Thinking the Right Way (at the Right Time) about Virtues and Skills

Scott Woodcock

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Let me begin by thanking Matt Stichter and the other participants in this symposium for including me in such an interesting conversation about the relationship between virtue and skill. Also, let me say that I think Stichter has written an excellent book – one that is remarkably lucid, focussed in its aims, and well-supported with secondary literature. At every point while reading the book I found the links between its arguments clear, and I also found that it was always plain how individual arguments fit into the broader aims of the work as a whole. This nod to accessibility might sound like faint praise, but I think it is an underappreciated trait that ought to be acknowledged and celebrated. Moreover, the book exhibits an Aristotelian mean dear to my heart: providing readers with just the right amount of helpful citations to other sources. Books that avoid the hard work of providing detailed references give me fits, as do those that paste in extended laundry lists of generic references without offering any specific details or annotation. Both stand to learn lessons in scholarship from Stichter's example.

The principal thesis of the book is that virtue is best conceptualized as a particular type of *skill*, and the chapters explore the implications of this thesis for a variety of issues related to moral development, social psychology and comparisons of virtuous agents with persons exhibiting more familiar kinds of expertise. Specifically, the first two chapters of the book describe key features of moral development in terms of self-regulation and skill acquisition for agents with our unique psychological capacities. The next two chapters of the book address foreseen objections to the "virtues as skill" thesis with special attention given to apt motivations and the role of practical wisdom. Finally, the last chapter of the book provides a reply to the situationist critique of virtue theory, i.e. the critique based on evidence allegedly proving that humans do not possess the robust character traits required for virtue theory to play a meaningful role explaining our behaviour.

The arguments in these chapters are persuasive, and Stichter displays admirable judgment weaving a path through the complex, interdisciplinary material at stake. Thus, in my contribution I will not be aiming to provide any devastating critique of material in the book. Instead,

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my plan is to identify three interesting features of the book that could benefit from further clarification. For all three features I think Stichter can address my requests for clarification via friendly amendments. Thus, nothing I propose jeopardizes his principal "virtue as skill" thesis. Nevertheless, I am curious to see if he will accept my proposals, since most of those committed to defending virtue ethics tend to forcefully reject them. Ultimately, what I am interested in is whether Stichter views his "virtue as skill" hypothesis as part of a *virtue theory* that is compatible with normative standpoints like consequentialism, contractualism and Kantian ethics, or if he is committed to the more specific cause of *virtue ethics* as an independent standpoint that exists as a rival to so-called modern ethical theories.[1]

1 The Intellectual Requirement

The first issue to address is Stichter's discussion of a contentious necessary condition for acting virtuously: the ability to articulate the principled reasons why an action is virtuous in specific circumstances. Many advocates of virtue ethics are convinced by Aristotle's claim in *Nicomachean Ethics* (2002: 115) that a virtuous agent must *knowingly* choose a virtuous act for its own sake and from a stable state of character. A permissive reading of this passage suggests only that accidental or unintentional performances of virtuous acts ought to be excluded from being considered genuine instances of virtue. However, Julia Annas and other philosophers defend a stronger requirement for virtuous activity: they claim that the virtuous agent must be able to articulate appropriate reasons for action for each of their specific virtue decisions.[2] As Sticher points out, this is a more demanding characterization of virtuous activity than, for example, requiring that agents comprehend the general principles that ground the virtues without necessarily being able to articulate how the principles are implemented in every case. This intellectual requirement sets the bar very high as a necessary condition for virtue, and, as Stichter observes (2018: 55–8), it stands out as disanalogous to familiar cases of experts who seem to display mastery of a skill without being able to articulate the details of how they exhibit this mastery at every stage of their achievements. The most conspicuous example here is grammar acquisition, but Stichter discusses examples of expertise in areas as diverse as sports, music, and even overtly intellectual skills like chess and medicine. In many of these examples it does not seem contradictory to say that an agent is an expert in the given area without possessing a lucid understanding of all of the reasons why their actions exhibit mastery in all specific circumstances.[3]

Intuitions may vary when it comes to the various types of skills at stake and what we expect from genuine experts, yet I agree with Stichter that, "we should be wary of any approach that

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[1] The terminology is not always consistent, but the distinction is nonetheless common. See, for example: (Nussbaum 1999), (Hurka 2001), and (Driver 2006).

[2] See: Annas (1993: 66–73, 1995, 2011), and Hills (2009: 108–13, 2015). Jason Stanley (2011, 2015, 2017) offers an influential account of skill that embraces intellectualist features. Rosalind Hursthouse (1999: 124) defends something like an intellectual requirement for virtue; however, she is careful to note (2011) that an agent exhibiting a virtue like practical wisdom might not be able to explain their choices in codifiable terms that inexperienced agents would understand.

[3] In fact, the debate is more complicated, because Annas claims only that the intellectual requirement holds for virtues and the subset of skills for which we do expect intellectual mastery. Thus, Annas can grant that it is possible to be an expert with respect to *some* skills without intellectual mastery – just not the skills that correspond to virtuous activity. Stichter, for his part, remains skeptical that the intellectual requirement is accurate for even the subset of skills that Annas requires to maintain the skill/virtue analogy (2018: 57).

would imply that if you cannot fully articulate your reasons for action, then you are not really skilled (or virtuous)." (2018: 82) It is important to note, however, that Stichter's rejection of the ability to articulate all aspects of one's decisions as a *necessary condition* of virtuous activity does not commit him to generally rejecting the role for this kind of articulation of reasons in morality or regular skills.[4] Rather, he is able to occupy the sensible middle ground that recognizes both the importance of careful reflection in an articulation of one's aims as well as the empirical possibility that such reflection may not *always* be required in the successful exhibiting of skills or virtuous activity.[5] This places the burden of proof squarely upon the proponent of an intellectual requirement to show that such cases are not possible, and that seems a tall order. Even Barbara Gail Montero (2016), who provides a sustained attack on the idea that expertise is manifested through automaticity, is careful to defend a similar middle ground rather than committing herself to the view that expertise is not possible without reflective articulation of all of the steps involved in the activity at stake. Shortly after presenting her "Cognition-in-action" thesis she states that, "This is not to say that the cognition-in-action principle implies that there is no unconscious thought in expert action. It allows for unconscious thought. However, the principle concerns the more controversial position that experts think consciously as well."[6] (2016: 38) Most importantly, the impressive set of examples she puts forward to undermine the thesis that expertise is primarily exhibited through automaticity are not presented as if agents must always be capable of articulating each one of the reflective features involved in the complex mix of deliberate and unreflective components that she attributes to skillful activity. This willingness to recognize complexity in the psychology at stake strikes me as a sensible approach to the empirical evidence we currently have available, yet this approach is, I think, compatible with being persuaded that we ought to at least accept the *possibility* that agents can exhibit genuine expertise, or virtue, without satisfying the intellectual requirement that they can at every moment recount the details that explain why their acts are justifiably skillful or virtuous.[7]

My question is whether Stichter is willing to take the next step and embrace the idea that unreflective virtuous behaviour is more than just possible – that it is *preferable* in at least some circumstances where the ideally virtuous human agent will be someone who has developed a propensity to temporarily avoid reflecting on the justifications for their actions. For example, when exhibiting virtues like generosity, friendship, modesty, or honesty, it can compromise the authenticity of an agent's motives if they reflect on the ethical reasons that justify their actions. For a truly generous agent, taking time to reflect on the theoretical justification for how helping others contributes to a life well-lived will be a distraction from one's more immediate sensitivity to others in need. Better, it would seem, that the ideally virtuous agent be

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[4] Thus, Stichter carefully emphasizes that, "There may be many good reasons to want a virtuous person to be able to articulate her reasons for action in terms of general principles, but the skill model rejects the idea that these intellectual requirements are necessary or sufficient for acting virtuously." (2018: 81)

[5] Moreover, as Ellen Fridland and Stichter (2020) recognize, even cases of seemingly spontaneous, intuitive skill or virtue displayed by experts occur only after a careful process of development that involves *deliberate* practice and a set of action schemas that integrate complex knowledge structures into action.

[6] Montero's "cognition-in-action" thesis is as follows: "For experts, when all is going well, optimal or near optimal performance frequently employs some of the following conscious mental processes: self-reflective thinking, planning, predicting, deliberation, attention to or monitoring of their actions, conceptualizing their actions, control, trying, effort, having a sense of the self, and acting for a reason. Moreover, such mental processes do not necessarily or even generally interfere with expert performance, and should not generally be avoided by experts." (2016: 38)

[7] For an influential defense of this view, see: (Driver 2013).

directly motivated by the needs of others when they act generously than if this agent acts while at the same time considering how helping others fits into a general justification for generosity in a virtuous life.

At this point, however, things get complicated, because those who advocate for an intellectual requirement on virtue will emphasize that they can accommodate some of the intuitive force of these cases. The reason this is so is that their position is *not* that agents must explicitly think about the principled justifications for their actions at every available opportunity for skilled/virtuous activity. Rather, their position is that such justifications must be *available* to skilled/virtuous agents so that the agents can articulate the principled reasons for their choices in all specific cases if called upon to do so.[8] Thus, if Susan is a genuinely honest agent, she need not explicitly think about the reasons why telling Helen the truth in a particular situation is the virtuous choice; she need only possess the relevant understanding of why this is so if she were asked to explain her decision. This feature of the intellectualist position allows philosophers like Annas to incorporate spontaneity into their understandings of the virtues and to acknowledge the intuitive claim that, in at least some circumstances, "thinking consciously about a skilled activity interferes with doing it." (2015: 4).

As much as this feature of intellectualist accounts of the virtues helps them avoid the caricature that they require active reflection every second of every day, Stichter can still point out that these accounts expect a great deal from the agents we can describe as genuinely virtuous. For these accounts still preclude the possibility of characterizing an agent as virtuous if they (a) have an extensive understanding of their general reasons to be virtuous, (b) exhibit a flawless practical capacity for acting in ways that are consistent with virtue, but for some reason (c) are not capable of articulating the reasons why each part of their decision-making manifests the virtues that apply in every particular situation in which they act. Stichter, it seems to me, holds a stronger position here, because all he needs is the mere possibility of one case like this to succeed. Moreover, returning to my question for him, should we not *prefer* that in some cases a virtuous agent ought to have developed a capacity to compartmentalize the justificatory aspects of her thinking so that the agent does not have access to the kind of general, impersonal reasons that undermine our authentic motives? Given our status as fallible human agents, would it not make sense for our moral education to include psychological practices that direct our focus to the immediate details of our choices and, in at least some circumstances, inhibit us from being tempted or distracted by the more general reasons that justify our choices? Even though we may want appropriate justifications available for agents in calm moments of reflection, it seems to me possible that empirical facts about our human psychology lead us to reject the intellectual requirement that agents' justificatory reasons be transparently available to them, if called upon, at *all* times. Instead, I think the mere availability of a set of justificatory reasons why actions are virtuous can potentially interfere with agents properly exhibiting the virtues at stake.[9]

For example, the virtue of beneficence may be powerful enough to interfere with the competing virtues of love and loyalty in conditions where strangers are in dire need of assistance. There is presumably a convincing *overall* justification for agents to maintain reasonable loyalty to their loved ones in such conditions, because devoting too much time

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[8] See Annas (2008: 212; 2015: 7–8), Hills (2015: 10), and Swartwood (2013: 523–24).

[9] In the terminology provided by Philip Pettit and Geoffrey Brennan (1986), the virtues in these cases are calculatively *elusive*, because they do not obtain if pursued via explicit, self-conscious measures, and they may also be calculatively *vulnerable* because their value evaporates if they are monitored by justificatory reasons that undermine the authenticity of agents' motives.

to strangers will eventually erode the special priority required for personal bonds in a life well-lived. Yet if this overall justification is constantly available to agents it will seem rational *at each moment* to beneficently favour the needs of others in desperate need of help, because, by itself, a single case of diverting time away from friends or loved ones is unlikely to constitute a deal-breaking blow to loyalty. At each moment it is hard to see how any sensible balancing of the virtues will privilege, say, taking a friend out to lunch over providing the same time and resources to a stranger in need of life-saving food or medicine. Eventually, however, the availability of this sensible balance of beneficence over loyalty in a series of individual moments will culminate in the dissolution of loyalty on the whole. This kind of odd practical paradox suggests that there may be some cases in which it is preferable to periodically block the availability of reflective justifications for virtuous action.

Of course, more space than is available here would be required to fully make this case. In this context, I only want to ask if Stichter is open to this possibility, since it fits well with the balance he aims to strike between the benefits of automaticity and the need to re-evaluate our moral commitments as part of our ongoing self-regulation.[10] If indeed he is open to this possibility, then his account of the virtues is open to the charge that it is partially *self-effacing* in the same way that some versions of consequentialism invite this possibility for compartmentalization in their moral psychology. My own view is that this is not a cause for concern. In fact, I think the details of human psychology ought to lead those working in ethical theory to *embrace* self-effacement rather than resist it. Yet this is not a popular view among most working in virtue theory. Most advocates of virtue ethics, for example, vigorously object to the suggestion that their proposed theories are self-effacing.[11] Thus, it would be interesting to know where Stichter situates his account of the virtues in this ongoing debate.

2 Motivation and Practical Wisdom

The second feature I want to highlight is Stichter's comparison of expertise and virtue in his chapters related to motivation and practical wisdom. He addresses the objection that there is a crucial motivational difference between skill and virtue because evaluations of skill do not presuppose that agents act from particular motivations in the way that our evaluations of virtue require.[12] In other words, we expect that virtuous agents act for the right reasons, but the objection at stake here claims that agents can exhibit mastery of a skill without necessarily having the most praiseworthy of motivations, e.g. the skilled chess player who wins a tournament for no reason other than a cash reward. One of the ways Stichter responds to this objection is to note that if we change our focus from the performance of an action to the *performer* in question, we find that we *do* expect those we regard as experts regarding a skill to be responsive to norms attached to the skill in question and to exhibit a commitment to acting well according to these norms. Thus, a genuinely skilled chess player would not play purely

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[10] The delicate balance between the risks and benefits of self-effacement is nicely captured by Stichter when he notes that, "… while expert performance displays automaticity with respect to implementation control, some situational control and most strategic control requires the use of deliberative processes." (2018: 51)

[11] The claim that virtue ethics is self-effacing is most prominently defended by Thomas Hurka (2001: 219–255) and Simon Keller (2007). Replies from advocates of virtue ethics who deny that it is self-effacing include: Swanton (1997), Annas (2008), Martinez (2011), Pettigrove (2011), and Clark (2016).

[12] Some of the different formulations of this objection that Stichter addresses include: Zagzebski (1996), Watson (2004), and Baehr (2012).

for financial gain, nor would they do things like use their talent to tank matches without getting caught.

A second point of comparison Stichter discusses is a contrast between skill and practical wisdom. One might think that *phronesis* is just a unique type of overall skill, but Stichter argues that it is structurally different than skills because it requires reflection on norms, values, and goals in a way that mastery of a particular skill does not. Even if we consider complex skills, like Jason Swartwood's (2013) example of firefighting that involves multiple goals that must be balanced and contextualized, these complex skills don't require reflecting on whether goals are worthy of pursuit. Thus, when it comes to goal commitment and motivation, Stichter's suggestion is that practical wisdom is unique in the way that it involves goal setting and re-evaluation rather than merely goal striving, even if goal striving involves a high degree of complexity and sophistication for certain skills and virtues.[13]

I find these two points of comparison intriguing, but I am not entirely convinced by them. Regarding the first point, especially, I do not share Stichter's intuitions in cases of agents with technical mastery failing to respect the norms of their chosen practice. It seems to me, for example, that the chess player who wins when they want to pocket the cash prize but deftly tanks their matches without anyone noticing whenever they can gain more from doing so is a genuine expert at chess. This might just reflect a fundamental contrast of intuitions about these cases, but it seems to me that when we want to evaluate a performer according to their responsiveness to appropriate norms associated with their skill, we are really just endorsing our preference for agents with skill *and* a kind a basic integrity that we find admirable but is not strictly necessary to exhibit the skill itself. For example, if one reads Andre Agassi's (2009) shocking memoir about his career in tennis, in which he notes his hatred for the sport and at least once tanking a match because of a fear his wig might fall off, I think an ordinary reaction is to think, "Wow, it's incredible how *skilled* Agassi was at tennis to have been able to accomplish everything he did with so much emotional turmoil in his life and so little dedication to the sport for its own sake!" He might not be an exemplar for others seeking to succeed at tennis, nor would we say that he is a role model for developing a healthy attitude toward our pursuits. Still, my intuition is that Agassi was all the more skilled for being able to display such amazing talent on the tennis court despite the considerable emotional difficulties he overcame in his life.

As for the second point of comparison, I'm not so sure that expertise lacks the key ingredient of reflection on the norms and values of the practice in question – that this is a feature exclusively revealed in practical wisdom. I know this seems like I am arguing in the opposite direction to what I just proposed as a narrow interpretation of genuine skill acquisition, but *if* one thinks that mastery of a skill involves some commitment to acting admirably within the area of expertise at stake, then it seems to me that this commitment regularly involves critical re-evaluation of the merits of what one is trying to achieve. In cases of simple games with clear parameters this might not be evident, but think of cases like, say, rock climbing and mountaineering, whose experts are constantly arguing about the merits of using ropes, oxygen, bolts, fixed gear, prior attempts, etc. Music as well is a context in which we think some individuals reveal admirable skills by *reinventing* what it is to create excellent work. Think Dylan going electric, Neil Young striking a single note nineteen times in a solo, or the Jesus & Mary Chain taking feedback to new levels in pop melody. These kinds of cases

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[13] On this point, I take it that Stichter agrees with Hursthouse (2006) and Hacker-Wright (2015).

suggest that there is no distinct line to be drawn between exhibiting expertise and the reflective nature of practical wisdom.[14]

Stichter has at least two replies to this type of objection. The first of these arises in his discussion of Daniel Russell's (2009) account of practical wisdom compared to the narrower skill of cleverness. Rather than just taking steps to achieve a determinate goal, as complex as these steps might be, practical wisdom, according to Russell, involves the determination of what will even count as achieving this goal in specific situations. Thus, in the case of military objectives, for example, practical wisdom might involve asking the prior question of what victory will look like in a given conflict, rather than just pursuing a preconceived notion of victory without reflection. Stichter, however, sees this distinction as thought-provoking but insufficient to fully appreciate the reflective nature of practical wisdom. For Stichter, practical wisdom involves even a further type of reflection at the initial goal-setting stage of deliberation, because practical wisdom has agents ask whether the goal is genuinely a choiceworthy part of living well. Thus, practical wisdom remains unique compared to skill, for Stichter, because agents exhibiting phonesis consider more than just the identification of a goal in complex circumstances; they consider the very worthiness of the goal itself.

My own view is that Stichter's observations on this topic are insightful even if I remain skeptical that the distinction between skill and practical wisdom can always be cleanly drawn in realistic cases. To return to musical examples, it seems to me that many skilled performers have fundamentally questioned the value of making music while they were engaged in reinventing the type of music they created. In other words, I think some of these cases cannot be described purely in terms of reflection of how to implement the goal of creating music in specific situations. Rather, for some artists the reason they end up reinventing their sound is directly related to them having reflected deeply on the worth of making music at a fundamental level. For some musicians, like Miles Davis or Brian Wilson, it would be difficult to explain some of their most famously skilled work without taking into consideration the ways in which they hit creative crises that were inextricably linked to questioning the point of making music at all.[15]

Stichter can, of course, claim that these are rare cases, and as a second strategy he can claim that not all cases of skill need to be devoid of deep reflection. He can instead maintain that practical wisdom is *defined* by this reflection in a way that is inessential for ordinary skills despite the fact that they may sometimes exhibit it. This may be a feasible way to preserve Stichter's thesis regarding skill and practical wisdom. I will leave things there and say only that I think the reply preserves the thesis at the cost of acknowledging some important cases that blur the lines between agents exhibiting true practical wisdom and those who are merely skilled at achieving particular ends. Still, even this blurring is not necessarily a problem for Stichter, because it does not undermine his core "virtue as skill" thesis. My point is only that if

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[14] Cheng-hung Tsai (2020) presents a similar objection to Stichter on this point. He notes cases in which it can be appropriate for an expert for a particular practical skill to deliberate about the end of the skill, e.g. a swimmer "can re-specify his end or goal of swimming from the previously specified end – say, swimming 100 m in 1 min – to the newly specified end – say, swimming 100 m in 55 s – which exceeds his current level of performance." (242)

[15] For a more obscure example that perfectly exemplifies this point, Mark Hollis created some of his most profound work in the midst of questioning the point of continuing to record music at all. In an interview during this period, before he disappeared from public life, he famously supplemented his recommendation that people learn to play one note before playing two notes with the caveat, "and don't play one note unless you've got a reason to play it." (Petridis 2019) It is hard to make sense of Hollis' minimalist musical skills without thinking they were mixed in with the deep reflection Stichter attributes to practical wisdom.

we can think of enough borderline cases it might be a worthwhile future project for Stichter to further articulate how the connection between virtue and skill can be maintained without undermining what is unique about the domain of practical wisdom and its special connection to human flourishing.

3 Virtue, Skill and Indeterminacy

Turning now, finally, to the third feature of Stichter's book, I think his "virtue as skill" thesis sets up a comparison between virtue and more familiar forms of expertise that is not favourable to the adoption of virtue ethics as a normative ethical theory. This is due to the fact that the virtue/skill comparison brings into sharp relief how *indeterminate* the virtues are without a normative framework to specify the content of what counts as living well for human agents. As Stichter (2018: 133) notes in his explanation of why practical wisdom should not be construed as its own distinct skill:

> However, it is difficult to see how the feedback mechanism would work if wisdom is a skill in the sense of a singular all-things-considered judgment about how to act well morally. The specific problem is that the target of living well in that sense is very broad and vague, which will make it difficult to determine whether you are acting in such a way as to achieve success.

Stichter states this only to suggest that *phronesis* is not its own single skill but is, rather, the background deployment of rational judgment that distinguishes virtues from other kinds of skills. Nevertheless, I think it accurately captures the longstanding objection to virtue ethics as an independent ethical theory compared to a helpful emphasis on practical applications that ought to enhance ethical theories like contractualism, consequentialism, and Kantian ethics. For if Stichter is correct that the target of living well is too vague to ground a determinate foundation for practical wisdom, this would seem to imply a level of indeterminacy for individual virtues that casts doubt on the viability of virtue ethics as an independent ethical theory. We might presume that we have clear enough intuitive conceptions of the virtues, but without an overall basis for justifying how these virtues are coordinated in difficult cases we are left to rely on our original intuitions and thus left without the guidance we expect from a prescriptive ethical theory. For example, we may have a rough working definition of courage that suffices in straightforward situations, but unless we can appeal to a determinate account of practical wisdom, or what it is to live well, we are left without guidance in cases where multiple virtues require coordination, e.g. a choice to fight alongside one's comrades or else refuse to fight to protest military regulations that show disrespect to LGBTQ+ persons. To genuinely understand courage requires an implied understanding of how practical wisdom unifies this individual virtue with others like loyalty, justice, compassion, beneficence and equity.

Thus, as familiar as the virtues might appear when applying ethical theories to the details of particular circumstances, if Stichter is correct that there is no distinct content to support the recommendation that one ought to *live well as a human*, i.e. no content that unifies the virtues and gives them substance compared to the determinate objectives of a practical skill, then virtue ethics is left offering no unique practical guidance. Instead, it repeats conventional wisdom bundled in inspiring aphorisms about doing the right thing at the right time in the right way, etc. When it comes to sorting out *difficult* normative content, virtue ethics remains the

academic equivalent of Monty Python's classic "How to Do It!" sketch that gave its viewers hilariously underwhelming advice like, "How to Cure all Known Diseases? Well, first of all become a doctor and discover a marvelous cure for something, and then, when the medical world really starts to take notice of you, you can jolly well tell them what to do and make sure they get everything right so there'll never be diseases any more." (1973: 12) It is not that such recommendations are false; rather, the problem is that sketch's characters and the advocates of virtue ethics give us prescriptions that depend crucially on listeners tacitly understanding in advance how to cure diseases or act courageously at just the right time, in the just right way, etc.[16]

To be clear, I am under no illusions that I can convince anyone of this claim about the indeterminacy of virtue ethics in this short essay. It is a longstanding debate that will continue to polarize advocates of virtue ethics and their critics for years to come. What I want to point out here is only that Stichter's insightful comparisons of human virtues with more tangible examples of practical skills tend to highlight the fact that the content of the virtues is not well specified compared to well-defined skills. For example, how much we ought to give to Oxfam to be genuinely beneficent is a question that "living well" doesn't answer as well as some expertise answers questions about, say, how to win at chess.

Remember, however, that even if I am right about this it doesn't create a problem for Stichter's book. His focus on the structure of virtue and its skillfulness doesn't imply a defense of virtue ethics, and he remains agnostic in the book, as far as I can tell, about the merits of any particular normative theory. I merely want to raise the issue and give him the opportunity to speak to whether he happens to favour virtue ethics and whether he is troubled by the comparative indeterminacy of its content compared to familiar skills presented in the book. Either way, *The Skillfulness of Virtue* offers an admirable analysis of the structure of virtue, and I look forward to learning more about some of its features that I find especially intriguing.

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[16] In effect, my point is that Stichter's apt comparisons of technical skills and virtues tends to highlight what Rosalind Hursthouse (1991: 229–33) describes as the "major criticism" of virtue ethics.

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