

# You Are Only as Good as You Are Behind Closed Doors: The Stability of Virtuous Dispositions

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**ABSTRACT:** Virtues are standardly characterized as stable dispositions. A stable disposition implies that the virtuous actor must be disposed to act well in any domain required of them. For example, a politician is not virtuous if s/he is friendly in debate with an opponent, but hostile at home with a partner or children. Some recent virtue theoretic accounts focus on specific domains in which virtues can be exercised. I call these domain-variant accounts of virtue. This paper examines two such accounts: Randall Curren and Charles Dorn's (2018) discussion of virtue in the civic sphere, and Michael Brady's (2018) account of virtues of vulnerability. I argue that being consistent with the standard characterization of virtue requires generalizing beyond a domain. I suggest four actions the authors could take to preserve their accounts while remaining consistent with the standard characterization. I also discuss how virtue education could be enhanced by domain-variant accounts.

**KEYWORDS:** virtue theory, dispositions, domains, civic virtues, virtues of vulnerability, education

## I. Introduction

**VIRTUES ARE STANDARDLY** characterized as stable dispositions. A stable disposition implies that the virtuous actor must be disposed to act well in any context, in any domain, required of them. For example, a politician is not virtuous if they are friendly in debate with an opponent, but hostile at home with their partner or children. They act friendly in one context but not in another. Friendliness, for this politician, is not a stable disposition. Similarly, a person with the virtue of

integrity ought to display integrity in the interpersonal sphere (as a member of a family), in their career, and when participating as a citizen in the civic sphere. We expect truly virtuous people to be virtuous in all domains: to show the same abilities or traits in each domain that calls for its expression.

Some recent virtue theoretic accounts focus on specific domains in which virtues can be exercised. These accounts are useful for virtue theory because they move abstract ethical theories to concrete human experiences. Two notable accounts are Randall Curren and Charles Dorn's (2018) discussion of virtue in the civic sphere, and Michael Brady's (2018) account of virtuous suffering. Applying virtues in domains can help determine pedagogical, policy, and other real-world implications of virtue theories.

However, these applied accounts expose a long-standing theoretical problem at the heart of virtue theories: how universally must a disposition manifest for it to be considered stable? Virtue theorists (at least since Aristotle) have divided virtues into categories: moral or character virtues (virtues that have to do with how we act and behave) and epistemic or intellectual virtues (virtues that have to do with how we think). A later addition to these categories is practical virtues, virtues that govern how we solve practical problems (the kind of hands-on problem-solving ability used by doctors or plumbers). All three categories seem to cut across domains. Someone who has the proper virtue of open-mindedness, for instance, must be open-minded as a parent, as a colleague, and as a citizen—they should not be open-minded in just one of the three domains. In this sense, stability implies that virtuous dispositions are domain-invariant. If the structure of a disposition (what it is and how it can be generated) is domain-invariant, then it is applicable to more than one domain. A domain-invariant virtue account is generalizable across domains.<sup>1</sup>

We can contrast domain-invariant accounts of virtue with domain-variant ones. Domain-variant accounts describe a virtue within a single domain. They might guide the reader through a sphere of human experience (like the civic sphere or when facing a devastating illness) and examine the dispositions to act or believe excellently there. Yet, quite frequently in domain-variant accounts, little discussion is provided beyond the scope of that domain. Rather, the aim of the account is to indicate admirable traits or faculties within a domain and then to describe how they manifest. Such accounts characterize excellent dispositions only within that sphere of human experience.

For reasons explained in Section III, let us categorize Curren and Dorn's (2018) account of civic virtue, and Brady's (2018) account of virtues of vulnerability, as domain-variant accounts of virtue. Both accounts do not generalize their description of the trait or faculty they call virtue beyond the domain. This results in an inconsistency with its standard characterization as a stable disposition. Particular to Curren and Dorn's account, a second problem arises: they describe traits or faculties that have not been previously conceptualized as

belonging to established categories of virtue (the moral, intellectual, or practical). However, they do not argue that the traits or faculties they describe ought to be a subcategory of one of these, nor do they sufficiently argue for a separate category of virtues from the traditional moral, epistemic, and practical virtues.

Yet both Curren and Dorn, and Brady, use the term 'virtue' to describe excellent traits within a specific domain. But virtues do not pick out traits within domains; virtue picks out features of human beings, which, when trained appropriately, perform well in contexts within domains. Thus, they run the risk of mistaking the concept of virtue with excellent behavior (or beliefs) in a domain. Furthermore, they risk labeling as 'virtue' a trait or faculty that is not applicable beyond a domain. Then the way they apply the term 'virtue' is inconsistent with the standard characterization of virtue as a stable disposition.

This paper aims to show that Curren and Dorn's (2018) account of civic virtue, and Brady's (2018) account of the virtues of vulnerability, are domain-variant. It will accomplish this by demonstrating that the authors have not sufficiently demonstrated that the traits they have identified as virtues meet the necessary standards for stability. I start with a brief overview in Section II of virtue theory. Section III describes Curren and Dorn's and Brady's accounts of virtue; in this, I argue that to be consistent with the standard characterization of virtue, virtue theoretic accounts must generalize beyond the domain they are working in. I then indicate four conceptual actions that domain-variant accounts could take to preserve the notion that virtues must be stable. In Section IV I analyze virtue curriculum and discuss how it can be better served by incorporating parts of their analysis. Aside from other significant contributions, their accounts point us toward better pedagogical approaches in virtue education.

## II. What Are Virtues?

Virtues are considered either faculties (innate abilities or capacities) or traits (acquired abilities or habits), or a hybrid of both.<sup>2</sup> The major distinction is whether motivational responses are required for virtuous expression: most who view virtues as traits think that it is, while faculty-based views hold that it isn't. Curren and Dorn (2018) hold a trait-based view, whereas Brady (2018) a faculty-view, but he accepts that virtues are partially constituted by motives. Since their views do not square completely, I will give a general description of virtue, and highlight the primary differences between them.

There are some common elements in any virtue-theoretical perspective. For example, virtues are generally seen as lasting features that make a person excellent (Battaly 2015, 5).<sup>3</sup> They are trained by repeated habits. Like learning to write every day, or ride a bike, virtues take practice to perfect. Once mastered, virtues dispose a person to act in the right ways (Annas 2011, 8). In this sense, virtues are stable dispositions that enable a person to act well in any given circumstance. If a disposition is stable, then it will manifest in any circumstance requiring it.

For example, if a person has the virtue of temperance, she would be temperate in all domains: interpersonal, civic, or when ill. It wouldn't be the case, for example, that she would be temperate at work, but easily angered by her children at home.

Virtues are also typically divided into the intellectual, the moral, and the practical. Intellectual virtues include traits like open-mindedness when presented with new ideas, self-reflection, and respect for a good argument. The moral (or character) virtues are traditionally traits like courage, generosity, temperance, and decency. Decency, for example, involves understanding under what circumstance we should tweak our application of rules to a specific case: a virtuous teacher should know when to enforce deadlines, and when to make allowances for students to submit papers late. The practical virtues (*nous*) have long been associated with developed problem-solving abilities of the sort used by technical experts such as doctors and plumbers (McDowell 1997; Russell 2009).

Faculties virtues are innate (or hard-wired) abilities, functions or capacities, like having good eyesight or memory (Lemos 2007).<sup>4</sup> It performs in the best possible way to bring about an end or goal (Greco 1993, 520; Greco and Turri 2015; Sosa 1985, 235; 1991, 227).<sup>5</sup> Character virtues, in this view, are stable dispositions that reliably enable one to achieve a goal. Intellectual virtues, likewise, are capacities to obtain the truth. Take the following example: most humans have the innate ability to distinguish between objects. A person can separate a cup from the table. Looking at Seurat's *A House Between Trees* (1883), for example, it is not difficult to see the yellow house foregrounded by trees on either end. Yet after some art classes, a person can be trained to see more, to scan the whole painting, including empty spaces, curves, and shadows.<sup>6</sup> In just this way, faculty virtues can be trained toward excellence, that is to reliably bring about a worthy goal.

Trait virtues require not only reliable abilities or acquired habits but proper motivation as well (Baehr 2011a; Pritchard 2013; 2016b; Zagzebski 1996). Trait-virtues are acquired human excellences (Zagzebski 1996, 105–106). Linda Zagzebski (1996) describes motive (in a sense relevant to virtues) as “an emotion or feeling that initiates and directs action towards an end” (131).<sup>7</sup> She describes the virtuous person as having emotions that “lead them to want to change the world or themselves” (1996, 131). Virtues, in this view, are traits that include proper emotional responses in the right circumstances and to the right degree.<sup>8</sup> For example, the person who learned to be open-minded should be motivated by a love for the truth, such that they aspire to spot truths and falsehoods. Likewise, the compassionate person should be motivated by feelings to help others. In this way, virtues can be individuated by their motivational states. The intellectual virtues, for example, are motivated by a love for the truth, the moral virtues by considerations of the good.

Whether you think virtues are faculties or traits, it is common in contemporary virtue theory to view virtues as stable dispositions that reliably achieve

some worthy goal or end. There is a history of describing how a virtue would be exercised in a particular domain; Aristotle used this technique in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. He considered how the virtuous person should act in times of war (courageously), how they should handle their wealth (with generosity) or personal property (with hospitality), how resources should be distributed (justly), and how one should act with friends (with friendliness).<sup>9</sup> In addition to explaining virtues relevant to particular domains, Aristotle also explained what virtues are and how they are generated. For example, he explained that courage is a mean between rashness and cowardice. Although he focused narrowly on courage while at sea, from his theorizing, we can see how courage might manifest in other domains as well. Courage can also help in the classroom, when a student has a question but is too afraid to ask. Virtue theory ought to describe a trait or faculty such that is consistent with the characterization of virtue as a stable disposition. Recall that stability implies that virtue can be expressed in any domain in which it is required. Virtue accounts that describe a trait or faculty with some degree of generality can show that the trait or faculty is domain-invariant, which means that the trait or faculty can manifest across domains.

In the next section, I look at Curren and Dorn's (2018) account of civic virtues and Brady's (2018) account of virtues of vulnerability. Their work does not show that the traits or faculties they call virtues are domain-invariant. As I will argue, they present domain-variant accounts of virtue, and they do not generalize beyond one domain. I want to make clear that I am *not* suggesting the study of virtues in domains is a hollow enterprise. Indeed, it can be very helpful to look at traits or faculties in domains like the civic sphere. As mentioned, it is part of a long tradition of exploring how a person should behave in an excellent way. To a certain extent, such exploring can only happen by looking at specific instances. Nussbaum (1988) gives a detailed account of how Aristotle isolates a sphere of human experience and lists virtues and vices within that sphere. She suggests that the "thin account of each virtue is whatever it is to be stably disposed to act appropriately in that sphere" (35). One way to extend this is to say that on a "thin account" of (Aristotelian or neo-Aristotelian) virtues ethics, it is enough to show a disposition as stable within a given sphere. If Nussbaum is correct, then, minimally, a "thick" account of virtues requires theorizing beyond a domain. Furthermore, there should be some argument persuading us that a thin account of virtues explains something important about excellent behavior or beliefs within a sphere. As it pertains to Curren, Dorn, and Brady's accounts, I suggest that they show that the traits and faculties they describe are stable dispositions by extrapolating from the domain.

### III. Domains

In *Patriotic Education in a Global Age*, Curren and Dorn (2018) present civic virtues as what equips people to act well in the civic sphere. Because they analyze

virtues only within one domain, they put forward a domain-variant account of virtue. They describe three parts of civic virtue: civic intelligence (the formation of good judgment), civic friendship (the moral component), and civic competence (corresponding to hands-on, community service action). Drawing on research in motivational psychology, they characterize moral virtues as “clusters of related dispositions of desire, emotion, perception, belief, conduct, and responsiveness to reasoning and evidence” (2018, 92). Intellectual excellence entails understanding a government’s true merits, values, and goals. This involves good judgment (that is practical judgment, or *phronêsis*), which, according to Curren and Dorn, is the virtue of excellence with respect to deliberating and choosing. They suggest that civic virtue equips a person to navigate challenging human encounters in the civic sphere (2018, 102). Civic virtue implies cooperatively engaging with other people, acting well in the civic sphere involves sensitivity to the flourishing of other persons, and what is needed to live well. It takes having an understanding of the well-being of others.

Curren and Dorn hold a trait-based view of virtues, and they use a neo-Aristotelian framework (which assumes the stability of the virtues). They assert that civic virtue implies an ability to act responsibly in the civic sphere. To maintain responsible citizenship, they insist that the civically virtuous person must have the right kind of motivation. Motivation, in this context, implies a level of sensitivity to what is morally valuable in the situation. When one is civically responsible (sensitive to what is morally worthy), one expresses their intellectual, social, and productive potential. The potential is exercised when one acts in the right way, to the right degree, and in the right circumstance. Acting responsibly in the civic sphere (that is, to express civic excellence) is to be motivated by all that is morally valuable in the situation.

It is, however, ambiguous whether Curren and Dorn think civic virtue is a distinct category of virtue or an application of virtue in the civic domain.<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, they tend to discuss the motivational core of civic virtue as being distinct from strictly moral (and presumably intellectual and practical) motivation. If the motivation is distinct, then it seems like civic virtue may indeed be a distinct category. On the other hand, they characterize civic intelligence as good judgment. Good judgment is generalizable; it improves one’s success in any domain (not just the civic domain). Good judgment must be domain-invariant. Are civic friendship, civic intelligence, and civic competence domain-invariant? They do not say. It looks more like they are instantiations of the moral, epistemic, or practical virtues in the civic domain.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, they do not provide an analysis that shows one’s motivation in the civic sphere is distinct from any domain.

This poses a dilemma for their account: if civic virtue is not distinct, it calls into question the proliferation of new terms, like civic intelligence, civic competence, and civic friendship. If virtues are supposed to be stable across domains, then even the word ‘civic’ in civic virtue seems redundant. If civic virtue

is distinct, it challenges the standard characterization of virtues as stable disposition, because virtuous motivation would differ depending on the domain.

Categories of virtues can be distinguished based on motivation. The moral virtues are motivated by the love for the good, while the intellectual virtues are motivated by love for the truth. Perhaps motivations can individuate domain-variant virtues from their more general counterparts. If our motivations in the civic domain differ from those in our ordinary interpersonal interactions, if whatever ties bind us civically are different from the ties that bind us interpersonally, then virtue theory should capture this difference by creating a distinct category of civic motivation.<sup>12</sup> If this is right, then domain-variant accounts have the potential to fill an important conceptual gap. Nevertheless, they must show that the motivations for civic virtue are sufficiently different to argue that civic motivations serve as a category of virtue.

Their account, as it stands, is inconsistent with the standard characterization of virtue as a stable disposition. Curren and Dorn did not show that the three components of civic virtue are sufficiently stable, such that they applicable beyond the civic domain. Nor did they indicate that these virtues are a distinct kind of virtue. Thus, they miscategorized civic friendship, civic intelligence, and civic competence; they are descriptions of how the moral, epistemic, and practical virtues manifest in the civic sphere.

Like Curren and Dorn, Michael Brady's (2018) account of virtuous suffering presents a domain-variant account of virtue. He only considers the ill domain, and the virtues he examines describe faculties applicable to that domain. Following Greco and Sosa, Brady (2018) holds that virtues are faculties that reliably achieve a set of goals in a circumstance (70). However, his account is a hybrid between the faculty and trait-based views described in Section II since he also holds that "virtues are partly constituted by motives" (74).<sup>13</sup> In this account, virtuous motives play an essential role in bringing about valuable goals (67). Furthermore, he argues that suffering is necessary for virtue development; suffering provides an opportunity for a person to act well in challenging situations, which positions one to develop virtues. The faculties Brady suggests for dealing with suffering well are adaptability, creativity, humility, and intimacy—Brady calls these the virtues of vulnerability. He writes that without suffering, one would not cultivate these virtues (104). Brady looks at adaptability, creativity, humility, and intimacy in a single domain, illness.<sup>14</sup> He draws on Havi Carel's autobiographical account, which details her experience with a painful illness, and he describes how she successfully coped by developing the virtues of vulnerability. His account explains how these faculties enabled Carel to deal with her circumstances well. The problem is that he does not give an account that generalizes beyond this particular domain. Thus, he has not sufficiently shown that the virtues of vulnerability are stable dispositions.

I admit that at least humility seems suitably stable without further evidence.<sup>15</sup> Serena Williams, for instance, can be called virtuous when she is reliably humble after winning a match (assuming she is so across domains of her experience, i.e., she is not boastful at home amongst her family and friends). We would find her vicious if she were boastful or jeered at the other player. Humility is a faculty that can be expressed across domains, like the domain of sport. Perhaps the same can be said of vulnerability and creativity. Nevertheless, it remains that adaptability and intimacy are not sufficiently described, and furthermore his account does not offer us a reason to think that the virtues of vulnerability are a category unto themselves.

To summarize the criticism so far, I argued that the authors present a domain-variant account of virtues, and that they did not sufficiently show that the traits or faculties described are stable dispositions. Brady did not sufficiently describe the virtues of vulnerability in such a way that they are generalizable beyond the ill domain. His account appears inconsistent with the standard characterization of virtues as stable dispositions. I also suggested that Curren and Dorn miscategorized civic friendship, civic intelligence, and civic competence as civic virtues; these appear more like applications of moral, epistemic, and practical virtues in the civic domain.

There are ways to preserve the civic virtues and virtues of vulnerability that Curren and Dorn and Brady describe (something they presumably intend to do). I have four suggestions to offer. They could either (1) show that the trait or faculty is part of a larger category of virtue, and that they are looking at the application of virtue in a domain (e.g., civic virtue is really a subcategory of *nous*, or practical intellect.); (2) they can show that, in fact, the trait or faculty they describe is a proper virtue, which is not domain-specific. This could be done by giving some examples outside of the domain; (3) they can show that the domain is not really a domain but is rather a category of virtue on the level of moral virtue, epistemic virtue, and practical virtues. Finally, (4) they could argue that stability does not imply domain-invariance; rather stability implies context-invariance, where context refers to instances in a domain. If stability implies context-invariance, then a virtuous actor does not necessarily exhibit virtues across domains, but rather across contexts within a domain. Recall the politician who is friendly in a debate with an opponent, but hostile at home with their partner or children. On this interpretation of stability, as long as the politician is reliably friendly in the civic domain, they have the disposition of virtuous friendship. The politician's behavior is thus stable in this sphere. Stability, in this sense, would not bear across domains.

These are some approaches that domain-variant accounts, like those I have presented here, could take to preserve their accounts while remaining consistent with the standard characterization. I realize I have not adequately defended the view that stability implies domain-invariance, nor have I explained the benefits



of describing stability in such a way—although I think there are advantages. Nevertheless, I hope that this paper has made the case that characterizing virtue as stable dispositions is itself ambiguous and requires further conceptual analysis. Despite this problem, I nevertheless believe that applying virtues to domains can help further develop virtue education. In the space remaining, I will make some remarks on the way that virtue education can be improved by studying virtues in domains. In this regard, virtue education would benefit by incorporating the analysis of Curren and Dorn in the civic domain and Brady’s analysis of the virtues of vulnerability. Their accounts described how one should act excellently in these respective spheres, which can help students imagine specific instances in which to practice virtue.

#### IV. Educational Implications

Virtue education is concerned with fostering moral and intellectual qualities of a good learner, qualities like curiosity, open-mindedness, and humility. It inverts the traditional aim to transmit rigorous content, using rigorous content instead to transform the learner.<sup>16</sup> If virtues are stable dispositions, then students must be taught how to act excellently across a wide range of contexts. Mastering virtuous traits, like curiosity, implies that students ought to pursue new subjects with the virtues they obtained. Curiosity describes when a person actively seeks out answers and asks many questions; such a person is not disposed to accept what they are told. They should also be curious about their own mental habits. When studying mathematics, for instance, students are taught to be curious about how to solve each problem, as well as how they feel while solving it. Do they feel frustrated, wanting to give up? Do they feel excited? Or anger at not getting the correct answer the first time? By being curious about attitudinal states, as well as the problem, students learn to be self-reflective.

Curiosity is one of the master virtues fostered at the Intellectual Virtue Academy (IVA) in Long Beach, California. IVA is a public charter middle school that offers an education based on an intellectual virtues model, and it is the first to offer such a curriculum. They seek to cultivate nine essential virtues: curiosity, intellectual humility, intellectual autonomy, attentiveness, intellectual carefulness, intellectual thoroughness, open-mindedness, intellectual courage, and intellectual perseverance. The master virtues cross domains, and in this sense, actively work toward developing stable dispositions in students. In *Educating for Intellectual Virtues: an introductory guide for college and university instructors*, Baehr (2015) discusses the guiding principles and provides practical suggestions to help students experience “meaningful growth” (5). Here are some examples:

- (1) Have students reflect (in writing) about their character strengths and weaknesses. Students can start by rating themselves according to target virtues or vices and reflecting on the ways these qualities impact their

lives (Baehr 2015, 14–15). *Guiding principle*: Self-reflection & self-knowledge are important for virtue education, as it lays an “epistemic foundation,” providing students with steps to improve the quality of their intellectual character.

- (2) Cultivate the *virtue of curiosity* by requiring students to submit two-three questions each week (Baehr 2015, 18).
- (3) Students can practice intellectual virtues, such as *attentiveness, open-mindedness, curiosity, and intellectual thoroughness, intellectual humility, intellectual autonomy* by honing good thinking routines, such as
  - a. “Claim-Support-Question” routine: students learn to isolate a claim, examine the support for it, and then ask questions, like is the support adequate? (Baehr 2015, 22; Dow 2013, 132; Garcia and King 2016, 210; Ritchhart 2002, 91–92).<sup>17</sup>
  - b. “See-Think-Wonder” routine asks students the following questions: (1) What do you notice? (2) What do you think is going on? (3) What does this make you wonder? These questions encourage students to make careful observations and thoughtful interpretations (Baehr 2015, 23).<sup>18</sup>
  - c. “Connect-Extend-Challenge” centers around these questions: (1) what do you see? (2) what do you think about that? (3) What does it make you wonder? These questions are aimed at “helping students connect what they have just learned to other things they already know, reflect on implications of their new knowledge, and identify remaining questions or points of confusion” (Baehr 2015, 23).<sup>19</sup>
- (4) Use virtue language in the written feedback provided on student papers (Baehr 2015, 27–28).
- (5) Use virtue language on rubrics (Baehr 2015, 28–29).

One advantage of this model is that the aim is not to transmit beliefs about content but to develop a self-reflective character. By submitting questions each week (#2), students are taught to think about what they do not know, as well as what they do. While teaching philosophy, I observe students who think they have grasped an argument and, in class, try to tear it down. But I encourage students to come to class with questions as well, and I ask that they submit questions to me ahead of time. This is also what the IVA model suggests: students should come to class with prepared questions. Learning how to write substantive questions is difficult and takes practice, so I provide my students with specific instructions (See addendum 1 for the instructions I give to my students). Developing skillful questioning abilities helps students to realize intelligence is not just knowing the answers, but also wondering about yourself in the world.

Another advantage of the IVA model is that many of the curriculum suggestions are slight adjustments to common teaching devices, which makes virtue education accessible for teachers to incorporate. Providing written feedback (#6) and using rubrics (#7) are common practices in education. For example, written feedback can be oriented to praise students when they adequately practice virtue. Baehr (2015) suggests if the writing is free of typos, spelling errors, grammatical mistakes, or the paper handles difficult subjects accurately and precisely, then praise intellectual carefulness; or if various standpoints are identified and given a forceful representation, mark for open-mindedness (27–28). On rubrics, teachers can grade holistically for *carefulness* when “the work is free from mistakes and errors; it isn’t hasty or sloppy”; or *autonomy*, when “the work demonstrates the student’s ability to formulate his/her own ideas and to think independently” (28–29).

However, a limitation of this model is that these exercises, while valuable, do not directly help students practice virtues in domains outside of subjects they learn in school, like mathematics. Including non-traditional domains, like how to cope well when suffering from illness, could benefit students and their development of virtue. The IVA curriculum is meant to develop virtue across a wide range of domains, and it should reflect the kinds of instances students might come across. The curriculum could be enhanced by considering how the nine master virtues would manifest in domains like the civic sphere or while dealing with illness. Consider open-mindedness. How does open-mindedness manifest in the civic sphere or ill domain?<sup>20</sup> In what way does the virtuous person exercise open-mindedness when discussing divisive political topics? How can young learners express curiosity when ill? Answering these questions involves having an understanding of the civic domain and how to act well there; it involves concretizing steps to deal with illness well. This is one reason why domain-variant virtue accounts, like Curren and Dorn’s, and Brady’s, are so helpful: they have done this work.

Curren and Dorn, for example, proposed that exercising virtue in the civic sphere involves being sensitive to other persons, their flourishing, and the necessities of others living well. Similarly, Brady mapped the conceptual territory one faces when ill. Virtue enables a person to navigate challenging human encounters in many spheres, and virtue curriculum can help students learn to navigate well by practicing virtue in different environments. It takes time to develop virtues like open-mindedness. Indeed, being open-minded with strangers in the civic domain may require different motivations than being open-minded with one’s peers, family, or friends. Practicing virtues in a variety of domains can help students develop the right motivations, which may be different in different domains.

To this end, virtue education would be served by considering how motivations might differ in different domains. Is the motivation for virtuous expression in the civic domain different from the motivation to cope well when suffering?

Does the virtuous actor's motivation in these domains differ from their interpersonal interactions? Do virtuous motives change throughout one's life? Aside from thinking about how motivations differ between domains, it would also behoove virtue theory to consider a variety of domains. For example, should different stages of life (youth, adulthood, older age) correspond to unique domains? Havi Carel (2016b) argues that there are corresponding excellences to stages of development. She draws on Cicero (1971) and Montaigne (1993), who suggest "that different virtues and types of projects are proper to different stages of life—courageous military service for the young, reflective reverie for the old" (2016b, 240). These are matters to be further explored. Although K–12 education cannot prepare a person to act virtuously in all possible domains, it can endeavor to provide students with practice grounds to develop the right dispositions in many. Ideally, virtue education will also lay the foundation for students to seek excellence throughout their life.

## V. Conclusion

The foregoing presented a skeptical account of domain-variant virtue theory. More significantly, I put forward a possible way of thinking about virtue as a 'stable disposition,' and I brought out one possible way in which domain-variant accounts are inconsistent with its characterization: they do not sufficiently generalize beyond the domain they are working in. In the first section, I sketched a general overview of faculty and trait-based virtues. I then critically analyzed two domain-variant accounts of virtue: Curren and Dorn's (2018) account of civic virtue and Brady's (2018) account of virtues of vulnerability. I argued that both took for granted that virtues signal stability across domains. I suggested that stability implies domain-invariance; that is, virtuous categories must cut across domains.

Some of the ambiguity about stability arises from a question of whether virtues are stable across domains or across contexts within domains. As I explained at the end of Section III, philosophers like Curren and Dorn, or Brady, could argue that stability implies a form of context-invariance, such that the virtuous actor reliably expresses virtue in any context within a unique domain. In which case, it may not be necessary that categories of virtues cut across domains. If virtues are bound to domains, then virtuous actors need only express virtues reliably within a given domain. Thus, a virtue account need not generalize beyond the domain. But to make this argument, the authors must show that virtuous motivation is distinct in the domain. A person is considered morally virtuous (that is, they have a sufficiently stable moral character) when they are motivated by a love for the good in any domain that requires virtuous expression. Likewise for the intellectual virtues: a person is considered intellectually virtuous when they are motivated by a love for the truth in any domain that requires its expression. So, to declare that a domain contains a unique category of virtue requires

some proof there is a unique motivational component. The virtuous actor must be motivated by a love of something other than truth or the good. If a person is reliably motivated by that other something, then perhaps the disposition is sufficiently stable, and thus a virtue.<sup>21</sup>

## Addendum 1

### Writing Substantive Questions

By Rena Goldstein

Submit at least 1 question each week. This will count toward your total participation grade.

In order to receive points, you must submit helpful questions. Helpful questions relate to course content in a clear and precise way. Here are some examples of the kind of questions I would like to see:

**Imprecise question:** What is the main idea of chapter 1?

**Precise question:** On page 10 of Sorensen's book, he talks about Anaximander's paradox. The paradox is, "Does each thing have an origin?" He answers no: "there is an infinite being that sustains everything else but which is not grounded in any other thing." What makes this question a paradox?

**Explanation:** The imprecise question is too broad. There may not be a single main idea in chapter 1. Then, which idea should we discuss? Additionally, it is not certain how answering this question will help us to understand the course content more deeply.

The precise question, on the other hand, points us to a specific paradox. It explains the paradox (notice it does not just reference Anaximander's paradox, but explains the paradox in a couple of sentences), and then poses a question.

**Unclear question:** The matter of theory locating events and observations within a systemic theory ends scrutiny to answer "why," or to apply to a wide range of cases as an instance of a more general pattern, which one is more opportune than the others for the topics?

**Clear question:** The professor gave a few different definitions for theory in class on Thursday. He said that a theoretical explanation seeks to "locate events and observations within a systematic theory." Then he said "it ends investigation as an answer to a 'why' question." Then he said we want "explanations that apply to a wide range of cases as an instance to a more general pattern." I'm confused as to which one we are supposed to use as a definition for theory. Why did he give so many different definitions?

**Explanation:** The first question is quite unclear. Notice that it is not a complete thought. What is being asked about the matter of theory? More exactly, what matter of theory? Does the statement, “locating events and observations within a systemic theory or ends scrutiny to answer ‘why,’” refer to the first part of the sentence? That is, is it supposed to be an example of a theory? Or is this a different thought entirely? What is the connection? Also, what is meant by more “opportune” in this context? Is the person asking which one is right or wrong? “Opportune” here is rather unclear. Also, ‘theory’ is mistyped, and ‘instance’ is misspelled, which leads me to think this person did not put much effort into asking a question.

Notice that the second question is much clearer. The person gave us a reference point, “the professor . . . in class,” so now we know to look at the notes (instead of the textbook). They also gave all of the definitions provided in class, rather than just referring to a time in class. It is clearer if specific information is given. The question posed at the end states both what the confusion is about, and why the person is confused (“why are there so many different definitions?”). This is a good example of a helpful question.

Please submit questions by Thursday at 5:00 a.m. Each week, I will choose 3–4 questions to address during section. Don’t worry, I will not reveal your name to the class. You will remain anonymous.

## Notes

1. A good example of a domain-invariant account of virtue, one that studied the structure of a virtue and how it can be generated, is Jason Baehr’s (2011a; 2011b; 2012; 2013) account of open-mindedness.
2. This distinction parallels one in the virtue epistemology literature: the distinction between reliabilism and responsibilism. Reliabilism views intellectual virtues as non-motivational capacities that lead to the increase of truths over falsehoods; whereas responsibilism views intellectual virtues as motivational, reason-responsive dispositions to act in the right ways. Hybrid views countenances features of both. For a taxonomy and discussion of the differences of these views, see Alfano 2012.
3. Cf. Robert Adams (2006) who identifies “virtue with persisting excellence in being for the good” (11).
4. See Lemos (2007): virtue is “an excellence of some kind, an excellence that is either innate or acquired. It is a disposition, skill, or competence that makes one good at achieving some goal” (98).
5. Sosa (1985, 235; 1991, 273–274) writes that a faculty is an ability or power; Greco (1993): “a...faculty in general is a power or ability or competence to achieve some result” (520).

6. In a study by Stine Vogt and Svein Magnussen (2007), nine psychology students and nine art students were instructed to view a series of 16 paintings. The art students tended to scan more of the painting, while nonartists focused on objects. They found that 40 percent of the time, nonartists looked at objects, compared to 20 percent that artists spent looking at objects.
7. Cf. self-determination theory (SDT), see Ryan, Curren, and Deci (2013); Ryan and Deci (2017).
8. Zagzebski (1996) argues that virtues also imply bringing about successful ends, that virtue must reliably lead a person to achieve their goal (106).
9. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* (§2.7), Aristotle begins by detailing the domains in which the virtues and vices most likely manifest.
10. In a sense, I am extending Geach's (1956) distinction between attributive and predicative readings of virtue. Geach describes an *attributive reading* of virtue as a (possibly complex) disposition that enables a person to do well in a given sphere, and this may or may not be a virtue (simpliciter); a *predicative reading* of virtue applies virtue, or subset of the virtues, to a domain. Most do not endorse an attributive reading of virtue. Often it is used as a distinguishing factor from the predicative reading. This would mean that domain-based virtues are just applications of proper virtues in one sphere. Many take this distinction for granted, or they are ambiguous. See Hazlett (2015) and Pritchard (2016b) for accounts that apply Geach's predicative reading of virtue and are thus less ambiguous in this regard.
11. I argued elsewhere that their account of civic virtue should be read as an application of virtue in the civic domain (Goldstein, forthcoming).
12. My thanks to Erica Preston-Roedder for raising this point during discussion at the Philosophy in Schools and the Public Realm workshop, held at the Janet Prindle Institute for Ethics, May 29–June 1, 2019.
13. Brady takes a distinctly non-Aristotelian approach to virtue ethics. He holds that pain and suffering can be virtuous responses, which is counter to an assertion Aristotle makes in Book 4 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle says that “that which is virtuous is pleasant or free from pain” (Book 4, Part 1, 1120a 23–27). To support his claim that pain or suffering can be virtuous responses, Brady looks to Nietzsche's view of psychological strength, or having a positive attitude toward suffering. Thus, he argues, the virtuous person embraces suffering as “an opportunity for resistance and overcoming” (2018, 94). For further reading of Nietzsche's view of character, see Randy Firestone (2017), Edward Harcourt (2015), and Christine Swanton (2011, 2015).
14. He is greatly influenced by Havi Carel's discussions of these faculties and how they enabled her to cope well with illness (Carel 2013, 2016a, 2016b, 2019).
15. For a discussion on whether humility is a virtue see Richards (1988). My thanks to Michael Brady who voiced this point and example, after I presented a commentary on his book, *Suffering and Virtue*, at the University of California, Irvine in September 2019.

16. The Intellectual Virtue Academy, in Long Beach, CA, is a public charter middle school that offers an education based on an “intellectual virtues” model. They state that “teaching for intellectual virtues is not an alternative to teaching rigorous academic content. Rather, rigorous content provides an opportunity for teachers to foster intellectual character growth” (IVA, n.d.).

17. Garcia and King (2016) write, “[Students] should isolate a claim (e.g., so-and-so believes murder is permissible), and question the support for that claim (e.g., that so-and-so is pro-choice, a position which a pro-life student may take to have a repugnant entailment). For instance, the students may be invited to ask a question of the form: How might someone accept the antecedent of a conditional but not its consequent (and so not the conditional itself)?” (211). Students can practice thinking routines that evaluate logical entailments through similar means, as well (222).

18. Project Zero, at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, has done a lot of research on thinking routines. For further details on “See, Think, Wonder,” visit [http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org/VisibleThinking\\_html\\_files/03\\_ThinkingRoutines/03c\\_Core\\_routines/SeeThinkWonder/SeeThinkWonder\\_Routine.html](http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org/VisibleThinking_html_files/03_ThinkingRoutines/03c_Core_routines/SeeThinkWonder/SeeThinkWonder_Routine.html).

19. For further details on “Connect-Extend-Challenge,” visit [http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org/VisibleThinking\\_html\\_files/03\\_ThinkingRoutines/03d\\_UnderstandingRoutines/ConnectExtendChallenge/ConnectExtend\\_Routine.html](http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org/VisibleThinking_html_files/03_ThinkingRoutines/03d_UnderstandingRoutines/ConnectExtendChallenge/ConnectExtend_Routine.html).

20. I wish to thank Sharon Burgess for raising this point in discussion at the Philosophy in Schools and the Public Realm workshop, at the Janet Prindle Institute for Ethics, May 29–June 1, 2019.

21. For comments on a previous draft and for conversations related to the topic of this paper, I am deeply grateful to Darby Vickers and to the members of the Philosophy in Schools and the Public Realm Workshop, hosted at the Prindle Institute June 2019.

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