about it than an externalist.² In this essay, I will take for granted a largely Aristotelian approach to these background metaethical issues, though acknowledging that there are many ways of interpreting Aristotle on these points. My starting point will be Aristotle's well known account of virtuous action in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. There Aristotle says that in order for an action to

be done virtuously, the agent must (a) know the action is virtuous, (b) choose the action, (c) choose it for its own sake, and (d) perform it from a firm and settled state of character.³

Although it is criterion (c) that is most obviously relevant to virtuous motivation, the other conditions help illuminate the motivational structure of a fully virtuous agent. I will thus discuss them as well.

First, however, it will help to state more formally some of the different questions about moral motivation posed by the opening example. When we ask what it means to say that an action is virtuously motivated, or that an agent is virtuously motivated in acting, we might be inquiring about any of the following:

1. Whether correct moral judgment, as exemplified in the virtuous person, implies that the person making the judgment takes herself to have a (motivating) reason to act in accordance with that judgment.⁴
2. Whether a person who judges that an action is the correct action will be sufficiently motivated to act in accordance with that judgment (i.e., not weak-willed).
3. Whether in order for an action to count as virtuously motivated, it must be done with a certain aim in view or done because it is right or noble or virtuous.
4. Whether in order for an action to count as virtuously motivated, the performance of the action must be accompanied by a particular feeling or affective state.

These questions are interrelated, but they raise separate issues. In this essay I will be focusing primarily on the issues raised by (3) and (4), although I will first briefly address (1) and (2).

The issue raised by (1) is fundamentally about the nature of moral judgment. If we are presupposing what is normally called the Humean view of moral psychology, then we will distinguish between judgments of reasons and motivating desires.⁵ Hume believed that reason alone cannot move us to action. Insofar as an agent's judgment that an action is right or virtuous is a judgment of reason, it cannot be motivating for her in the absence of an accompanying desire. (Of course, many Humeans, including Hume himself, reject the idea that moral

judgments are judgments of reason at all.) What would such a picture of moral psychology suggest about virtuous motivation?

On this picture, when we say that an agent is virtuously motivated in acting, we are primarily making a claim about the presence, nature, and direction of certain, virtuous desires. An agent who desires to help people will be motivated to act when she judges that they are in need of help, but an agent who lacks that desire, or who desires instead to see them suffer, will not be so motivated. Because this picture locates the source of moral motivation in the agent's desires, then that agent's virtue is a reflection of the moral quality of her desires. An agent with virtuous desires will be virtuously motivated; an agent with vicious desires will be viciously motivated.

Consider Michael Slote's broadly Humean way of approaching virtue ethics, which puts virtuous motivation at the center of the account.⁶ A virtuously motivated agent, on Slote's account, is motivated by care or empathy for others, motives that are fundamentally sentiments (which is why Slote calls his theory a version of moral sentimentalism.) Importantly, Slote builds quite a lot into his conception of virtuous care, such as that a virtuously caring person will be attentive to considerations about how to direct her care appropriately. This thick, richly described conception of a virtuously caring motive is foundational to Slote's account of right action, which is defined in terms of what a person with this kind of virtuous motive would do. A crucial implication of Slote's view is that it is not possible for a virtuously motivated person to do something that is in fact morally wrong. The picture I will eventually defend resembles Slote's view in that it will build a great deal into the conception of virtuous motivation. It differs, however, in that it allows for the possibility that a virtuously motivated person might nevertheless perform a wrong action.⁷

Slote's approach does not presuppose Humean moral psychology, although it seems more compatible with it than other versions of virtue ethics.⁸ But many virtue ethicists reject this underlying picture of moral psychology, arguing instead that the correct judgments of a virtuous person are necessarily motivating.⁹ An agent who fails to be moved by his judgment that an action is required of him thereby shows himself to be failing to judge properly. On this view, we do not need to postulate an accompanying desire in order to explain the pull of the moral judgment. The motivation is built into the judgment.

The question posed by (1) is largely a question about internalism. Is it possible to make a sincere moral judgment without being motivated to act in accordance with that judgment? Or does the lack of motivation imply that the moral judgment has not been made or has been made insincerely? How we answer this depends on what we think a moral judgment is. Internalists can be cognitivists or non-cognitivists about moral judgments, and needless to say, there are many variations on each theme. The Aristotelian account presented here is probably best described as a kind of cognitivist internalist view.¹⁰ On this view, moral judgments can be correct or incorrect, and correct moral judgments are motivating for a virtuous agent.

Now this leaves open many possibilities about what it means for something to be a correct moral judgment. Consider Minerva's judgment that people are in need of help. Is that a moral judgment by itself? Or would the judgment need to include something about it being good, right, or virtuous to help people in need? If we take an internalist view and hold that virtuous agents are motivated by their moral judgments, it is necessary to set out the content of the judgment in such a way that it explains what motivates a virtuous agent to act in accordance with it. An internalist about virtuous motivation is committed to saying this much: it is not possible for an agent to judge that she should do an action and be entirely unmoved by that

judgment. Of course, to be moved by a judgment is not necessarily to be sufficiently moved to act on that judgment. This takes us to the second of the four questions.

Question (2) raises a puzzle about the possibility of weakness of will (*akrasia*). This puzzle has ancient origins, dating back to the Socratic claim that all wrongdoing is a result of ignorance.¹¹ To know the good is to do the good; someone who fails to do the good necessarily acts in ignorance.¹² This Socratic claim makes weakness of will impossible, at least if that is defined as knowing what is good to do, but failing to do it. Aristotle famously disputed the claim, although his own account of the phenomenon is hardly perspicuous. Like question (1), question (2) raises questions about the nature of moral judgment. Anyone who denies that weakness of will is possible must explain not only how correct moral judgment can be motivating, but also how it can be sufficiently motivating. This is a tall order and one that I doubt can be filled adequately, but I will set this issue aside. It is evident that the weak-willed person lacks virtuous motivation, since he fails to do what is right. A more interesting question is whether the continent (*enkraitic*) person counts as being virtuously motivated, an issue we will consider later.

Let us turn to question (3), which is about the aims or ends of virtuous action. This question has been the focus of much contention at the level of normative theory. The contentiousness arises over whether virtuous agents should be motivated by the virtuous quality of the action itself or by the features of the action that make it virtuous. Who exhibits virtuous motivation—Albus, who writes the check because it is a generous act, or Minerva, who writes the check because it will help people? Although Albus is clearly focused on the moral value of the action, we might wonder whether that focus reflects an egoistic preoccupation with his own virtuous character.¹³ Alternatively we may think him a moral fetishist, caring more about the

virtuousness of the action than the actual people in need of his help.¹⁴ Furthermore, there are potential theoretical problems about the relationship between the moral justification for an action and what seems like the morally admirable motives for those same actions.

This last point has been famously illustrated by Michael Stocker, in the form of his example of a person who visits his friend in the hospital out of duty.¹⁵ Taking for granted that it is better for such actions to be motivated by friendship, love, or care, Stocker argues that utilitarianism and Kantianism are faced with what he calls a form of schizophrenia.¹⁶ What justifies the action does not seem to be what should motivate it, leading to what Stocker takes to be a theoretically and practically unpalatable split within the theory. For utilitarianism, what justifies the action is the fact that it maximizes happiness; for Kantianism, the justification lies in the fact that the action fulfills a moral duty.¹⁷ But these seem to be inappropriate motives for visiting a sick friend, and certainly inferior to motives of love and care. This produces, according to Stocker, a troubling lack of harmony between justification and motive: “not to be moved by what one values....bespeaks a malady of the spirit. Not to value what moves one also bespeaks a malady of the spirit.”¹⁸

Stocker’s hospital visitor has spurred much debate in the literature, much of it on the question of whether virtue ethics is faced with a similar problem.¹⁹ It would seem that according to virtue ethics, what justifies an action like visiting one’s friend in the hospital is that it is virtuous or that it is what a virtuous person would do. But this is no more appealing as a motive for acting than considerations of what would maximize happiness or fulfill a duty. If we think that the morally best motive for visiting one’s friend in a hospital is something like love or care, then virtue ethics is just as “schizophrenic” as other moral theories.

This problem, which is now usually characterized in terms of whether a theory is self-effacing, is a multi-layered one.²⁰ I will take for granted that insofar as Kantianism and utilitarianism are self-effacing, so is virtue ethics. It too is faced with a potential split between the justification for an action in terms of its virtuousness and the kinds of moral concerns we think should be motivating a virtuous agent. The question is whether this is a problem.

Stocker claims that this split between one's reasons (or justifications or values) and one's motivations (or desires) is a bad thing. But what exactly is supposed to be bad about it? Is it a generally negative feature of a theory if it ends up giving different accounts of what a virtuous person values and what motivates her to act? Or perhaps the concern is not so much with the structure of the theory itself, but with the picture it presents of ideal moral agency. Stocker assumes, not implausibly, that a virtuous agent would be motivated to visit by her care and concern for her friend. He further assumes that on a two-level theory, care and concern for her friend is not what would justify her in acting. If the agent is aware that her action is justified by other considerations, as it seems a virtuous person would be, then she will find herself with a mismatch or disharmony between her justifying moral reasons and her motives. She could get rid of the disharmony either by discarding the justifying moral reasons or by incorporating those reasons into her motivation. Those solutions, however, come with their own problems. The first solution would jettison moral considerations entirely, but the second risks turning virtuous agents into unfeeling prigs.

So what *should* be going on in a virtuous agent's head as she writes a check to charity or visits her stricken friend in the hospital? What would have to be true of her in order for it to be true that she is engaging in a virtuously motivated hospital visit? Would a virtuous agent be

motivated to visit her friend in the hospital on the grounds that it's virtuous? Or would she be more virtuous if she were to visit just because she cares about him?

It is worth noting that the problem shows up most compellingly in the case of beneficent or generous actions, where we do expect virtuous agents to have some sort of concern for the well-being of those they are helping. It is much less obvious that there is some equivalently admirable motive in acting, say, justly. Suppose that rather than writing checks, Minerva and Albus are returning dropped wallets to their owners. Minerva does it because she is concerned about the person and the hardships he would endure without his wallet. Albus does it because it is what justice requires. In this case, our intuitions about what would motivate a virtuous person are likely much less clear. So we should be careful not to draw unwarranted general conclusions about virtuous motivation from the single case of the hospital visitor. Perhaps it isn't always a bad thing to be motivated by an action's rightness or virtuousness. Moreover, even where we think that other motives should play a role, we shouldn't be too quick to dismiss the moral motive as insignificant to the question of whether an agent is virtuous. We can imagine a person who, while acting from genuine care and concern, nevertheless fails to be adequately concerned with the rightness of what he does. Indeed, Immanuel Kant presents us with just such a person—the sympathetic philanthropist of the *Groundwork*.²¹

Kant claims that in order for an action to have what he calls moral worth, it must be done from the motive of duty, meaning a commitment to doing what is right. A shopkeeper who charges fair prices so as not to lose customers acts in accordance with duty, but his action lacks moral worth because it is motivated by self-interest, not moral concerns. This seems uncontroversial, but Kant goes on to claim that the actions of a sympathetic philanthropist, who helps people from care and concern, also lack moral worth. Kant's picture is of someone whose

temperament is naturally kind and sympathetic and whose inclinations direct him toward helping. Why would Kant deny that such helping actions fail to have moral worth? Unlike the shopkeeper, the sympathetic philanthropist is motivated by what seem like moral concerns about the well-being of other people. Just as we are inclined to ascribe virtue to Stocker's caring hospital visitor, so we may also want to ascribe it to the sympathetic philanthropist, and declare that his helping actions are virtuously motivated.

And yet perhaps we should not be too quick to ascribe virtuous motivation to the sympathetic philanthropist, at least as Kant describes him. After all, sympathetic inclinations come and go. Would an agent motivated by sympathy alone help if he's in a bad mood or dislikes the people who need help? Sympathetic feelings can lead us to help on occasions when we should refrain, or to help badly, or in ways that undermine our own self-respect. All this points to what, on Barbara Herman's view, is the real problem with the sympathetic philanthropist, which is that his sympathetic feelings essentially float free of morality.²² He would help regardless of the moral ramifications of helping, and this, for Kant, is where the problem lies. However pleasing and praiseworthy his inclinations are, they cannot serve as the basis for ascriptions of virtue. For that, we need something more.

Kant, of course, took the something more to be a commitment to morality. In the end, the sympathetic philanthropist proves to have that commitment, although it is not evident until his sympathetic inclinations are driven away by sorrow and he continues to help. It is the sorrowing philanthropist who most evidently demonstrates Kantian's idea of moral motivation, since he is motivated to help without the aid of either self-interest or immediate inclination to do the action.

Rosalind Hursthouse has argued that Aristotelian virtue ethicists should agree with Kant about the sympathetic philanthropist, as he is described in the *Groundwork*.²³ Insofar he is

simply following his inclinations, he demonstrates a lack of practical wisdom, that all-important Aristotelian virtue. In Aristotelian terms, he has at best natural virtue. I will say more about practical wisdom shortly, but it is worth noting that the sympathetic philanthropist fails to express Aristotelian virtue in his motives just as much as he fails to exhibit a Kantian good will. It might seem as though the sympathetic philanthropist is genuinely virtuously motivated on those occasions when the inclinations are present, even if not otherwise. But this fails to do justice to the intuition, shared by both Aristotle and Kant, that there is something enduring about a truly virtuous person's motivation to help, something tied to features of her character or will. Moreover, as we will soon see, the sympathetic philanthropist's lack of practical wisdom undermines the virtuousness of his motives even when he does manage to act rightly.

Where does this leave us with respect to question (3) and Stocker's criticism? Ideally, it seems, a hospital visitor would visit out of concern for his friend and his act of visiting would reflect his commitment to the underlying moral considerations. Morality directs us to be concerned about people; insofar as our helping actions are motivated by that concern, they are morally motivated. The dutiful hospital visitor need not be a moral fetishist in order to count as morally motivated.²⁴ But there's more to Stocker's worry than fetishism; it's also about the feelings that go along with virtuous actions. We may think that the hospital visitor should be experiencing feelings of love and concern for his friend in addition to whatever moral motivation we think he should have. This takes us to question (4): must virtuous action, in order to be virtuously motivated, include certain feelings or affective states?

Kant's answer to this question is a qualified "no." It is a "no" because of his example of the cold-hearted benefactor, who helps from duty alone but whose action still, on Kant's view, has moral worth. It is qualified because Kant thinks that we do have a duty to cultivate our

sympathetic feelings, since they support us in the identification and reliable performance of virtuous actions.²⁵ Moreover, we are to fulfill moral requirements cheerfully; a grumpy hospital visitor may not even be succeeding in acting beneficently. Still, many people, especially virtue ethicists, would want to go beyond this and say that in order for a helping action to count as virtuously motivated (as opposed to simply morally motivated), it should be accompanied by the kinds of attractive feelings that Kant attributed to the sympathetic philanthropist.²⁶

Indeed, an affirmative answer to (4) is generally taken to be one of the hallmarks of Aristotelian accounts of virtuous action. Aristotle himself describes virtues as being about both acting and feeling properly. On the standard Aristotelian picture, virtuously motivated actions have a characteristic affective state, a state that is not simply reducible to a pro-attitude toward the action, which even Kant's cold-hearted benefactor would have.

This idea is sometimes expressed in terms of Aristotle's distinction between virtue and continence. According to this distinction, the virtuous person takes pleasure in virtuous action and acts with ease. The continent person, by contrast, has to struggle with competing inclinations and although he also does what he should, he finds it challenging. I have argued elsewhere that the moral distinction between virtue and continence is not nearly as straightforward as is often supposed.²⁷ To see why, consider again the sorrowing philanthropist, the man who once enjoyed helping people, but now who helps from duty alone. This is clearly a morally motivated action. Should we say, though, that his action fails to be virtuously motivated because he lacks sympathetic feelings at the time of action? I think that it does not fail, that it can still be virtuously motivated even it lacks affects that otherwise seem appropriate to helping actions. Suppose the man's sorrows stem from the fact that his child has just been diagnosed with a terminal illness. Surely we do not think he would be a better person from a moral

standpoint if he simply set those sorrows aside. For the philanthropist whose life is going well, happy feelings may well be the appropriate accompaniment to his helping actions. But the sorrowing philanthropist is not just in a psychologically different place; he is in a morally different place. If his mind is overclouded by sorrows that, from a moral standpoint, demand a suitably sorrowful affective stance, then there would be something morally deficient about him if he were not sorrowing. Sometimes, it's morally appropriate to have the affects of the sorrowing philanthropist. Virtuous people are not always happy about helping; they are happy only insofar the circumstances warrant those feelings.²⁸ As Hursthouse points out, a virtuous person will return a wallet to a scoundrel, but there's no reason to think that she will be glad about it.²⁹

I have taken a long path through those four initial questions. Before I set out my own view about what virtuously motivated agents are like, let me summarize where things stand. Questions (1) and (2) raise primarily metaethical issues about the very possibility of moral motivation. Answering question (1), about whether moral judgments are motivating, requires an account of what moral judgments are. Answering question (2), about whether weakness of will is possible, requires an account of whether moral judgments must be sufficient to move us to act accordingly. Questions (3) and (4) take us deeper into the virtuous agent's motivational structure, particularly the affective stance that is characteristic of virtue. I have said that I think a person can be morally motivated without being virtuously motivated, that virtuous motivation requires something beyond moral motivation. Virtuous motivation includes both an appreciation of the action's choiceworthiness and also an affective stance appropriate to the action in question. The appropriate affective stance will vary according to the circumstances in which the action is performed, but it matters. All this suggests that a virtuous agent's motivational structure expresses her virtue in a way that cannot be simply copied by agents who lack virtue.

To see why this is so, let us now turn to Aristotle and his four criteria for an action to be fully virtuous.

The four criteria, recall, are that the agent must (a) know that the action is virtuous, (b) choose the action, (c) choose it for its own sake, and (d) perform it from a firm and settled state of character. It may seem as though the issue of appropriate motivation is contained entirely within (c); however, this is not the case. It is not possible to understand what it means to choose an action for its own sake without understanding what a virtuous person takes herself to be doing when she acts and how her virtue is contributing to her motivational structure when acting.

Let's begin with (a), which has both a thin reading and a thick reading. On the thin reading, (a) is merely stating that an agent must not be mistaken about what she is doing. If she does something virtuous by accident or under a misconception about the nature of her action, then she won't count as knowing that the action is virtuous. On the thicker reading, knowing an action is virtuous amounts to making a correct judgment that the action is virtuous. This by itself needn't imply that she is choosing it as a virtuous action, or that there is nothing else about the action that she finds compelling. But it does suggest that in order for an action to meet this criterion, the agent must possess a considerable degree of moral knowledge. I want to defend this thicker reading, so let us consider what is involved with making a correct judgment about an action's virtuousness.

There are two parts to this thicker reading of (a). The first part is the claim that the agent must be capable of recognizing the action as a virtuous one. We might think it's enough to be able to attach the correct label to the action, as a small child might do. Children of course can be taught to call certain actions virtuous before they are capable of understanding what it means to call them that. A young child may know that when he shares his cookies with his friend, this is

properly describe as a generous action. But in order to really know what he is saying when he calls it generous, he must be able to recognize what it is about the act of sharing that makes it worth doing.

A rather different concern about a thick reading of (a) is that virtuous people sometimes reject the labels employing virtue terms when those labels are attached to particular actions.³⁰ Generous people do not, as a rule, go about thinking about their actions *as* acts of generosity. If a generous person declines to call her generous action by that label, does she fail to meet the criterion for (a)? Hursthouse addresses this concern by arguing that virtuous people act for what she, following Bernard Williams, describes as X reasons. X reasons refer to features of the situation, such as the fact that someone needed help, or that the agent is driving, or that the other person is one's friend.³¹ We might think of X reasons as pointing to the features of the circumstances that make it choiceworthy, features that the virtuous person is attending to when she chooses her action. On this view, to say that an agent must know that an action is virtuous is to say that must know that these are features of the action and see those features as being what makes the action choiceworthy in those circumstances. Of course, to say that she sees the action as choiceworthy suggests that she is motivated to choose it, and so we will return to this in the discussion of criterion (c).

The second part of (a) is that the judgment must be correct. If the agent knows that the action is virtuous, it must be true that it is virtuous. This would rule out actions done under the mistaken belief that they are virtuous. We might ask whether incorrect actions might nevertheless be virtuously motivated. After all, couldn't I make a mistake about what's right to do, and yet still choose the action, choose it for the right reasons, and choose it from a firm and unchanging character? Wouldn't such an action be virtuously motivated?

I would want to say that it cannot. But in order to say that, we need to distinguish between two different types of mistake. Suppose I hear that the local homeless shelter is in dire need of immediate financial assistance. I wish to help and so immediately send money, only to find out that I am wrong about the need. In fact, the shelter has just received a substantial gift and is in excellent financial shape. I have not judged correctly about what I should do, but it seems odd to say that I am not virtuously motivated. Now in this case, what I am wrong about is an empirical matter. It would be different if I were making a mistake about the moral significance of the cause. Suppose that there is an organization in town devoted to the preservation of a particular style of roof shingle on historic buildings. The shingle is quite expensive and difficult to procure. I get wrapped up in the shingle crusade and send the already well-funded organization all my spare cash. Meanwhile, the local homeless shelter, housed in a historic building, cannot afford to replace its roof with the designated shingles, forcing the residents to live in a leaky, moldy environment.

It seems clear that if I know about the situation at the homeless shelter and yet continue to send money to the preservation society, I am judging incorrectly. Not only am I not doing what is virtuous, but my ignorance is of a sort that seems to impugn my moral character. I am excessively caught up in the aesthetics of historical buildings and I am overlooking crucial moral considerations about the needs of the shelter residents. In this case, it is more plausible to say that I am not virtuously motivated. My inability to judge correctly here, unlike in the other case, is a strike against my claim to be virtuous.

This fits nicely with Aristotle's discussion in *Nicomachean Ethics* III.1 about the relationship between ignorance and voluntariness. In that chapter, Aristotle employs his conception of a practical syllogism as containing a universal premise, a particular premise, and a

conclusion that takes the form of an action.³² For instance, I may know that it is wrong to kill one's father (universal premise), recognize that the man at the crossroads is my father (particular premise) and then conclude that I should refrain from killing the man at the crossroads. Aristotle claims that ignorance of a particular, when accompanied by regret, can render an action non-voluntary. We might make a parallel point about virtuous motivation. When an agent's ability to know whether the action is virtuous results from non-culpable ignorance of a particular, then we may still be able to consider the action virtuously motivated. But ignorance of universals, for Aristotle, is another story. Ignorance of a universal is ignorance of a general moral consideration or principle, and this kind of ignorance blocks correct judgment in a different way.

How does it block judgment in a way that might give us reason to deny that the action is virtuously motivated? For that, we need to see what Aristotle thinks it takes to judge correctly. Aristotle famously (or infamously, depending on one's perspective) claimed that there is a reciprocal relationship between practical wisdom and the moral virtues, such that in order to have practical wisdom, it's necessary to have all the moral virtues and vice versa. If the reciprocity thesis is true, then we have a way of explaining why a failure with respect to knowledge of the universal undermines the agent's claim to be virtuously motivated in ways that failure to know a particular does not. This is because the failure to appreciate a universal, such as the fact that the basic comfort of the shelter residents is far more important than the aesthetics of the building in which they are living, displays an absence of, or at least a serious deficiency with respect to one of the moral virtues (presumably compassion or empathy in this case.) So incorrect judgments, understood in this way, are not all of a piece. Some of them are a result of the agent's lack of virtue; others are not. Where the agent's incorrect judgment is a result of the

agent's deficiencies with respect to the moral virtues, then we should withhold the claim that the action was virtuously motivated.

I have interpreted (a) in such a way that it does quite a lot of work in the account of what is happening when a virtuous person acts. To say that she knows that the act is virtuous is to say that she has a correct understanding of the features of the circumstances that make the action the virtuous thing to do in those circumstances. It isn't necessary that she have the thought, "this is the virtuous thing to do here," but she must be picking up on those features that make the action virtuous. If she does not have hold of those features, she lacks practical wisdom and hence, cannot be fully virtuously motivated.

As we saw in the discussion of question (3), the problem with the sympathetic philanthropist is the action's moral status does not enter into his deliberations. He helps because he finds it pleasing to help, and it is pure serendipity that his inclinations tend in this direction. Importantly, the sympathetic philanthropist need not be acting in total ignorance. Presumably he is correct in his judgment that people are in need of his help. He may even be judging that it is good for him to help them, as opposed to merely pleasant for him. If he is genuinely focused on their needs, then he is picking up on the features of the action that make it virtuous. But there is more to correct moral judgment than that. The judgment of the practically wise person is an all-things-considered judgment about the appropriateness of helping here, taking into account other moral considerations. We may not see a difference between the naturally sympathetic person and the practically wise person in cases where the latter would judge that helping is appropriate. (This may explain the standard reaction to Kant's sympathetic philanthropist.) The difference is most apparent in cases where there are competing moral considerations in play, considerations that the merely sympathetic person does not recognize or cannot identify.

A related case is posed by the person that Julia Annas describes as the learner in virtue.³³ The learner is someone who is trying to become virtuous, but who does not yet know which actions are virtuous. Because of this, he must depend on the judgment of a moral expert. Assuming that he has succeeded in identifying such an expert, then when he judges that he should do the action recommended by that expert, he will be making a correct moral judgment. It will not be pure serendipity that he gets it right, and presumably if he follows the expert's judgment across the board, he will judge correctly across situations. This is a kind of moral knowledge, though it still falls short of the moral knowledge characteristic of the fully virtuous person. I will return to the learner in virtue when we discuss (c), but first let me say something brief about (b), the claim that the action must be chosen or decided upon.

This second criterion is sometimes tied to the third (that the action must be chosen for its own sake), but they are distinct. Most obviously, (b) suggests that virtuously motivated actions are done consciously, with a particular aim or end in view. That would seem to rule out unreflective actions as virtuously motivated. This is a complicated issue, since we may be inclined to think that an agent's character is often revealed by what she does when she doesn't have time to deliberate. Much, of course, depends on what is required for an action to count as having been chosen.³⁴ Aristotle's own criteria are somewhat restrictive; I am inclined to use more expansive ones. Probably most of us would agree that a purely reflexive response isn't an action, although it might nevertheless be indicative of something about an agent's moral character. But if we say that an action can count as having been chosen if it can reasonably be said to have been done with some end in view, then this criterion allows that, say, a virtuous agent's sudden leap in front of a bus to save a child could count as having been chosen.

Let me now turn to criterion (c), which is both central to this Aristotelian account of virtuous motivation and also controversial. As we have seen, the idea that a virtuous agent would choose an action because it is virtuous (and presumably also because it is *kalon*) runs the risk of making the virtuous person seem either self-centered or fetishistic, neither of which seems virtuous. We have also seen that a lack of concern with whether an action is right or virtuous can be problematic, given that it may lead agents to act badly. So how should we interpret (c)?

I said in the discussion of (a), that the agent must know that the action is virtuous, that this amounts to seeing the action as choiceworthy, and choiceworthy in virtue of the features of that make it so. All four of the characters in my opening example see the act of writing the check as choiceworthy, but they do not all see it as choiceworthy in virtue of the same features. This is why Gilderoy and Petunia would fail to meet criterion (a) on the thicker reading; they are not picking up on the features of the action that make it choiceworthy. And if they do not know what it is that makes the action choiceworthy, then they cannot choose it for its own sake.

What about Minerva and Albus? Minerva sees the action as choiceworthy in virtue of the fact that it helps people. Albus sees it as choiceworthy in virtue of the fact that it is generous. Which of them is choosing the action for its own sake in Aristotle's sense? In order to answer that question, we must delve further into their motivational structures. Let's start with Minerva. In order to count as being virtuously motivated, Minerva must know that on this particular occasion, helping people is the virtuous action. This requires that she employ practical wisdom to get to that judgment, which serves to filter the various moral considerations in play. As we know from the sympathetic philanthropist case, helping people is not always the right thing to do. If she is virtuous, Minerva will not go directly from the fact that people are in need to the judgment that she should write the check. She needs to make an all-things considered judgment

that writing the check would be virtuous in these circumstances. So she needs to be cognizant of the action's overall virtuousness in order to count as virtuously motivated.³⁵

As for Albus, what we need to know is whether he is already fully virtuous or whether he is what Annas calls a learner in virtue. If he is a learner (and say, is just following Minerva's lead because he knows her to be a moral expert), then he will not count as virtuously motivated because he will not be able to make the judgment on his own that this action is the virtuous thing to do here. He may be morally motivated insofar as he wants to do what is generous. But in order to count as virtuously motivated, he must understand in virtue of what the action counts as generous and moreover, he must see those features of the circumstances as what makes the action choiceworthy.

I propose that a virtuously motivated action combines features of the actions of Minerva and Albus, as I originally described them. In order for the act of writing the check to count as being virtuously motivated, the agent must know that the action is virtuous (else she turn into the sympathetic philanthropist), but she must also know what features of circumstances make this action virtuous and moreover, she must see those features as making the action choiceworthy. This means that she is motivated to act by her recognition that people are in need, but she does not go directly from that recognition to the judgment that she should help. She must also know that helping is the virtuous thing to do here, and it must be true of her that she would refrain from acting if it weren't.

This takes us to criterion (d), which is that the virtuous action must be done from a firm and unchanging character. Why would this be important to virtuously motivated action? Recall that one of the concerns about the sympathetic philanthropist is that his ability to act correctly is tied to a particular set of circumstances and even there, it is serendipitous. If he is acting on

sympathy alone, his ability to judge and act correctly is limited to those situations in which acting on those sympathetic inclinations is fact the right thing to do. He will not, however, be able to weigh sympathy against fairness, respect, or any other moral consideration. Moreover, his sympathetic inclinations may not persist over time or win out in the face of competing inclinations.

Here again we see the importance of the reciprocal relationship between practical wisdom and the moral virtues. The moral virtues, on Aristotle's view, are enduring dispositions to feel and react well to particular moral considerations. If I am courageous, I react to threatening circumstances with the appropriate degree of fear; if I am generous, I react to the needs of others with the appropriate compassion and concern. These feelings of course serve to motivate me to act well, but on this Aristotelian picture, they do more than this. The moral virtues shape the judgments of practical wisdom by making those features salient in the moral landscapes we see. The reason why the practically wise person is capable of judging correctly about when and how to help people is that her perception of her circumstances has been shaped by the moral virtues she possesses. They lead her to see certain things as mattering, and mattering in varying ways. A virtuous agent may value historical preservation, but she will value the health and well-being of vulnerable people more. She will thus judge that virtue requires her to prioritize the needs of her homeless neighbors over the historical features of the building that shelters them. Her motivational structure will reflect the complexities of her judgment. She will not be torn over what to do, but she may well regret that the shingles are prohibitively expensive. The virtuously motivated person will judge correctly and will also exhibit the affects appropriate to the full moral landscape she faces.

Practical wisdom also helps the agent sustain her commitments in ways that reinforce the moral virtues. Returning once more to Kant's philanthropist, we can see that what enables him to continue his beneficence in the face of his sorrows is his deep commitment to the underlying moral values and his ability to rouse himself to act in accordance with that commitment. For Kant, virtue just is this strength of will. Aristotle's account of virtue is rather different, but the motivational aspect is similar. A virtuous person will be able to act as practical wisdom directs her to act, regardless of what trials and tribulations she is facing. The moral virtues help her live up to the commitments expressed in her moral judgments. This means that the practically wise person not only judges well, but acts well and indeed, can be counted on to act well regardless of her circumstances.

I will conclude with a brief summary. I began by canvassing the various questions that might be asked under the guise of asking about virtuous motivation. I claimed that virtuous motivation goes beyond moral motivation insofar as it requires the motivational structure characteristic of a fully virtuous person. A person may be motivated to do what she should for moral reasons without being fully virtuous. She may fail to appreciate the reasons why the action is choiceworthy, even though she knows that it is. Or she may lack the appropriate affective state, the state that matches her judgments of the moral features of the situation. Insofar as virtuous motivation requires full virtue, it is obviously a difficult standard for ordinary mortals to meet. It does nevertheless express a moral ideal toward which we have reason to aim.

(7899 words)

¹ I am not here concerned with drawing a distinction between good actions and right actions.

² The terms 'internalist' and 'externalist' lend themselves to many different definitions. Here I just mean by 'internalism' the view that an agent's moral judgment is necessarily motivating, and by 'externalism' the view that it is not.

³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999) 1105a1—1105b10. The translation of these terms is fraught, and since I am not engaged in textual exegesis, I am not going to worry too much about the implications of using say, ‘choice’ instead of ‘decision’ for *prohairesis* or ‘for its own sake’ as an interpretation of *to kalon*.

⁴ I am of course glossing over a number of important distinctions among types of reasons.

⁵ Bernard Williams notes that this is better described as a “sub-Humean” account of motivation, on the grounds that Hume’s own view is considerably more complex than this. I am sympathetic to this position. See “Internal and External Reasons” in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), chap. 8.

⁶ Slote’s view has evolved considerably since the publication of his first full account of virtue ethics in *From Morality to Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). In explaining his view here, I am drawing primarily on *Morals from Motives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) and to a lesser extent, *Moral Sentimentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁷ In Slote’s terminology, this means that my account is not agent-based.

⁸ I should note that Slote does not call himself a Humean and indeed, in Chapter 7 of *Morals from Motives*, he explicitly distances himself from Hume on the matter of practical reasoning.

⁹ See especially John McDowell, “Virtue and Reason,” *The Monist* 62 (1979): 331-350 and “Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 52, suppl. (1978): 13-29.

¹⁰ For a useful examination of whether Aristotelians should be motivational internalists or externalists, see Kristjan Kristjánsson, “Aristotelian Motivational Externalism,” *Philosophical Studies* 164 (2013): 419-442.

¹¹ See especially Plato, *Protagoras*, trans. Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992).

¹² It is worth noting that it does not follow from this Socratic view that the ignorance is non-culpable.

¹³ For an argument to this effect, see Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁴ See for instance, Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

¹⁵ Stocker, “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976): 453-466.

¹⁶ For good reason, this way of describing the problem has fallen out of use. I will thus use it only in scare quotes and only in reference to Stocker’s depiction of the issue.

¹⁷ Strictly speaking, the hospital visit would be fulfilling a Kantian imperfect duty, which makes a difference to its motivational structure.

¹⁸ Stocker, pp. 453-454.

¹⁹ See especially Christine Swanton, “Virtue Ethics and the Problem of Indirection” *Utilitas* 9 (1997): 167-181; Simon Keller, “Virtue Ethics is Self-Effacing,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 85 (2007): 221-237; Julia Annas, “Virtue Ethics and the Charge of Egoism,” in *Morality and Self-Interest*, ed. Paul Bloomfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Glen Pettigrove, “Is Virtue Ethics Self-Effacing?” *Journal of Ethics* 15 (2011): 191-207.

²⁰ The term is Derek Parfit’s (*Reasons and Persons*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), but there are a number of different objections that go under the self-effacing umbrella. See Pettigrove (“Is Virtue Ethics Self-Effacing?”) for a nice articulation of the various possible versions of a self-effacingness objection to virtue ethics.

²¹ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Thomas Hill and Arnulf Zweig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

²² Herman, “On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty,” in *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), chap. 1.

²³ Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 98-102. See also Philippa Foot, “Virtues and Vices,” in *Virtues and Vices* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), chap. 1.

²⁴ Christine Korsgaard has an account of how this could go in Kantianism. See her “From Duty and for the Sake of the Noble,” in *Aristotle, Kant, and the Stoics: Rethinking Happiness and Duty*, eds. Stephen Engstrom and Jennifer Whiting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 206-207.

²⁵ For an extensive argument supporting the importance of emotion in Kant, see Nancy Sherman, *Making a Necessity of Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) chap. 4.

²⁶ I have argued that the cold-hearted benefactor presents a substantial divide between Kantianism and Aristotelian virtue ethics. See Stohr, “Virtue Ethics and Kant’s Cold-Hearted Benefactor,” *Journal of Value Inquiry* 36, no. 2-3 (2002): 187-204.

²⁷ Stohr, "Moral Cacophony: When Continenence is a Virtue," *Journal of Ethics* 7, no. 4 (2003): 339-363. See also Susan Stark, "Virtue and Emotion," *Noûs* 35, no. 3 (2001): 440-455 and Jeffrey Seidman, "Two Sides of Silencing," *Philosophical Quarterly* 55 (2005): 68-77.

²⁸ Lorraine Besser-Jones has argued that it is psychologically implausible to suppose that virtuous people will always find virtuous actions pleasant. ("The Motivational State of the Virtuous Agent," *Philosophical Psychology* 25, no. 1 (2012): 93-108.

²⁹ Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, p. 97.

³⁰ Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, p. 127

³¹ Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, p. 128.

³² This is, of course, an oversimplification of what Aristotle means by a practical syllogism.

³³ Annas, "Virtue Ethics and the Charge of Egoism."

³⁴ On the subject of habitual virtuous actions, see Nancy Snow, "Habitual Virtuous Actions and Automaticity," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 9 (2006): 546-561.

³⁵ I am here employing Christine Swanton's useful description of overall virtuousness. See *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 239-244.