Partiality Traps and our Need for Risk-Aware Ethics and Epistemology

Guy Axtell

Radford University

"Our eyes see nothing behind us. A hundred times a day we make fun in the person of our neighbor, and detest in others, defects which are more clearly present in ourselves, and we marvel at them with prodigious impudence and heedlessness. *Oh, importunate presumption!"* –Michelle de Montaigne[1]

Abstract. Virtue theories can plausibly be argued to have important advantages over normative ethical theories which prescribe a strict impartialism in moral judgment, or which neglect people's special roles and relationships. However, there are clear examples of both virtuous and vicious partiality in people's moral judgments, and virtue theorists may struggle to adequately distinguish them, much as proponents of other normative ethical theories do. This paper first adapts the "expanding moral circle" concept in order to illustrate the difficulty of adequately distinguishing virtuous from vicious partiality. Later sections aim to show how an adequate philosophical ethics will be able to both a) attribute virtue (and hence praiseworthiness) to agents whose actions may directly serve only their special interests, roles, or special relationships; and b) attribute vice (and hence censure) where agents' attitudes and/or actions mirror known personal biases (for instance, an egoistic attitude) or social biases (for instance, an ethnocentric attitude). This dual ability leaves space for much virtuous partiality, while also reflecting a "risk-aware" approach, recognizing the deleterious consequences of our human penchant for constructing and imbuing moral significance to oftentimes factitious us/them dichotomies.

1. Partiality, Virtue, and Vice

This collection has as its central focus the problematic nature of properly distinguishing between virtuous and vicious partiality. There are clear instances of actions which are representative of each; but when as philosophers we consider how to sort cases, we are confronted with a long-standing puzzle: a puzzle concerning the proper balance between our general moral obligations (obligations associated with reasoning impartially and treating others as equals), and our specific or relational moral obligations to a smaller subset of people: our family, our nation, our friends, etc.

Impartiality and partiality are epistemic as well as ethical concerns, and indeed I will later argue that we need a comprehensive approach which is "risk-aware" on both fronts. But let us start with this question: How well are extent normative ethical theories equipped to deal with the puzzle just mentioned? If we assess an answer to this by looking to the master principles which normative ethical theories have typically tried to supply, I think we have to say that extent theories are pretty *ill*-equipped to deal with it. How to properly distinguish between virtuous and vicious partiality, and how to establish the mentioned balance, are questions addressed neither in the norms that normative ethical theories provide to evaluate agents and their actions, nor in the moral guidance that they prescribe. Among normative ethical theories, deontology and consequentialism each propose a master principle for decision-making, a principle demanding impartiality in an agent's moral deliberations. Virtue ethics (and care ethics, if one wants to distinguish it) seems not to supply such a master principle, and is often criticized by its 'rivals' on this account. Yet it may be advantageous not to be tied to strict impartiality as the measure of moral intensions: resistance to such a claim allows philosophers to make needed space for virtuous partiality in special relationships, and to defend the integrity of person's fulfilling social

roles and localized commitments.[2] Many characterological concepts draw attention to special roles and relationships: as neighbors, friends, parents, care-givers, citizens, etc.[3] Virtue ethics also allows acknowledgement of quite substantial cultural-variance in aretaic concepts, while yet supporting genuinely universal virtues like justice, care, toleration, etc.

Still, virtue theorists may struggle to adequately distinguish virtuous and vicious partiality much as proponents of other normative ethical theories do. We should perhaps begin by acknowledging that *all* normative ethical theories appear to flounder on this problem to a lesser or greater extent. This chapter will explore the reasons why this problem is so ubiquitous in our moral experience, yet challenging for ethical theory to take proper account of. We need an approach that makes place for social roles and that issues guidance which allows integrity to agents in balancing general moral obligations and their more specific interest and projects. At the same time, we need as account which supplies tools for distinguishing vicious from virtuous partiality, and which explains the ground for censure of agents whose moral judgments mirror known personal or social biases. I will argue more specifically that philosophers can only provide an adequate response to the virtuous/vicious partiality problem when their approach is adequately risk-aware. This means taking a direct and empirically-informed interest in study of the many *partiality traps* that we often fall prey to, both as individuals and in in our group associations.

Together with some examples to initially illustrate the difficulty of adequately distinguishing virtuous from vicious partiality, Section 2 adapts the "expanding moral circle" concept and its treatment in contemporary moral psychology, and in the work of two philosophers, Tu wei ming, and Peter Singer. This model of concentric circles helps illustrate attitudes that may seem at once to be either virtuous and vicious, or perhaps even both. There is

an ever-present possibility, as Peter Goldie points out in unison with Tu, of evaluating the same action — say, of special kindness or generosity towards a particular child by a parent — as virtuous or vicious, depending on the frame of reference, and how the treatment of that one child relates to the agent's treatment of others.[4] So after delving deeper into meta-ethical concerns in Section 3, Section 4 interprets vicious partiality especially in terms of what virtue ethicist Peter Goldie refers to as "domain-limiting partiality." This is one of several problems which might serve to motivate risk-aware virtue theories, moral or epistemic.[5] On the one hand, choices that define our personal morality require a freedom to pursue one's own, often friend-and-kin-centered projects; any form of altruism which denies this puts morality into direct conflict with human moral psychology. On the other hand, Goldie's articulation of domain-limiting partiality forcefully draws attention to the biases and blind spots that psychology *also* informs us of, and which often skew emotional development in a person, frustrating cooperative strategies of problem-solving in and between groups.

While giving place both to self-interest and to the particular social roles that people adopt or inherit, a virtue theory of the prescribed sort casts what I will argue is a needed, critical focus upon our pronounced tendency to attribute moral value only or mainly to members of one's favored ingroups, or to make similarly self-serving presumptions. Our doxastic partiality is implicated in this as well. The judgments we make in ignorance of our own biases Michele de Montaigne calls our "importunate presumptions" in the caption quote of this paper.

2. Vying Interpretations of the Expanding Moral Circle

The "expanding moral circle" is a concept with ancient roots that I think helps clarify key issues in our problematic concerning virtuous and vicious particularity. Confucian scholar Tu wei Ming

describes the expanding circle concept as ever-present in Confucian thought, closely connected with emotional maturation and moral self-cultivation. In Greco-Roman thought it goes back to the 2nd-century Hierocles, an early Stoic who described a developmental process of *oikeiôsis*, variously translated as "affinity," "appropriation," or "affiliation." Ethicist Peter Singer develops the idea more explicitly as part of his utilitarianism in *The Expanding Moral Circle: Evolution, and Moral Progress* (1981; revised 2011).

Let us first take up a recent study by social psychologists, and what Graham, Waytz, Meindl, Iyer, and Young (2017) insightfully characterize as dueling *centrifugal* ('center-fleeing') and *centripetal* ('center-seeking') forces in the moral circle. Major moral education traditions often take sides, "one favoring the centripetal forces of attachment to close others, family loyalty, and patriotism, and one favoring the centrifugal forces pushing toward greater egalitarianism and inclusiveness of outer social circles" (61). This *centripetal/centrifugal force view* is usefully applied to current moral debates about empathy, and about politics, the authors argue. But they find unsound the arguments and moral education traditions – including effective altruism – insofar as they "presuppose that such forces will be diametrically opposed to centripetal forces in a zero-sum fashion" (62).[6] Here empathy's centripetal bent, and limited ability to motivate action, is taken as needing to be sharply contrasted with moral reasoning education via utilitarian moral principles. In such a view attachment and empathy are even disparaged as parochial, and as leading to moral atrocities like war and genocide. Singer for example "casts such centripetal forces as purely intuitive, based on kin selection and tribalism, whereas the centrifugal forces are purely rational, an overcoming of intuition by deliberation and philosophical reflection" (59). Such zero-sum opposition of centrifugal and centripetal forces, the authors point out, is called into question by empathy's defenders. Their own thesis is more

dynamic, however: While in obvious tension, "both of these forces can have both intuitive and rational bases." Developmental studies show "very early emergence of both moral forces, suggesting at least partly intuitive bases for each" (59).

Jesse Graham and several other authors of this paper have also co-authored with Jonathan Haidt, and these claim about moral learning are directly presented as further support of *moral foundations theory*.[7] This means that the centripetal/centrifugal forces account "corresponds more generally to a pluralist view of morality, allowing for multiple moral concerns and forces that can come into conflict with one another even within a single individual at a single point in time" (63). The tension of centripetal and centrifugal forces constrains moral learning; it comes to color the moral arguments that appeal to people as most plausible, such that liberals are more likely than conservatives to respond to centrifugal moral forces, and conservatives are more likely than liberals to respond to centripetal forces (63). Yet both forces are present inter-personally, the authors rightly point out: it is *within each person* that these competing forces reside, and must originally be balanced and adjudicated. Treating these as *intrapersonal* forces developing over time, rather than simply as opposed ideologies or traditions of moral learning, "helps us see that such conflicts begin within individuals, not between them."
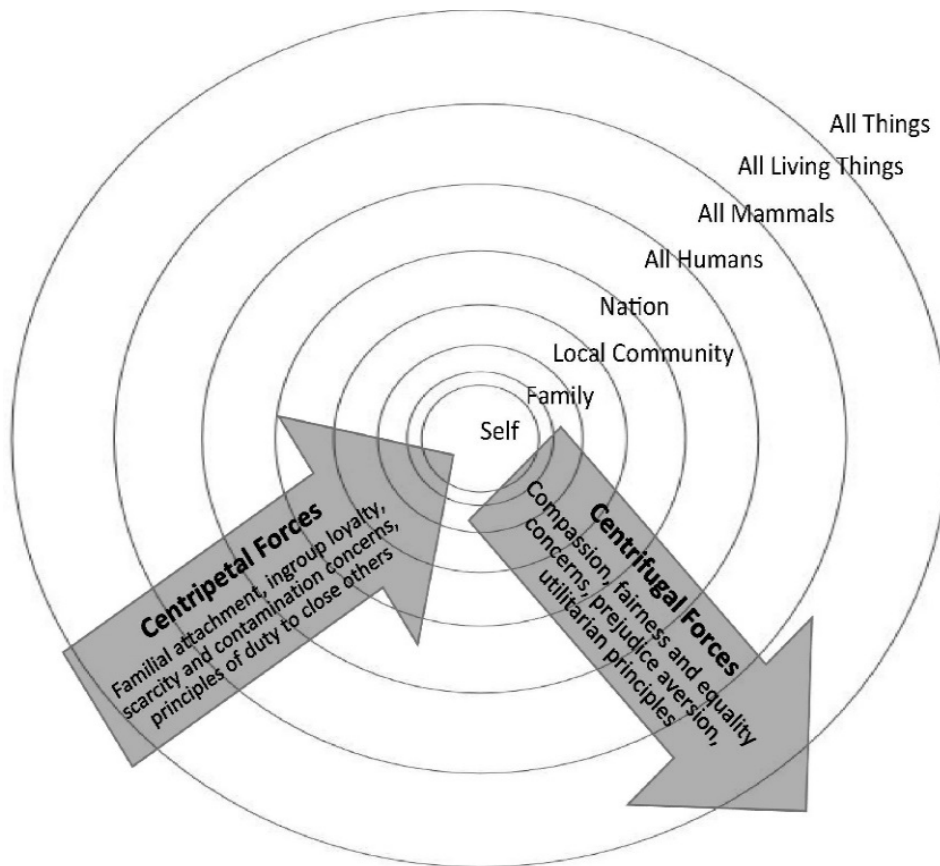
Figure 1: Centripetal and centrifugal forces in the moral circle, and associated intuitive and deliberative factors. [Reprinted with permission from Graham, Waytz, Meindl et. al 2016, p. 60.]

Turning to philosophical uses of the moral circle concept provided by Tu (1985; 1993) and by Singer, it is easy to see that these share a great deal in common. Yet there are important differences, and Tu and David Wong (2002) critique Singer directly before arguing for the need for a more empirically informed, or sentimentalist account. Tu and Wong help articulate advantages of virtue ethics over Singer's impartiality principle of rationality, and both are especially concerned with how the relationship between our special roles and relationships, and our extended benevolence through moral self-cultivation.[8] Classical Chinese thought, as Tu

elaborates it, depicts human beings as born cloistered in upon themselves; yet through healthy

moral development or cultivation of one's own character, people are able to overcome various

self-imposed limitations, or "traps." To whatever degree they are able, they are at the same time

progressively ameliorating their own condition, and widening their moral circle: the range of

interests that they allow as relevant in their moral judgment.

As Tu develops the ancient Chinese version of the expanding circle, each of the

concentric circles outside of Self represents a broadened moral horizon beyond simple self-

interest; yet at the same time, each redrawing of the circle may present a "trap" to still fuller

moral cultivation.[9] That these are traps or stumbling blocks for us as moral reasoners is attested

by the fact that we typically have ample concepts of moral vice to individuate and describe them

[Figure 2]. So, for example, if I never develop my moral circle to include the interests of others, I

am a moral egoist (and in the case of an extreme lack of normal moral sentiments, may even be

potentially psycho or sociopathic). Tu writes,

> But if we extend sympathy only to our parents, we take no more than the initial
>
> step toward self-realization. By embodying our closest kin in our sensitivity, we
>
> may have gone beyond egoism, but without the learned ability to enter into
>
> fruitful communication outside the immediate family, we are still confined to
>
> nepotism. Like egoism, nepotism fails to extend our sensitivity to embody a larger
>
> network of human relationships and thus limits our capacity for self-realization.
>
> Similarly, parochialism, ethnocentrism, and chauvinistic nationalism are all
>
> varying degrees of human insensitivity. In the dynamic process of self-realization,
>
> they are inertia or limitation. In either case, they are detrimental to the human
>
> capacity for establishing a community encompassing humanity as a whole.[10]
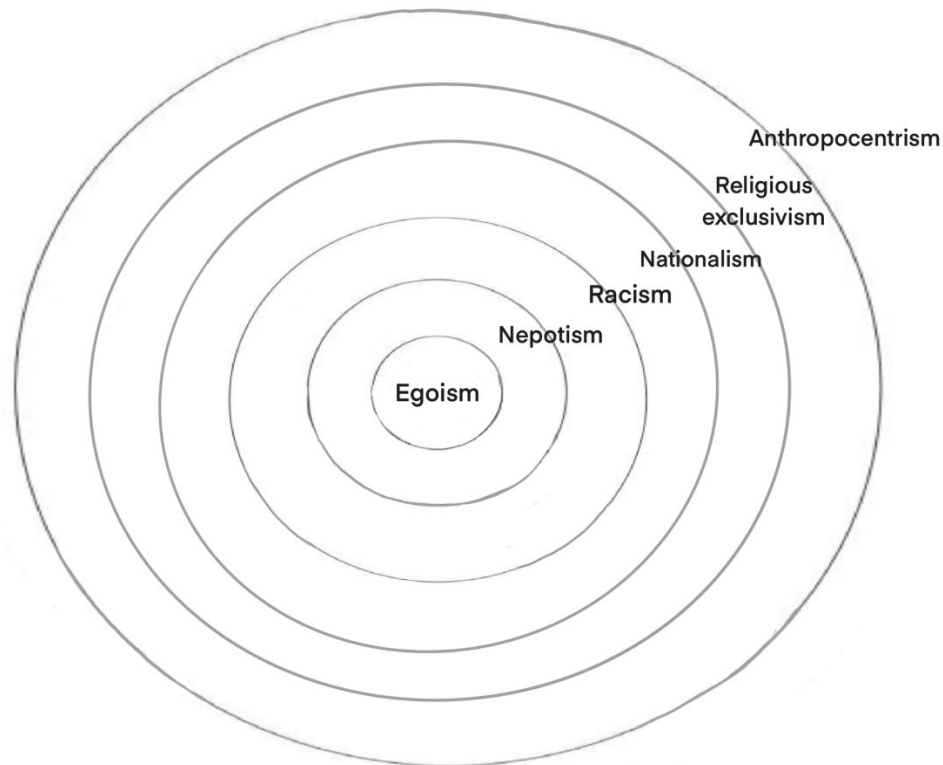
[Insert Figure #2 above, from separate file]

Figure #2: "Traps" to moral development described as moral biases of individuals or groups

In the recent film *Mulan,* Mulan's father expressly reminds her that "Devotion to family is a virtue." The expanding moral circle acknowledges this virtuous partiality. Yet the special relationship of a person to and within their family is not presented as a person's *only* loyalty; nor does the father allege that this loyalty is always to be valued above every other relationship. In theory one may be able to serve these obligations consistent with a broadening conception of the moral community. We can sometimes serve more local and global concerns, and even find our efforts *harmonizing*. Indeed, Confucianism plies especially strongly on the metaphor of the

polity as the family writ large. But our moral situation often appears to us as presenting trade-offs, choices where we believe that we cannot equally serve a more particular and a more universal caring. Not unlike Jean-Paul Sartre's real-life example of a student of his who had to choose during the fascist occupation of France between staying to aid his mother, or leaving her to join the Resistance, Mulan indeed is caught between caring for her family in a particularly difficult time, and her wish to serve in the military in order to protect the country against immanent invasion. Mulan's choice appears to be between virtuous partiality towards one cause or towards another, where it seems unlikely or impossible to serve both. The happy ending to Mulan's story is that despite appearing to abandon her family to join the army, she is able eventually to reconcile these goods. Returning home after the threat is past, her father first chastises her for having left home and forsaking the traditional roles of a daughter within the family. But he then forgives her, and the family indeed shares in the honors which the King bestows upon Mulan: For she has in fact managed to serve both her nation *and* her family by bravely — though unconventionally — serving its defense.

Here we might pause briefly to distinguish moral *conflicts* from moral *dilemmas.* If decisions like the young Frenchman's, or Mulan's, or many others were merely *moral conflicts*, their situation would be one where the agent knows the morally right thing to do, but is personally conflicted because they desire to act otherwise than they believe they morally should. We could then evaluate their choices as either *enkratic* or *akratic*, that is, we could evaluate them as able to resist the temptation they feel (i.e., they remain continent), or as instead submitting to an immoral desire (i.e., they are incontinent). But our topic of virtuous and vicious partiality instead arguably directs us to cases which often appear to involve genuine moral *dilemmas* for agents*, rather than 'mere' moral *conflicts.* In a dilemma situation, the competing demands, or

more positively, the goods that a person must decide between, because they cannot satisfy them all, are not easily weighed as on a scale; they are instead often processed as choices among incommensurable goods, adding greatly to the agent's personal struggles. If locally and globally-directed efforts harmonize as they did for Mulan, this is likely something that she and her family could only discover along the way, or in hindsight. With limited time and energy, choices are often forced upon us, and how alternative choices might have fared is a matter that remains mysterious to us, or a cause for guilt or regret if we later reflect upon missed opportunities for harmonizing actions.[11]

Let us note also that Confucianism, as a role-centered virtue ethics closely connected to the traditional "five relationships," aims to harmonize different levels of obligation through a division of labor. A role-centered ethics is a virtue ethics which recognizes the special relationships which come from the various social roles we play.[12] There is much to be said for role-centered ethics as an alternative to strong impartiality in reflective morality (see Beaty, this volume, for a further development). Harmonization of one's more local and global social roles is certainly desirable, yet a role ethics of a stern and hierarchical sort may also *undercut* harmonization, or lead to a good deal of insincerity or dissatisfaction on the part of agents.[13] Social roles are often assigned to people on the basis of sex or other factors; roles that come with titles or special entitlements are often unearned.[14] An institutionalized caste system, for example, may thwart people's aspirations by constraining them to a set of social roles assigned to them by society according to gender, social rank, inherited title, etc. So, let us note in passing that a *critical* stance towards culturally-assigned roles is another important aspect of the risk-aware account towards which we are progressing in this chapter. As Disney's Mulan (untraditionally)

suggests, a person's integrity may sometimes reside in challenging rather than fulfilling assigned identities or social roles.

Returning to compare our two graphics, Figure 1 suggests that there may be agents aplenty to whom we can ascribe virtuous partiality, whether one harkens to the centrifugal or the centripetal reading. Figure 1 in this sense looks benign, since the centrifugal viewer of this circle focuses on an expansive, outward-moving locus of concern, or on special relationships with close others. Both readings are in this sense vindicatory. By contrast, Figure 2 recognizes censure of an agent for a morally or intellectually vicious partiality, a censure supported with an explanatory argument. It offers a more subversive reading: What appears on Figure 1 as the virtuous achievement of widening or extending one's moral horizon by allowing more interests to be respected in our reflective morality, appears on Figure 2 as an agent who may still have become trapped or 'stuck' in a bad place in their moral development. Some of the terms on Figure 2 will seem uncontroversially to be *negatively-valenced* thick concepts for the reader; this follows from their close association with a specific recognized form of personal or social *bias.* "Nepotism," "sexism," "ethnocentrism," "racism," etc. are thick evaluative concepts describing attitudes that philosophers and others attribute to agents with negative valence; they are pejorative terms describing one or another attitude taken to be a social bias, and a form of vicious partiality. Although many factors may make biased reasoning appealing and comforting to us, Figure 2 shows us that concerns about vicious partiality share with Montaigne's moral psychology when he writes, "We are all huddled and concentrated in ourselves, and our vision is reduced to the length of our nose. We are all unconsciously in this error, an error of great consequence and harm."[15]

But those who exhibit parochial attitudes, or who perform actions characteristic of them, typically do not think of them as biases for which they are blameworthy. This may be a form a false-consciousness for which a subversive description can be liberating. People often, if not always, 'do bad things under the guise of protecting the greater good,' a phrase which is ambiguous between *mistaking* evils for happiness, the good that one seeks, and merely *disguising* one's wrongful motives as good, quite disingenuously. On the other hand, as Graham, Waytz, Meindl et. al. point out, it is also unsound for normative ethicists to take centrifugal, universalizing forces as implying that "drawing the line anywhere" is a form of prejudice, or that one's moral duty is to have egalitarian concern for all, regardless of social or temporal distance. Centrifugal and centipedal tendencies need to be balanced, as such a view is not.

Is "anthropocentrism" a partiality trap? This has been a debated topic in environmental philosophy, where Singer's analogized "speciesism" with racism. But whether analogies are strong and cogent, or instead weak or uncogent, requires close attention. We haven't space for the speciesism vs. biocentrism debate here, and I am content to leave this an open question, since it is a matter of debate whether non-anthropocentrism is properly impartial, or instead results in bias of another sort.[16] But this question is itself illuminating of our problematic, and in passing we should note that it also connects this problematic concerning virtuous and vicious partiality with our attitudes towards non-humans, including animal welfare issues and issues central in environmental philosophy.[17]

As another example of a potentially illuminating controversy, what about "religious exclusivism" appearing as a trap or roadblock to moral self-cultivation on Figure 2? I have elsewhere contended that soteriologies and conceptions of faith which normalize exclusivist responses to religious diversity are indeed subject to censure as a form of vicious partiality, in

ways which inclusivist or 'bridge-building' responses to religious differences are not.[18] But while some readers might agree that Figure 2's characterization of religious exclusivism as a partiality trap is apt, seeing here a kind of intellectual smugness,[19] other readers might want to argue that these religious attitudes are *disanalogous* to attitudes towards difference that they concede reflect a kind of vicious partiality.[20]

This should alert us that *argument by analogy/disanalogy* is a primary philosophical means by which to investigate the distinction between virtuous and vicious partiality. The moral circle metaphor is helpful only as it encourages more careful and detailed analogical arguments to support a developmental process of *oikeiôsis*.[21] I would argue that these ethical arguments need to be informed by social scientific study of the personal and social biases. More specifically, they need to be cognizant of what some psychologists call our *tribalistic tendencies,* even when ensconced in theological orthodoxy.[22] So, it is important to the risk-aware account that I am developing that we at least *raise this question* about whether there may be examples of vicious partiality rationalized as theologically-correct beliefs and attitudes, and whether exclusivist beliefs and attitudes is one such example. I again, do not insist that the reader accept each concept on Figure 2 as negatively valenced; some may take anthropocentric beliefs, and/or theological exclusivist beliefs as theologically-correct, or as somehow inevitable, and try to offer arguments from disanalogy in order to make philosophical sense of their position.

My final task to conclude this section is to compare Tu and Singer's differences in articulating the moral circle idea and its implications. The ancient Chinese account, Tu showed us, is sensitive to the many distinct by related "traps" or "stumbling blocks" to adequate moral self-cultivation. Tu approaches the realization of moral universals from the perspective of self-cultivation philosophy, or "the process of learning to be human": "The Confucian view of

personal development can be visualized as an open-ended series of concentric circles…. [T]he self is always understood as the center of relationships. This open-ended series of concentric circles points to an ever-extending horizon."[23] The assumption is that "the more we broaden ourselves to include others, the more we are capable of deepening our self-awareness."[24]

So, this approach is broadly sentimentalist in character, and far from an impartialist ideal theory which Tu, in direct criticism of Singer, characterizes as "a romantic utopian assertion about equality, unity, and universality." Sympathy, empathy, antipathy, and other moral emotions may not develop in people; or strong egocentric, ethnocentric, anthropocentric biases will take hold in our outlook on life. If the expansion of our moral circles is in some sense an imperative, this is not an imperative of logic, or of reason *a priori,* but more so of nature: "The ability to feel the suffering of others or the inability to endure their suffering empowers us to establish an experiential connection with another human being. This provides a great resource for realizing our moral nature."[25]

By contrast with Tu, Singer treats adherence to a *Principle of Equal Consideration* as a matter of ethical obligation, or a decision rule to follow in delineating right and wrong action.[26] At the least, he thinks that if we were ideally rational, we would base our decisions on this principle. "If we were more rational, we would be different…[But] an ethic that relied solely on an appeal to impartial rationality would…be followed only by the impartially rational" (157).[27]

Singer's approach in *The Expanding Circle* thus supplements his earlier, more rationalistic defenses of strict impartialism in "Affluence, Famine, and Morality" (1972), where geographical and other differences make no moral difference to our obligation to reduce suffering.[28] Moral sentiments are given place only as they cohere with the work of the impartiality principle. "Impartiality" rings of objective reasoning and of "rationality" as Singer

wants to employ that term. Strictly aligning rationality with impartiality makes the 'ought' of

morality a matter of maximizing this peculiar sense of rationality, predominates in Singer's

account of the moral circle much as it did in his earlier publications.[29]

But the present account disputes this expectation that rationality or objectivity simply

tracks a stateable ideal of perfect impartiality. It casts doubt on whether there is any winner to be

declared between the effective altruist's appeal to rationality, and Ayn Rand's appeal to objective

reality (the way things are, not how they ought to be) in defense of egoism/moral minimalism.

Both are as extreme as any ideal and non-ideal theory can respectively be. Utilitarianism

demands of moral reasoners what Bernard Williams terms "an output of optimific decision"

(1973, 117), but at the same time poses an *integrity challenge*, since it neglects (or even requires

sacrifice of) the projects, attitudes, and commitments upon which a person's integrity is staked

(see Beaty and Goldman (this volume) for further discussion of the integrity challenge).[30]

Moreover, Singer's impartiality principle imposes an ethic of a strongly *altruistic*

character, rather than recognizing a distinction between actions or omissions which moral duty

demands, and actions or omissions which, while praiseworthy, go beyond duty or reasonable

expectations on persons. Singer struggles to make sense of the non-dutiful well-doings, or

supererogatory[31] actions which are praiseworthy but which aren't plausibly required of people in

order for them to be moral. For closely related reasons he can't falters in distinguishing the

evaluation of acts and of omissions. I here agree with Goldman (this volume) that "the most

plausible notion of supererogation can be argued to appeal to the concept of morality that admits

partial acts as ordinarily moral."[32] That we should love our children, and care for our community

seem like very *natural thoughts*; but that we should always act altruistically, love our neighbors

as ourselves,[33] or treat all humanity as of intrinsically equal value and moral concern, seem like

very *unnatural 'oughts.'*[34] These are action of moral saints and heroes, but not demands either of morality or of reason.[35]

    So, for soft-universalists and sentimentalists, there is an ever-present *invitation,* supported empathetically and philosophically, to weigh carefully the interests of those outside our closest thinking, and to respond to their second-personal demands. There is negotiation along with navigation of these normative concerns, but there is nothing answering to Singer's conception of rationality, where that assumes that high moral parsimony is always good, and low moral parsimony always bad.[36] If "invitation" seems too weak to support soft universalism, we could strengthen it with Stephen Darwall's language of *second-personal demands* (2006).[37] For as Kwame Anthony Appiah (2018) points out, "you cannot do identity-work all by yourself" and "identities without demands would be useless to us." The present chapter agrees with Appiah that there is a common humanity, even though there is decidedly not, and never will be, a common identity: "[T]here is a common humanity – we can dispute whether or not it is, or is yet, an identity – that we need to build on as we negotiate with one another with and through our various identities."[38] The driving force of centrifugal reasoning again meets the resistance of centripetal thinking, often strengthened by the politics of identity.[39]

    Even setting aside the concepts of dutiful and non-dutiful well-doings, effective altruism seems to commit us to maintaining that there is always an objectively better choice between acting locally – say in care contributing to or working at a local food bank – and acting globally, say with contributions to or working on a project aimed at addressing world hunger. But it is not as if one is praiseworthy and the other not; nor even that one is in general morally *better* than the other. It seems instead intuitively better to hold that a person may be more active locally or globally in a cause, and be equally praiseworthy for it. Neither people's natural partiality, nor

their limited economic resources and attendant *triage* in their choices of who, and how much to aid, are treated satisfactorily in effective altruism.[40]

In summary, neither people's natural partiality, nor their limited economic resources and attendant *triage* in their choices of who, and how much to aid, are treated satisfactorily in Singer's account, or in effective altruism more generally. Tu's sentimentalism urges the overcoming of traps of partiality, but is far more cognizant of the limits of what moral duty can impose in terms of aid to others, than Singer's rationality-focused approach.[41]

3. A Pragmatic Pluralist Meta-ethics

Ethical pluralism and soft-universalism are conceptually close, and mutually-supportive.[42] But my own soft-universalism is not expressed as preference for virtue ethics over-against other normative ethical theories, each claiming to be a complete account. It is not the ideals of detachment and impartiality that are mistaken, but rather the notion of a single master-principle of normative ethics. I think that we should embrace Dewey's pragmatic pluralist claim that we need "a moral philosophy which frankly recognizes the impossibility of reducing all the elements of moral situations to one single principle…." Meta-ethics needs to be pluralistic at this more basic level as well, acknowledging Dewey's "*independent* factors in morals" hypothesis. (IFM) is what Dewey develops as the "hypothesis that there are at least three independent variables," of which in problem situations the reflective moral agent must take account: "The three things I regard as variables are first the facts that give rise to the concept of the good and bad; secondly, those that give rise to the concept of right and wrong; thirdly, those that give rise to the conception of the virtuous and the vicious."[43]

Dewey and Tufts claim that "Each of these variables has a sound basis, but because each has a different origin and mode of operation, they can be at cross-purposes and exercise divergent

forces in the formation of judgments. From this point of view, uncertainty and conflict are inherent in morals…. Because these forces pull different ways there is genuine conflict—and a problematic quality pervades the whole situation."[44]

So, the metaethical conclusion I would draw from the previous sections is in line my initial claim that none of the extant normative ethical theories deal well with the problematic of virtuous and vicious partiality. It is in line with Graham et. al.'s claim that none do enough to recognize the duality of centrifugal and centripetal traditions of moral learning. Agent-focused considerations invite personal and social psychology in ways that act-based considerations leave aside. But our meta-ethics needs to be pluralistic at this more basic level as well, acknowledging Dewey's "*independent* factors in morals" thesis. Pragmatic pluralism is tantamount to the claim that we need to think through, and ultimately try to balance, each of these factors — motives, consequences, and social approbation/disapprobation — in order to adequately distinguish vicious from virtuous partiality.

But while these comments may suggest to some readers a preference for meta-ethical particularism over generalism — the focus of a great deal of debate in meta-ethics — I would suggest that it is the *centralist* thesis that Dewey and other pragmatists and virtue ethicists reject, that is the better critical focus than *generalism*.[45] Rejection of the centralist thesis arguably opens up substantial philosophical space, allowing for the compatibility of pluralism with soft universalism, something that particularists cannot adequately support.

Opponents of meta-ethical centralism, or thin-property reductionism, are 'thickies' in contrast to 'thinnies,' as Simon Blackburn nicely describes them. [46] One way of challenging centralism stems from considerations about non-dutiful well-doings. As G. Newey (1997) succinctly argues,

Moral theories favouring thin-property reductivism in one or other direction inevitably have problems in accommodating supererogation. But unless they do, they fail to save some important phenomena of the moral life, and raise rather sharply the question what these theories are theories *of*…. Utilitarians will press the question whether an act maximises utility; if so, it is just what the agent ought to have done anyway. For Kantians, value is exhausted by acting according to our obligations as a rational agent. We might roughly characterise the contrast between utilitarians and Kantians by their respective directions of reduction between value and deontology [*telos* and *deontos*]. But on either view, there is no non-deontic value space for supererogation to occupy. [47]

This "strife of *deontos* and *telos*" (231; compare Grigore 2019) among Enlightenment-era moral theories has dominated debate, but such a 'primacy' debate among act-focused theories I hold to be the result of their shared *centralism*, or thin-concept reductionism, together with their *generalism*, which leads to the further assumption that one and only one such system of evaluation must be 'complete' within itself. While I cannot fully make the argument here, turning from the generalism versus particularism debate to critical attention on centralism and non-centralism (i.e., non-reductionism; axiological pluralism), I would argue better-addresses our long-standing need to distinguish the functions of agent and act-focused as a prelude to better balancing them. And while particularism is associated with rejection of *both* hard and soft universalism, the shift I would endorse opens the combination of non-centralism and generalism, a combination which recognizes axiological pluralism yet allows for defense of soft-universalism.

Dewey held that his thesis of the independence of factors of motive, consequences, and social approbation and disapprobation, "has significant forward-going implications for debates in ethics,

insofar as it functions to deflate debates among ethicists that turns on claims about the conceptual primacy of any one of these three ethical concepts over the other two."[48] What I hope the foregoing sections have persuaded the reader is that deliberation over how best to fit partiality and impartiality into ethical theory, and how best to balance them in our reflective morality, *is such a debate*. But instead of digressing further into these broader meta-ethical issues, the final section will now turn to a more focused approach. It will utilize Peter Goldie's work on the role of thick concepts in reflective morality in order to more directly motivate "risk-aware" ethics and epistemology.

4. Motivating Risk-Aware Virtue Theories

Despite the appeal to impartiality in deontological and consequentialist ethics, partiality is often recognized as not only permitted, but even as required by morality where it revolves around people's special relationships, or the social roles that they play. Special relationships and social roles both come with responsibilities attached.[49] I cannot (again) leave my children to fend for themselves during my conference without shirking my parental duties of care. I cannot do so without being not only *legally* negligent in the care of my dependents, but also morally culpable for my actions or omissions.

There are many other considerations which might serve to motivate risk-aware virtue theories, moral or epistemic. There are real-world problems of 1) *epistemic injustice*, and of 2) *willed ignorance* and its effects. There are also problems with 3) *historically contingent particularity*, such as in constructing one's identity in a manner conditioned by one's own family or culture, but in blindness to other cultural traditions.[50] While there are relevant considerations with each of these three problems, I will set them aside in order to focus this section's

examination of vicious partiality on a fourth problem: centripetal thinking that Peter Goldie

refers to as *domain-limiting partiality.*

Goldie (2008; 2011) can help us analyze vicious partiality because he urged ethicists to make

a closer study of how people's circle-of-care is so often sharply or arbitrarily constrained. He

called these cases of bias due to an agent's *limited domain* of care: A father is kind to his

children, but cruel to his spouse; a woman is kind to her family, but mean to her employees at

work; a child is honest in school, but dishonest with friends; a self-described patriot is loyal to

countrymen, but bigoted towards non-citizens (or perhaps towards ethnic sub-groups he chooses

to *see* as cultural aliens despite all evidence to the contrary). For Goldie, if we ask why a

person's fully-engaged range of application of a thick concept like "kind" or "honest" seems so

restricted, the answer lies in people's emotional dispositions.

> A person's emotional dispositions, and the thick concepts which can be involved
>
> in their sincere, fully engaged, expression in thought and speech, are often in
>
> these ways restricted in their domain of application, so that we rightly withhold
>
> the attribution of a general character trait -a virtue or a vice- to that person: …his
>
> use of thick ethical concepts tracks, and is explained by, these emotional
>
> dispositions, or by the lack of them….[51]

Goldie not only saw cases of vicious partiality as prevalent in real life, but also as something

he explicitly claims philosophical ethics, including virtue ethics, has yet to adequately address. It

is hard to know what to say about the character of a person who is kind to their own child but

mean or indifferent to other children in characterological terms of virtue and vice, because their

seeming virtues are, or this closer view, so compartmentalized by domain or "focus." The focus

to which kindness is directed clearly has an object, but it is a severely limited one, and the agent

may well be censured if their thinking and attitudes show that as ensnared by a strong bias. All of these examples "of pro-attitudes but of limited domain," as Goldie puts it, he treats as indicating that ascribing virtue to an individual should often be withheld, despite there being some good aim and motive in respect to a favored ingroup or special relationship. For they are often at the same time failures to apply their thick concepts more consistently, such that they extend their pro-attitude more broadly.[52]

Goldie questions whether ethicists have studied domain limiting partiality nearly enough, yet he doesn't think that these phenomena motivate the situationist challenge to virtue theory, or negates the value of concepts of virtue and vice – either for philosophers or for agents themselves. Attention to these phenomena instead *confirms* that thick evaluative concepts "not only help to explain the connection between depth of feelings and sincere judgements involving thick concepts; they also help to explain, in ways that no general account can aspire to do, our individual inconsistencies."[53]

Goldie's thesis finds support in Appiah in *Experiments in Ethics* (2008), where he explains that the inconsistencies or assumed asymmetries in the judgments of agents are typically features which the independent observer will perceive and take as salient, but which are often not apparent to the persons whose character and actions are being studied. This helps tie together our argument that we cannot adequately address the partiality-and-the-virtues/vices problematic without confronting pan-human facts about the tribalistic aspects of our thinking. Christina Cleveland (2014) similarly the relevance of empirical studies of personal and social bias to the fore, and applies it to the politics of identity:

> The worry is that when social biases like *Ingroup–Outgroup Bias* do take
>
> hold—in whatever sphere of life—the tendency to cling to rigid and

oversimplified categories of other groups. This in turn often leads people to exaggerate differences between ingroup and outgroups, or *us* and *them....* We want to be perceived as different from *them* so we exaggerate our differences with the other groups.... In fact, we often distinguish ourselves from other groups even when there's no logical reason to do so....[54]

At the same time, cooperation, our best inheritance from nature, remains frightfully clustered into ingroups, where competition rather than cooperation so often characterizes intergroup relations, and where available win-win cooperative strategies of problem-solving are thereby often ignored. Not only the study of *individuals* as in Goldie's domain-limited partiality cases, but also the study of *groups and collectives*[55] needs to be conducted in a *double-edged* manner, a manner recognizing that groups in which members act cooperatively with other ingroupers may yet exhibit moral indifference (and willed ignorance) towards the experience of outgroupers, or even quite condescending and dehumanizing attitudes towards them.

5. Conclusion

The misguided nature of the search for a 'complete,' hard universalist normative ethics, which the sorts of cases discussed in this paper make so apparent, has many implications.[56] But none are bigger than the need to study the complexities of *agents themselves*, rather than to study moral judgment on the basis only of an ideal theory. [57] Ethics and epistemology can and should be risk-aware, and being risk-aware means being informed by psychology of tribalism, i.e., psychology that recognizes the troubling effects of our tribalistic tendencies and social biases. Such blindness to one's own bias, and weakness in our analogical reasoning, is reason why vice-charging becomes robust when it is supported by inductive evidence, and why robust in contrast

to merely rhetorical vice-charging/bias-charging serves to promote moral reflection in agents (Kidd, 2016).

Sometimes this enables an agent to take seriously considerations they previously have not, and to foster critical thinking. Risk-aware virtue theory utilizes social and cognitive psychology, and does not take ideal theories as most useful to its normative projects. It aims to further integrate moral theory with moral psychology, political psychology, religious psychology, and other human sciences. It aims to bring this *as a complete package,* to the politics of identity. Taking a melioristic stance, ethicists and theologians alike might heighten critique values that were originally functional but that have grown into something hypertrophic and dysfunctional. They might at the same time recommend what Rachel Cohon (2008, 3) refers to as *prosthetic character traits*: new virtues which serve remediate our natural disabilities.[58]

But before concluding, let me make two major clarifications/qualifications of my own stance in calling for risk-aware ethics and epistemology as something needed in order to properly distinguish virtuous and vicious partiality. An ameliorative stance is an educational orientation with aims of getting people to think better and to more recognize the advantages of cooperative problem-solving. All educators want to add to the toolkit of agents, and appropriation of (engagement with) thick characterological and evaluative concepts, as we have seen with Goldie's work, is an important part of that toolkit. But the foregoing arguments should not be taken to mean all ethicists ought to think of their role as overtly melioristic[59] or paternalistic[60]; nor should they be taken to mean that when an ameliorative orientation is adopted by researchers or educators, this must mean the educators should *character* education, in contrast to having a simpler aim of educating for critical thinking.

While I, like Cohon, do take an overtly ameliorative stance, this need not issue into my taking character education as the primary goal of education. Character education and critical thinking are sometimes taken as *alternative* aims of education substantially in competition with one another. Learning specific skills of critical reasoning and inculcating deep-seated habits and dispositions are not fully separable, since conduct and character are closely fused (Dewey). But which is emphasized, and why, are especially debatable issues for public and private-school educational practice, issues to which the present account remains largely neutral.[61]

In conclusion, I have held that strict impartiality is no constant mandate of morality or of rationality, yet have also motivated the need for taking account, in agent evaluation and in guidance, of the many specific biases and partiality traps to which we are susceptible, individually and collectively. Both of these points I hold as necessary for a more adequate delineation of virtuous from vicious partiality. While there are certainly substantial burdens of affluence, we are not all 'guilty of all the good we did not do in life,' as perfectionists charge. Yet distancing ourselves from this extreme of ideal theory remains quite consistent with holding that the more balanced view which philosophers, moral psychologists, and theologians should seek is one which encourages the broadening of our moral circles, and in so doing incorporates critical thinking about differences, and specific lessons from bias studies.

So beyond insisting that ethical theories provide a comfortable home for virtuous partiality, we today need philosophical approaches which help educate agents in how to emotionally engage, and how to root out willed ignorance and avoid the various other partiality traps likely to stunt their fuller moral development. The dangers to us individually (in our moral development and sensitivities), and collectively (in our ability to face shared problems and to alleviate our human condition), I believe lie largely on the side of our failures in recognizing the partiality traps which

so often limit our moral imagination, skew our logic, and thwart the evolution of social cooperation.

Accordingly, philosophers and educators more generally should respect the ever-present, emotionally-charged centripetal forces of self-interest and in-group loyalty, yet teach for more consistent engagement with thick evaluative concepts as a crucial aspect of critical thinking that supports the expansion of our moral circles. Vicious and virtuous partiality are distinguished through the presence or absence of specific empirical markers of bias, and risk-assessment of the pattern of moral judgments an agent makes. This suggests that fostering risk-awareness, especially in regards to a person's generalizations and analogical inferences and their real-world effects when reflected in their judgments of others, should enable agents to better distinguish virtuous from vicious partiality in their own thoughts and actions. These techniques, while limited, aid the ability of moral agents to recognize (and erase) the 'enemies in the mirror' which we so often propagate when we let our personal biases or our tribalistic psychology run unchecked.[62]

Works Cited

Alfano, Mark. *Character as Moral Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony. *The Lies that Bind.* New York: W. W. Norton, 2018

-------------. *Experiments in Ethics.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Ariew, Roger and Watkins, Eric (eds.). *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*,

        2nd Edition. Indiannapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2009.

Axtell, Guy, and Carter, J. Adam. Just the right thickness: A defense of second-wave virtue epistemologies. *Philosophical Papers* 37, no. 3 (2008): 413-434. https://doi.org/10.1080/05568640809485229

Axtell, G., and Olson, Philip. "Three Independent Factors in Epistemology: A neo-Deweyan Approach to the Nature and Sources of Epistemic Value. *Contemporary Pragmatism* 6(2) (2009): 89–109. Doi: 10.1163/18758185-90000118

Axtell, Guy. "Wittgenstein and the ABC's of Religious Epistemics." In *Wittgenstein and the Epistemology of Religious Belief,* Duncan Pritchard and Nuno Carlos Venturina (eds.). Oxford University Press, 2023.

 -------------. "Cultivating Doxastic Responsibility: Ameliorative Epistemological Projects and the Ethics of Knowledge." *Humana.Mente Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 14(39) (2021): 87-125. https://www.humanamente.eu/index.php/HM/article/view/356 https://doaj.org/article/0aea52d29a9d48ff80d9e4626b33e188

-------------. *Problems of Religious Luck: Assessing the Limits of Reasonable Religious Disagreement.* Lexington Books, 2020a.

-------------. "An Argument for the Conceptual Incoherence of Mutualist Exclusivism." *Academia Letters,* 2020b. doi:10.20935/AL94. Accessed: https://www.academia.edu/44791328/An_Argument_for_the_Conceptual_Incoherence_of_Mutualist_Exclusivism

-------------. "Thinking Twice about Virtue and Vice: Epistemic Situationism and the Vicious Minds Hypothesis." *Logos and Episteme* 8(1) (2017): 7-39. *https://www.pdcnet.org/logos-episteme/content/logos-episteme_2017_0008_0001_0007_0039*

-------------. *Objectivity.* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2015.

-------------. "Expanding Epistemology: A Zetetic Responsibilist Approach." *Philosophical Papers,* 37(1) (2008): 51-88.

Barry, Christian & Lazar, Seth. "Supererogation and Optimization." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* (2022). DOI: 10.1080/00048402.2022.2074066

Bernal, Amiel, and Axtell, Guy (eds.). *Epistemic Paternalism: Conceptions, Justification, and Implications.* Rowman & Littlefield, 2020.

Cassam, Quassim. "Epistemic Vices, Ideologies and False Consciousness." In Michael Hannon and Jeroen de Ridder (eds). *The Routledge Handbook of Political Epistemology*. London: Routledge, 2020. https://www.academia.edu/43794456

Chang, Ruth. "Normative Powers." *The Aristotelian Society Aristotelian Society Supp,* xciv (2020): 275-300. doi: 10.1093/arisup/akaa012

Cleveland, Christena. *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces that Keep us Apart.* Westmont, IL: IVP Books, 2014.

Cohon, Rachel. *Hume's Morality: Feeling and Fabrication*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Conly, Sarah. "Why Feminists should Oppose Feminist Virtue Ethics," *Philosophy Now* 33 (2001): 12-14.

Dancy, Jonathan. "Moral Particularism." Stanford Encyclopedia online, 2017. Accessed https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-particularism/

Dare, Tim. "Robust Role-Obligation: How Do Roles Make a Moral Difference?" *Journal of Value Inquiry* (2016) 50: 703–719. DOI 10.1007/s10790-016-9577-2

Darwall, Stephen. *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability*.

Harvard University Press, Boston, 2006.

Dewey, John. *The Later Works*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989.

Dewey, John., & Tufts, J. H. *Ethics.* New York: Henry Holt and Company/London: G. Bels

Sons, 1908.

Doris, John. *Lack of Character*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Fritts, Megan and Miller, Calum. "Must We Be Perfect? A Case Against

Supererogation." *Inquiry* (2020) 63. https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2020.1784786

Grigore, Nora. "On Why There is a Problem of Supererogation." *Philosophia* (2019) 47 (4):

1141-1163.

Heyd, David. "Supererogation." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* 2019.

https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/supererogation/

Katherine Dormandy. "True Faith: Against Doxastic Partiality about Faith," *Australasian*

Philosophical Review, 5(1) (2021): 4-28, DOI: 10.1080/24740500.2021.2000187

Fesmire, Steven. 2023. *Pragmatic Pluralism: Beyond Moral Fundamentalism.* Oxford

University Press.

Goldie, Peter. "Thick Concepts and Emotion." In D. Callcut (ed*.) Reading Bernard Williams*

London, 94-109. London: Routledge, 2008. ISBN 9780415771900.

-------------. "Intellectual Emotions and Religious Emotions." *Faith and Philosophy*, 28(1)

(2011): 93-101.

Graham, Jesse, Waytz, Adam, Meindl, Peter, et. al. "Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces in the

       Moral Circle: Competing Constraints on Moral Learning." *Cognition* 167 (2017): 58-65.

Graham, Jesse, Haidt, Jonathan, Koleva, Sena, et. al. "Moral foundations theory: The pragmatic

       validity of moral pluralism." *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 47 (2013):

       55–130.

Grau, Christopher. "There is no 'I' in 'Robot': Robots and Utilitarianism. *EEE Intelligent*

       Systems 21 (4): 52-55.

Hickman, Larry. *Pragmatism as Post-Postmodernism: Lessons from John Dewey.* Fordham

       University Press, 2007.

Hofstadter, Douglas and Sander, Emanuel. *Surfaces and Essences: Analogy as the Fuel and Fire*

       of Thinking. Philadelphia: Basic Books Group, 2013.

Hume, David. *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, Eugene Miller (ed.), Indianapolis: Liberty

       Fund, 1985.

-------------. *A Treatise of Human Nature,* L. A. Selby-Bigge, ed. Revised by P.H. Niddith.

       Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978.

Kahan, Dan M. "Why Smart People are Vulnerable to Putting Tribe before Truth." *Scientific*

       American (December 3, 2018)*.* Accessed

       https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/why-smart-people-are-vulnerable-to-

       putting-tribe-before-truth/

Kidd, Ian. "Charging Others with Epistemic Vice." *The Monist* 99(3) (2016): 181–197.

Kirchin, Simon. *Thick Evaluation.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Kitsik, Eve. "Epistemic Paternalism via Conceptual Engineering." *Journal of the American*

       Philosophical Association 2022, 1-20. Doi: 10.1017/apa.2022.22

Knitter, Paul. *Introducing Theologies of Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.

Kotzee, Ben, Carter, J. Adam, and Siegel, Harvey. "Educating for Intellectual Virtue: A Critique

    from Action Guidance." *Episteme* (2019): 1-23.

Kotzee, Ben. "Education and 'Thick' Epistemology." *Educational Theory* 61(5) (2011): 549-

    564.

Lewis-Kraus, Gideon. "The Reluctant Prophet of Effective Altruism." *The New Yorker,* August

    15, 2022 issue, np. Accessed https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/08/15/the-

    reluctant-prophet-of-effective-altruism

Madigan, Timothy. "Virtue Ethics." *Philosophy Now Magazine* 88 (2012, np).

    https://philosophynow.org/issues/88/Ecological_Ethics

McNabb, Ramsey. "Why you Shouldn't be a Person of Principle." *Philosophy Now magazine*,

    Issue 60 (2007 np). Accessed

    https://philosophynow.org/issues/60/Why_You_Shouldnt_Be_A_Person_Of_Principle

Mill, J. S. *The Basic Writings of John Stuart Mill.* New York: Modern Library, 2002.

Montaigne, Michele de. *The Complete Essays of Montaigne,* translated by Donald Frame.

    Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958.

Newey, Glen. "Against Thin-Property Reductivism: Toleration as Supererogatory." *Journal of*

    Value Inquiry 31 (1997): 231–249.

Olhorst, Jakob. "Dual Processes and Dual Virtues." *Philosophical Studies* (2021). Online access

    https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-021-01761-7

Olin, Laurin, and Doris, John. "Vicious Minds." *Philosophical Studies* 168 (3) (2014): 665-692.

    https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11098-013-0153-3

Pappas, Gregory. *John Dewey's Ethics: Democracy as Experience.* Indianapolis: Indiana
    University Press, 2008.

Putnam, Hilary. *The Collapse of the Fact-Value Dichotomy and Other Essays.* Cambridge, MA:
    Harvard University Press, 2002.

Queloz, Matthieu & Bieber, Friedemann. "Conceptual Engineering and the Politics of
    Implementation." *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 2021 (3): 670-691.

Ralston, Shane. "How to Cultivate a Good Character—Pragmatically: Dewey and Franklin on
    the Virtues." *Education and Culture* 2022, forthcoming.

Ridge, Michael and McKeever, Sean. "Moral Particularism and Moral Generalism," Stanford
    Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2016. Accessed https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-
    particularism-generalism/

Rorty, Richard. "Who Are We? Moral Universalism and Economic Triage." *Diogenes* 44(173)
    (1996): 5-15. doi:10.1177/039219219604417302

Rosenstand, Nina. *The Moral of the Story* (Ninth ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill, 2020.

Samuelson, Peter and Church, Ian. "When Cognition Turns Vicious: Heuristics and Biases in
    Light of Virtue Epistemology," Philosophical Psychology 28(8) (2014): 1095-1113.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism is a Humanism.* Yale University Press; Annotated edition (July
    24, 2007 [1946].

Schwenkenbecher, Anne. *Getting our Act Together: A Theory of Collective Moral Obligations.*
    London: Routledge, 2021.

Singer, Peter. *The Expanding Moral Circle: Ethics, Evolution, and Moral Progress.* Princeton
    University Press; Revised edition, 2011.

-------------. *The Most Good You Can Do: How Effective Eltruism is Changing Ideas about Living Ethically.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015.

Stangl, Rebecca. "Neo-Aristotelian Supererogation." *Ethics*, 126 (2016): 339-65.

Stevenson, C.L. *Facts and Values: Studies in Ethical Analysis.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963.

Tessman, Lisa. *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles*, Oxford University Press, 2005. ISBN 0195179153.

Thomas, Paul. "Deprogramming QAnon Followers Ignores Free Will." *The Conversation* (2021, np). https://theconversation.com/deprogramming-qanon-followers-ignores-free-will-and-why-they-adopted-the-beliefs-in-the-first-place-158372

Timmons, Mark. *Moral Theory: An Introduction, 2nd edition.* Rowman & Littlefield, 2012.

TU wei ming. *Humanity and Self-Cultivation: Essays in Confucian Thought*. Boston, MA: Cheng & Tsui Co, 1999.

-------------. "Confucianism." In Arvind Sharma (ed.), *Our Religions.* HarperSanFrancisco, 1993.

-------------. *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Self-Transformation*. New York: SUNY Press, 1985.

Urmson, J. O. "Saints and Heroes." In A. I. Melden (ed.), *Essays in Moral Philosophy*. University of Washington Press, 1958.

Van Bavel, Jay, and Packer, Dominic. *The Power of Us: Harnessing Our Shared Identities to Improve Performance, Increase Cooperation, and Promote Social Harmony.* New York: Little, Brown Spark, 2021.

Wong, David B. "Crossing Cultures in Moral Psychology." *Philosophy Now* 36, 2002, np.

Wong, David B. Moral Relativism and Pluralism. Cambridge, UK: *Cambridge Elements,* 2023.

Williams, Bernard. "A Critique of Utilitarianism." In J. J. C. Smart & Bernard Williams.

Utilitarianism: For & Against. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973.

Endnotes

[1] Montaigne, 116.

[2] While philosophical virtue ethics does not try to apply a "master principle," at least of a strict impartialist nature, some duty ethicists such as Sarah Conly (2001), have argued that virtue ethics as a normative ethical theory is a *more* rather than less demanding alternative. Although examples like a caste system with associated religio-cultural norms might be an example, this doesn't seem characteristic of philosophical virtue ethics. And although Conly criticizes virtue ethics (and care ethics in particular), as "intrusive" and as issuing guidance that will often leave people alienated and conflicted, she allows that feminist virtue ethics "has been successful in illustrating that the focus of our lives is on the personal and the particular rather than on the universal and abstract, and, importantly, has been persuasive in arguing that this is not a flaw." Her neo-Kantian alternative depends upon delineating "[a] new and improved duty ethic [that] can accommodate this insight; it is within the scope of duty ethics to say that the demands made on humans should be ones they can meet" (2001, 14).

[3] Dare (2016, 719) argues that if roles are to make a moral difference, then "they must be conceived of robustly, as themselves the source of obligations for role occupants." Perhaps "obligations" ('dutes') *best* fits with acts or omissions affecting those beings we have special relationships with (compare Goldman, this volume).

[4] In ancient China, accusing one's own parent or grandparent with a crime was *itself* sometimes deemed a crime punishable by death. Filial piety in this tradition trumps impartiality, and there is little merit to an ethics that would insist as hard universalists do on the primacy of *agent-indifferent* reasons. But this is different than what we may call *virtues of reflective detachment,* which fuel the expansion of our moral circle. In the Chinese tradition these virtues are supported by famous "Caretaker" and "Ruler" thought experiments presented by Mozi; they include *shu,* the ability to take-perspective, or to put oneself in another's shoes.

[5] The earliest version of this paper briefly discussed each of these four motivating problems, but this developed version presents a fuller discussion of just one of them: Goldie's problem of *domain-limited partiality*. These four problems, and others connected with them, are each connected with our *bias blind spot.* As problems that are examined in risk-aware virtue theory, they collectively call for what Rachel Cohen terms *prosthetic character traits*, new virtues cultivated in order "to remediate our natural disabilities'" (2008, 3).

[6] For fascinating insights on tensions among self-described effective altruists (EA), not just between local versus global charitable projects, but also between short-termism (whether local or global) and long-termism, see Lewis-Kraus's article on William MacAskill. This was published August 2022, just prior to the criminal indictments of Sam Bankman-Fried and other FTX executives who publicly claimed strong attachment to EA principles and projects as articulated by MacAskill and Singer (2013).

[7] Graham and Iyer collaborated with Haidt on some of the early major statements of moral foundations theory, as a pluralistic response to such questions as, "Where does morality come from?" "Why are moral judgments often so similar across cultures, yet sometimes so variable?" and "Is morality one thing, or many?" See Graham, Haidt, Koleva et. al., 2013.

[8] Although I have not seen him treat the Moral Circle directly, David Wong (2002), another noted Confucian scholar, emphasizes the cultivation of moral sentiments through analogical reasoning, or "extending" from our "baseline" (usually local) judgments, contrasting this with Singer's 'top-down' analytic approach. Too much of normative ethics "is dominated by platitudes about communicating the right principles to the next generation. Not enough of it is a serious attempt to identify ways to cultivate the ability to make good judgments" (np). Mencius and the Taoists agree "that we must treat each situation as unique and as overflowing conceptual categories formed on the basis of the past," but work from strength of analogies to invite broader empathies. But the complaint Mencius has against the Mohists is that "they emphasized an impartial concern for all persons at the cost of recognizing the independent moral status that special relationships have," whereas Confucian tradition upholds that "while everyone is owed a basic respect and concern, we owe those who stand in special relationships to us an extra concern over and above what we owe to others, simply in virtue of those relationships" (np). Wong focuses on the example of legendary sage-king Shun (*Mencius* 7A35) who "manages to honor both values at different moments in his dealing with the situation.... When we encounter situations that pose

similar-looking conflicts between impartial concern and familial loyalties, we have Shun's judgment as a resource and a model" (np).

[9] Compare Tu 1985, 58. Tu finds the expanding moral circle expressed in Confucian texts, but it is arguably still more apparent in the Taoist classic, *Tao Te Ching.* See especially *TTC* 54, varied translations of which can be compared at: https://www.egreenway.com/taoism/ttclz54.htm

[10] Tu, 1985, 175-176.

[11] We might here admit to Voltaire's judgmental dictum, that in some sense we are all guilty of the good that we did not do in our lifetimes. But as I will argue, morality cannot demand strict impartiality in an agent's moral reasoning, any more than the concept of moral duty can plausibly demand moral saintliness of us, or unlimited altruism, or self-sacrifice for the common good, etc.

[12] The five constant relationships are those between ruler and subject, father and son, elder brother and younger brother, husband and wife, and friend and friend. Wong (2023, 18-19) contrasts relationship and autonomy-centered ethics, and rightly points out strong differences between relationship (or 'role') ethics (Confucian or other) and any kind of egoism: "Growth of the network of responsibilities can be inversely related to broad latitude to do what one wants. Wong thus takes the responsibility dimension of relational valuing to stand "in an inverse relation to the personal-choice dimension of autonomy" and in contrast with familiar versions of autonomy- and rights-centered traditions.

[13] Still more troubling, the "harmonization" in question here is only quite tenuously connected with an agent's happiness or eudaimonia. For if the social situation for moral agents is one of oppression, or of calamity, then even if there is potential harmony between a local and a more global resistance, the virtues they manifest may be what Lisa Tessman terms "burdened virtues": the virtues that such conditions require the oppressed or traumatized to develop. "What I think of as the *burdened virtues* include all those traits that make a contribution to human flourishing--if they succeed in doing so at all--*only* because they enable survival of or resistance to oppression (it is in this that their nobility lies), while in other ways they detract from their bearer's well-being, in some cases so deeply that their bearer may be said to lead a wretched life." Tessman (2005), 95.

[14] So, while I hold the recognition of social roles and special relationships as an advantage of virtue ethics over hard universalist theories like Singer's utilitarianism, it should be noted that a philosophically adequate treatment of social roles, and the virtuous partiality that accompanies them, must not treat virtue to simple obedience to a socially-assigned identities and associated norms. It appears to be a strong bias in Western ethics (which virtue ethics, and non-Western perspectives help to rectify) that particularity, partiality, and relational qualities are associated with *non-moral thinking*, and that "universality" in reflective morality reduces to impartiality in the sense of applying the one correct decision rule.

[15] Montaigne, 116. Thus, if centripetal forces and the unrealizability perfectionist ideals limits the scope of ethics, prejudice aversion together with cultivation of natural social sentiments centrifugally expands our moral circles in a cosmopolitan direction.

[16] Tu is keen to weigh in on this issue, pointing out, "The Confucian ideal of human flourishing is …not anthropocentric…The proper measure for humanity is cosmological as well as anthropological…and self-transformation features prominently in Confucian tradition…. The more we broaden ourselves to involve others, the more we are capable of deepening our self-awareness [through] an ever-expanding network of human relatedness" (1999, 205-6). But some would argue that the result of rejecting anthropocentrism is vague, and may be characterized as "biocentrism" rather than greater objectivity.

[17] Issues of political theory may also depend on how we think of the strength and cogency of the analogical argument in play: Certain laws, such as laws prohibiting voluntary active physician-assisted suicide, are paternalistic in nature, and the rationale that accompanies them may lean upon a faith-based assumptions setting human beings, as creatures of divine design, apart from the rest of nature.

[18] Three bridges to religious dialogue and interfaith or ecumenical projects are developed by Paul Knitter (2002). See Axtell 2020a and 2020b for discussion. Katherine Dormandy (2021) draws useful distinctions between two defenses of *doxastic partiality,* defenses she calls "anti-epistemological" and "epistemological partiality," each with somewhat different associated risks or dangers. The former, which she uses Kierkegaard to illustrate, is heroic, acknowledging the dissonance that attends stubborn counter-evidence to one's beliefs, but supposing that "noetic struggle makes faith excellent"; the latter defense, by contrast, "eschews struggle and fosters noetic ease." It aims not just to avoid cognitive dissonance but to annihilate it. "In religious contexts, epistemic partiality may seem truth-conducive – a sort of reliable cognitive bias – and epistemic partialism encourages its unearned indulgence, sometimes to such an

extent that for any potential impartialist counterevidence, it is the height of both faith and of philosophical reason to hold it 'defeated' simply by reiterating one's evidence-weighting policy of giving greater weight to what favourable, partialist, evidence one already has" (5). This clearly relates to what Appiah (2018, 44) describes as "biblical determinism," which ignores how scriptural interpretation is regularly contested within the practices, and traditions constantly being reinterpreted.

[19] I suspect we find plentiful examples that constitute smugness in regard to religious differences, both between 'militant' atheists and religious fundamentalists, and between fundamentalist adherents of different religions, denominations, or sects. See Stohr, this volume for a general discussion of Kant and the vice of smugness. Arrogance, defamation, and ridicule, are vices which Kant in his *Doctrine of Virtue,* identifies as vices that violate duties of respect for others. Risk-aware thinkers, whether irreligious or religious, should be keenly aware of epistemic injustices that accompany such violations, whether they manifest in the strict impartialism of skeptical evidentialism, or in one's blanket devaluation of the moral and spiritual live of non-adherents to their 'home' religion.

[20] Despite the concerns I am raising that attitudes of religious absolutism (including doctrinal and soteriological exclusivism) are indicative of vicious partiality, most adherents do not find it difficult to avoid such extremes in their conception of faith and its demands. So, I hold my treatment to be consistent with Gardner's thoughtful account of Christian faith as a social virtue (this volume). But two notes of caution. Gardner moves quickly from a perceived necessity for religious "particularity" to an agent's epistemic "partiality" informing the testimonial trust that is partly constitutive of their faith. I would urge that these are distinguishable, and that while particularity is not especially philosophical problematic, doxastic partiality certainly is. Secondly, when testimonial trust is understood as legitimizing doxastic partiality, the agent is likely to gloss over important differences between the *narrative* testimony in revelation/scripture, and ordinary or *assertive* testimony. People often deal poorly in processing these important differences even apart from religious examples, as cognitive psychology has shown. See Axtell 2020a, Chapter 3 for fuller development.

[21] Some scholars have indeed held that "analogy is the core of cognition," and is the "fuel and fire" for human thought and reasoning (Hofstadter and Sander, 2013). Analogies are intricately related to our ability to apply *categorization* schemes. Despite the many wonderful things that analogies and disanalogies do for us, a risk-related concern is our penchant to create and apply stereotypes: distorted categorizations. "And think of stereotypes based on such things as sex or race or nationality or age or profession or religion --they too are a kind of categorization, made hastily or unreflectively. Most people buy wholly into their stereotypes without realizing that such coarse-grained judgments of other peoples

are often way off the mark. In short, stereotypes are a frequent source of deeply erroneous categorizations" (527-528).

[22] My referring to tribalistic aspects of our psychology presents a generalization that of course needs to be hedged, since the personal and social biases are themselves quite varied. For works spanning across domains of controversial views (philosophy, ethics, politics and religion) see Kahan (2018) and Van Bavel and Packer (2021). It has been applied more specifically to theology of religions in Robert Wright's John Templeton Foundation (2021-2023) "Project to Foster Intellectual Humility and Counter the Psychology of Tribalism."

[23] Tu 1993, 205.

[24] Tu 1993, 144.

[25] Tu 1993, 175. Self-cultivation is a precondition for harmonizing human relations, as Tu's virtue ethics emphasizes: "Confucians recognize that human beings are social beings, but they maintain that all forms of social interaction are laden with moral implications and that self-cultivation is required to harmonize each one of them" (56).

[26] Issues of impartial reasoning via a utility calculus are also debated in relationship to robot ethics, and there it is quite doubtful we should design autonomous robots to reason in the way Singer thinks humans should. Christopher Grau (2006, 53-54) asks, "[I]f we could program a robot to be an accurate and effective utilitarian, shouldn't we? Perhaps not. Utilitarianism has its problems, after all; for the sake of the greater good, it permits actions that most humans would consider unjust, unfair, or immoral. The tension between utilitarianism and the integrity of the self is a powerful objection when we consider human agents…However, this might not apply when the agents are machines. After all, whether a robot has commitments that conflict with an impartial morality is (mostly) up to its creator, so we could avoid such conflict by designing robots accordingly. The quest to create moral robots gives us reasons to deliberately withhold certain human traits from them. Which traits matter here?"

[27] Graham et. al. (2016) treat virtue ethics as recognizing a balance of centripetal and centrifugal intuitions, but Singer's effective altruism as presenting centripetal tendencies as mere bias. Still, Goldman and Beaty (both this volume) point out that utilitarians need not be impartialists all the way down; Beaty sites a Millian argument to support this. So perhaps a better way to put my point is that (early) Singer is

committed to a strong *Symmetry* thesis according to which you are required to optimize your beneficial sacrifices even when they are genuinely supererogatory (beyond the call of unconditional duty); whereas *Asymmetry*, which allows you to prioritize your own well-being and reasons to a greater degree (while still placing constraints on the options that you may permissibly choose) is far more plausible. See Barry and Lazar 2022 for analysis of these theses, and an argument that Asymmetry, which grants discretion not to optimize, occupies a wide and advantageous logical space.

[28] The expectation of charitable giving, Singer argued, should be to donate all the way up to the point where the giver herself is reduced "very near to the material circumstances of a Bengali refugee" (1972), 236–237.

[29] Singer does sometimes try to distance himself from dependence on ideal theory: "An ethic for human beings must take them as they are, or as they have some chance of becoming. The goal of maximizing the welfare of all may be better achieved by an ethic that accepts our inclinations and harnesses them so that, taken as a whole, the system works to everyone's advantage" (157). However, this comment seems highly inconsistent with Singer's appeal to his impartiality principle of reasoning.

[30] The integrity challenge seems also to overlap with several of the five reasons Silverman (this volume) develops as showing that impartiality is not as central a moral value as some traditional ethicists have contended. Williams held that the *doctrine of negative responsibility* in utilitarianism, which leaves little if any role for social roles and projects, and the *integrity challenge* this presents an actual moral reasoner, "represents in this way the extreme of impartiality, and abstracts from the identity of the agent…. [T]he reason why utilitarianism cannot understand integrity is that it cannot coherently describe the relations between a man's projects and his actions" (1973, 85-86). See also NcNabb 2003 for a teaching-friendly introduction.

[31] The very concept of supererogation is a vexed one, stemming from deontological language even if Kantians commonly find this category of actions senseless. Urmson (1958), who is often credited with ushering in debate over the *problem of supererogation,* eventually suggests replacing the term with "non-dutiful well-doings" (Heyd, np). But the perfectionist view held by Symmetry, which would eliminate the category of good-but-not-obligatory actions in favor of the 'best possible' (optimal) action as always obligatory, is committed to a very strong form of impartiality in order to determine what 'optimization' is or means. While some have argued that virtue ethics has as much trouble as other theories in

accommodating praiseworthy but undemanded actions, I here agree with Stangl that this is a misguided objection, since it is "implausible to think that all virtuous actions are equally virtuous" as the objection assumes (2016, 353). If that assumption can't stand, this arguably undercuts both the Kantian view that an action has moral worth only in so far as it is done from duty to the moral law, and the more broadly perfectionist/effective altruist *good-ought tie-up principle* (GOTUP) asserting that whatever is good, ought to be done. While the deontologist is low on a Symmetry (or "parsimony") scale, and the effective altruist is high, neither appear able to recognize the value of actions not done from duty. "Supererogation is valuable because we believe that beyond the impersonal and egalitarian social web created by the universal morality of duty, there is space left for particular relationships that are not governed by the principles of justice and rights" (Heyd, np).

[32] Even if it is held that we have "most reason" to do uniquely maximizing act x, it seems that we have permission not always or regularly to act on these best reasons. Nor is this point merely to propose excusing conditions. It is to reject the good-ought tie-up principle, where doing the best is always obligatory, and never optional: Whatever is good, ought to be done, and this moral good/moral ought, is both (*sui generis*) and over-riding of every other sort of reason. Urmson (1958) was correct to point out that deontology autonomous and utilitarianism both set off from anti-supererogation starting points, and only come through strained distinctions to allow actions that are good to do and praiseworthy, but not morally obligatory. Virtue ethics also makes place for important *asymmetries* between vicious and virtuous deeds, where vicious ones are always censurable, but virtuous ones, while praiseworthy, need not routinely be deemed obligatory. Terms such as moral "saints" and "heroes" are utilized as ways of marking this common-sense distinction. Virtue ethics relatedly recognizes substantial differences in evaluating acts and omissions. It also rejects the symmetry of virtue and vice attributions assumed by act-focused theories. These are other important features make virtue ethics more amenable to recognition of special roles/relationships, and those broader psychological forces we here follow Graham et. al, in terming centripetal. Ultimately, my supererogationism is of the sort Heyd describes as holding that the "supererogatory is something that is not required in any sense and its omission does not call for an appeal to a special permission, exemption or excuse" (np). Yet evaluation of agents is still qualified by markers of measurable bias — traps — which help evaluate an agents' pattern of acts and omissions by applying bias studies. *Willed ignorance* of sufferings and injustices, for example, is no excusing condition from censure, but an evaluator has to have strong grounds for attributing willed ignorance and overt bias, in order to make a vice attribution robust.

[33] The Bible may command loving one's neighbor as oneself, but this is arguably an expression of ideal human brotherhood, or of a saintly moral character not expected of those not of the faith. Note that the 'love thy neighbor' command stands out as one of the only *positive* duties among the biblical commandments. In *Civilization and its Discontents,* Freud's is famously critical of this commandment, and more generally of "a state of evenly suspended, steadfast, affectionate feeling [toward] all men alike" (1930, 49), as ill-fitting human psychology. Morality must be made for humans, not humans for morality, on his naturalistic approach.

[34] J.S. Mill, like Singer, appeals to a disinterested standard of right action, yet the closer we look, the basis for expanding our moral circle is not the impartial demand of rationality, or the *good-ought tie-up principle* asserted by moral perfectionists; it is instead successful engagement of what Mill called "conscientious feelings of mankind," closely akin to Hume's "social sentiments." Some of the further differences which give a virtue ethics advantages will emerge in the next section. Utilitarian reasoning may be expected of policy-makers, but Mill is far more explicit than Singer that the times when ethics obliges one to reason in this way are actually quite exceptional. The rest of the time, Mill allows, "the interest or happiness of some few persons, is all he has to tend to." Mill (2001), 252. But we should not accept any potential new *dichotomy* between virtuous and vicious partiality: Much lies between, as Mill seems to acknowledge. For a fuller critique of Singer's impartiality demand, see Axtell 2015, Chapter 6, "Ethics and Objectivity."

[35] On the other hand, the 'oughts' that attend partialist prescriptions will be similarly 'unnatural' when there is little empirical support, or only empathetic and counter-inductive thinking, to support the category distinctions that the partialist draws. Such cases invite a subversive genealogical account. So, while proper respect for the *epistemic force* of inductive norms suggests maintaining the burden of proof on counter-evidential claims, proper respect for the *limitations of inductive inference* suggests taking etiological challenges seriously whenever the analogical and category-based inferences of actual agents display marks of vicious partiality. See Axtell 2023 for development of these arguments, and further elaboration of my inductive risk account of the limits of reasonable disagreement.

[36] For an overview of debate between supererogationism and perfectionism, see Heyd, 2019. Fritts and Miller (2020) provide a perfectionist argument that the good-ought tie-up makes it nearly impossible to posit a category of actions which are neither required, nor obligatory. But I do not find convincing their arguments that virtue ethics cannot make a comfortable home for supererogatory acts, or that ideological parsimony demands that we stand with just two categories of actions, obligatory and non-obligatory. The

Morality Play game at https://www.philosophyexperiments.com/moralityplay/ provides an interesting way to raise these issues in an ethics class.

[37] See Darwall 2006. Note that Ridge and McKeever (2016) interpret Darwall as developing a pragmatic defense of generalism about *standards,* but standards of moral *obligation* only. Neither the law, where one's negative rights, including property rights and freedoms to *disassociate* from voluntary groups or associations tend to predominate*,* nor social contract theories will attribute moral blame to persons for acting out of a primary self-interest. Hickman (2007, 32) relatedly says that according to Dewey, "humans make self-reflection a part of evolutionary history when they come to consciousness by means of social intercourse."

[38] Appiah (2018), 217-218. Although a cosmopolitan thinker in many respects, Appiah repudiates the fantasy ironically shared by some liberals and conservatives, "in which identities are merely chosen, so we are all free to be what we choose to be. But identities without demands would be useless to us":

> Identities work only because, once they get their grip on us, they command us, speaking
> to us as an inner voice; and because others, seeing who they think we are, call on us, too.
> If you do not care for the shapes your identities have taken, you cannot simply refuse
> them; they are not yours alone. You have to work with others inside and outside the
> labeled group in order to reframe them so they fit you better; and you can only do that
> collective work if you recognize that the results must serve others as well. (218)

[39] Virtuous partiality is clearly instanced in what Hume characterizes as "knavery" (developed in Axtell 2021). Knavery can describe the outward-facing attitudes and conduct of individuals, but also of *groups.* In the course of describing this quite negatively-valenced concept, Hume comments on how emotional attachment to one's social identity can lead to this sort of identity-protective vicious partiality. People "are generally more honest in their private than in their public capacity, and will go greater lengths to serve a party, than when their own private interest is alone concerned. Honour is a great check upon mankind: But where a considerable body of men act together, this check is, in a great measure, removed; since a man is sure to be approved of by his own party, for what promotes the common interest; and he soon learns to despise the clamours of adversaries." Hume 1985 [1741], IP 1, Mil 40-42.

[40] This is the reason why effective altruism has had its own internal conflict between 'short-termism' (direct aid to people in need) and 'long-termism' (donations best spent on grander problems facing future

generations) (Lewis-Kraus, 2022). Beyond the question of the possible harmonization of our local and global projects discussed earlier, our choices are often limited by practical factors, or by factors outside our control. Our own and our national financial resources are limited, for example, while worthy causes are many. Some of the most troubling cases an agent's choices, as Richard Rorty (1996) argues against Singer, may demand something analogous to a medical process of triage, prioritizing some aid projects while necessarily deprioritizing others. Rorty criticizes his impartialist moral universalism, where one ought always to help the worst off, as idealistic, and naïve in regard to economics and financial resources. He does so in part by repurposing this medical term, *triage*, referring to the parsing of medical cases in order to primarily or only serve those deemed the worst off, or the most savable, among multiple victims in a medical emergency. Traditional moral universalism "claims that the presence of common traits testifies to a common purpose." Rorty goes on to challenge this, and to argue that the universalist who answers the question, "Who are we?" with "We are members of a moral community which encompasses the human species," is leaning upon the assumption "that we can avoid economic triage" (3-4).

[41] For further development of a sentimentalist approach, see Goldman, this volume. Hume's sentimentalism is perhaps best summarized in his "accurate proof of this system of ethics" in *Treatise* Part III (p. 619).

[42] On the distinction between hard universalism (or moral absolutism) of deontology and utilitarianism and the soft universalism of virtue and feminist care ethics, see Rosenstand (2020, 104-106 and 527). But not that my view may differ somewhat from Fesmire 2023, who would prefer dissociating rather than associating pragmatic pluralism even from soft universalism, among theories of how to understand and deal with moral differences, as well as from Wong 2023, who associated pluralism with relativism.

[43] Dewey and Tufts, 7.

[44] Dewey and Tufts, 8. For developments of pragmatic pluralism and what Fesmire refers to as Dewey's "big house" of ethical theory, see especially Fesmire 2023, and Pappas 2008. Pappas insists that while Dewey would agree with many of Williams' criticisms of utilitarianism, "he does not think this entails that morality should be agent-centered as Williams and other virtue theorists seem to think" (140). Pappas argues that it is a mistake to assimilate Dewey to virtue ethicists despite the criticisms they share of deontology and consequentialism; this threatens a new 'Great Divide' between character and conduct, ethics to-be and ethics to-do (129). Rather, his criticisms of centralism and reductionism, *do* vindicate Dewey's stance as a genuine 'third way,' but it is one that ethicists, including virtue ethicists, should *adapt themselves to*, in contrast to those who would argue that Dewey was a virtue ethicist. So when I

argue for the "advantages" of virtue theory, I mean to qualify my thesis in this way. Fesmire characterizes this way as embracing pragmatic pluralism in contrast to competing monistic claims of a single central and basic source of normative justification; theories are tools, and each extant normative ethical framework may compensate for something concealed by the others, such that we need to compare them and weigh them together, even while recognizing that character and conduct can often only artificially be divided.

[45] The literature focusing on *generalism vs. particularism* includes McNabb 2017, and Ridge and McKeever 2016*,* in addition to Dancy; while that focusing on *centralism vs. pluralism* includes Dewey, Putnam (2002) and Williams.

[46] These two descriptions --thinnies and thickies-- are closely-related monikers for their positions in metaethics. But more formally, thinnies like Blackburn endorse "centralism," the claim that the normative tasks of ethics should primarily focus on analysis of central concepts of ethical rightness/wrongness, and ethical goodness/badness. Kirchin relatedly describes Blackburn as a "separationist," along with others in the "disentangling debate who claim to factor moral judgments between cognitive and emotive factors (the factorability thesis). This is also how thin-concept reductionism gets exploited by emotivists, such as by C. L. Stevenson through his reductive two-factor analysis of evaluative language. Dewey had Stevenson in view when he warned that the attempts to explicate independent "meaning components" in language implies *hypostatization* of these units of discourse, and leads to intensifying the fact/value dichotomy (*Later Works* 16, 339). Perhaps surprisingly, Stevenson later conceded that "Valuative and descriptive meaning…stand in extremely close relationship. They are distinguishable aspects of a total meaning situation, not 'parts' of it that can be studied in isolation" (1963, 85). Putnam (2002) described thickies as "friends of entanglement" 2002), who recognize the enormous impact of emotion and temperament over people's moral judgments. See Axtell and Carter (2008) for an argument describing the ill-effects of the epistemological analogue of moral centralism, *epistemic centralism.* See Axtell and Olson (2008) advancing axiological pluralism (pluralism in *sources of* value) and making an analogical argument for "three independent factors in epistemology," in substantial parallel with Dewey's thesis of three independent factors in morals.

[47] Newey 1997, 231. The author adds that cases of mixed or unpure motivation, which are common-place, are especially difficult for purely deontic evaluators to analyze. An agent-centered approach he shows makes better sense of these distinctions, for "There is no disposition of character which is the disposition

to perform acts of supererogation. But there are closely related dispositions of character, such as *kindness*"; and while it is *implausible* to think that acts of kindness realize only deontically-reducible goods, "It is plausible to think that there is no across-the-board way to pick out acts of kindness, other than by reference to their motivational history" (248, n. 6).

[48] Dewey, *Later Works* Vol. 5: 280.

[49] I find substantial connections between what I am terming Tu's sentimentalism, and Dewey's pragmatist ethics, and while these are meta-ethical issues, they have interesting connections with virtue ethics. Even as we engage quite self-consciously in what Dewey calls reflective morality, care for those we have special relationships with are typically foremost in our concern. It is from these relationships that we take most of our "concrete" moral expectations. See Madigan 2012 for further relevant work focusing on Dewey's close connections with virtue theory.

[50] One might try to distinguish virtuous *particularity* from vicious *partiality*. Particularity and partiality are distinct concepts, and while particularity (for example, your choice to identify with one tradition cultural tradition rather than other extent traditions) might be thought to exhibit a kind of bias, it is a fact of life that we start out embedded in our cultural surroundings and influences. This becomes morally problematic only where it grows into attitudes of parochialism, or is attended by unjustified superiority assumptions.

[51] Goldie 2008, 108. If we compared one case where a father cares for his own children but is just rather indifferent to the welfare of children other than his own, and another where this 'caring father' actually exploits or harms other children in a way that he never would his own, then we would plausibly judge him viciously partial only in the latter case. The first man's lack of caring of non-blood relations, if that is an assumption he brings to his reflective morality, is morally troubling, and may not be fully excusable; but surely this is not as blameworthy as second man's active mistreatment of non-blood relations.

[52] Some of these concerns raise the issues of whether some or all versions of virtue theory are committed to *robust* and *global* character traits, and whether they are *empirically adequate* if they do. Such concerns have been presented to as a challenge to virtue ethics, or to certain versions of it, by proponents of situationism in psychology. Axtell (2017) offers a direct response to formal dilemmas posed for virtue theory by Olin and Doris (2013), and Alfano (2014), respectively. My responses centrally involve the idea that our human mental heuristics and Type 1 ('fast and frugal') thinking isn't wholly virtuous *or* vicious,

as these authors suppose a virtue theorist must take them to be. Rather, they are virtuous (potentially credit-conferring) to agents when the zetetic strategies they employ are well-suited to their problem-situation or zetetic context (i.e., are *ecologically rational,* given the context of inquiry and the aims of situated inquirers), and vicious when they are employed even though ill-suited to their problem-situation (or markedly inferior to alternative zetetic strategies these agents reasonably could have implemented). This is also partly why I title my particular version of virtue theory as *zetetic responsibilism* (Axtell, 2008b). For two other responses to the situationist challenge which similarly try to wed virtue theory to dual-process theory, see Samuelson and Church (2014); and Olhorst (2021).

[53] Goldie (2008), 94. Goldie argues that there is often a logical inconsistency behind the moral inconsistency of an agent's judgment encapsulating a narrow or seeming arbitrary choice of focus. Indeed, both the logical and moral inconsistency of a censured agent are likely to be features which the independent observer will perceive, and take as explanatory, but which are not evident to the individual. Psychologically, then, "full engagement with a thick concept, and correlatively its action-guidingness in application by that person, need not apply across all domains. One can be fully engaged with a concept here but not there" (Goldie 2008, 103-4). Yet philosophically this engagement, even if it seems to involve the expected emotional disposition, is not virtuous in the universal or human sense if its scope is arbitrarily curtailed on unprincipled grounds or by the influence of morally-irrelevant factors.

[54] Cleveland (2014), 68-70. She continues, "This natural inclination to obsess over the characteristics that distinguish our group from other groups is exacerbated by the fact that we spend the majority of our time with fellow group members who confirm our beliefs, culture, and way of life. . .. Exaggerating differences also gives way to wider differences in viewpoints. This is called *perspective divergence—*[or] *the gold standard effect—*and is one of the main causes of divisions between groups . . . lead[ing] us to believe that not only are we different from them, but we are also better than them."

[55] Inaction and omission are usually discussed with focus on individual agents, but I agree with Schwenkenbecher (2021) that for many issues facing us today, such as climate change, famine, antibiotic resistance, etc., collective inaction is a more interesting concept. It illuminates our "massively shared obligations," but also our many failures in respect to them. More positively, "we-framing" allows us to conceptualize courses of actions collectively available, and subsequent "we-reasoning" motivates overcoming group-based ignorance, and trustfully doing one's part of the action combination leading to the best collectively available outcome.

[56] In debates over moral universalism, a useful distinction is often drawn between "hard" and "soft" universalism. Soft universalists recognize that values and customs do vary across cultures but argue that *some* values may be universal. Virtue theories support soft universal, but not hard universalism, the claim that there is one never-changing standard for deciding whether an action is ethical. These are further advantages of virtue ethics, and why it can endorse universal human rights as principles that all societies should respect and aspire to. The distinction also helps to show that not every approach that is not hard universalist is thereby a moral "relativism."

[57] Timmons (2012) argues that "any plausible moral theory is likely to be a limited, pluralistic moral theory" (299). The present paper agrees with this view, and sees the difficulties of properly distinguishing vicious and virtuous partiality, and of find middle-ground between egoism and altruism, as powerful arguments for it. The "limited" position as Timmons describes it is a negation of "Determinacy: A moral theory should feature principles which, together with relevant factual information, yield determinate moral verdicts about the morality of actions, persons, and other objects of evaluation in a wide range of cases" (305). "Pluralism" is a denial of "monism", the view that there is some single basic feature of actions in virtue of which they are right or wrong (310). Virtue ethicists are considered to be moral pluralists (Timmons 2012), where moral pluralism combines two claims: There is plurality of basic moral rules, but no underlying moral principle from which these rules can be derived that serves to justify them (298). I find these contrasts to be more directly relevant to our problematic than the question of moral particularism, which Timmons describes as denying (1) the generalist thesis, (2) the universal relevance thesis, and (3) the polarity thesis (276). I argue that by developing a non-centralist (Hilary Putnam (2002); Bernard Williams), rather than a non-generalist metaethics, virtue theories avail themselves of powerful resources to defend the combination of soft universalism and moral pluralism (including moral foundations theory). It then finds ample resources to distinguish moral pluralism from moral relativism, on the one hand, and from moral absolutism, on the other (compare Fesmire, 2023).

[58] Despite having evolutionary advantages in an earlier period of social evolution, a character-trait becomes hypertrophic, as Nietzsche reminds us, as it turns an originally life-promoting idea into a life-denying one.

[59] Evaluative and prescriptive aims are not identical, and should not be conflated. Normative ethics and epistemology can be (and typically has been) *evaluative*, without also being *prescriptive* in the guidance-embracing sense of those with strongly ameliorative aims like Cohon's. Cohen's language of "prosthetic"

virtues might be a further source of controversy. A risk-aware approach takes the censure of agents who 'mirror' known biases to be an important task, but also a respectful, constructive practice. See Thomas (2021) for an analysis of QAnon ideology that emphasizes the ills of a pathologizing language of "deprogramming" aims and of associating ideologies with 'cult brainwashing.' I agree with Thomas that what is needed is more detailed study of social influence, and of group dynamics in cases of extreme beliefs and echo chambers, not a treatment that, by prematurely pathologizing the moral or doxastic partialities of the agents, deprives them of their autonomy and thereby also of their *responsibility* for their beliefs and actions. Thomas' work is a fine illustration of how our tribalistic psychology is already being studied in an emerging sub-literature within religious studies.

[60] This chapter's title firstly broaches a recent debate over "ameliorative" research, and a fascinating related recent literature on conceptual engineering and epistemic paternalism. See for example Queloz and Bieber (2021) and Kitsik (2022), along with Bernal and Axtell (eds.) (2020) for pro and con views in this debate. Of the knave, individual or group, Hume famously writes that, "every man ought to be supposed a knave, and to have no other end, in all his actions, than private interest. By this interest we must govern him, and, by means of it, make him, notwithstanding his insatiable avarice and ambition, co-operate to public good" (Hume 1985 [1741] IP 1, Mil 40-42. Whether this "governing" constitutes paternalism, and if so to what degree it is justifiable, depends partly on the means taken to achieve it.

[61] Kotzee, Carter, and Siegel (2019) argue that instilling critical reasoning skills in students likely is a more ideologically neutral than a role-model or exemplarist virtues-focused account of the aims of education. The more minimal aim of CT is a better candidate for a primary aim of education, and is perhaps a more effective one for attenuating the ill-effects of personal and social bias. Dewey denied there is *any* 'ultimate' aim of education, and I have argued elsewhere that this presents an alternative to *both* the CT *and* Virtues approaches. For a special edition on the role of thick concepts in ethics and education, see also Kotzee, ed. (2011). For Dewey on cultivation of character as an aspect of personal growth, see Ralston 2022, and for accounts of 'responsibilist' virtues as directly informed by social and cognitive psychology, see Axtell (2017) and Olhorst (2021).