A Virtue Theory of Moral Motivation

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It is uncontroversial within virtue ethics and virtue theory generally that states of character and most, if not all, virtues have a *motivational* component: they dispose their possessors to act in certain ways and shape the states of mind and motives that occasion and substantially explain specific acts (e.g., Brandt, 1988: Kamtekar, 2004; Adams, 2006).[1] States of character have other components and their moral significance is not limited to their role in moving people to act, but the motivational component of states of character is important. It has figured importantly in the formulation and discussion of virtue ethical accounts of right action (e.g., Slote, 2001; Russell, 2009; Hurka, 2010) and debates concerning moral motivation or the motivational aspect of an agent's moral creditworthiness. A common argument for the superiority of virtue ethics, over and against its deontic and consequentialist rivals, has been that outwardly commendable acts that flow spontaneously from related states of character, such as compassion and loyalty, are more admirable or creditworthy than outwardly similar acts arising from a sense of duty or calculation of consequences. Yet, motivation remains remarkably under-theorized in virtue theory.

As a first approximation, we could think of a virtue theory of moral motivation as addressing the following:

1. The *nature* of genuinely (credit-bearing) moral motivation: What is the relationship between having a virtuous state of character and being motivated in a morally admirable

[1] I will assume, for the purposes of this paper, that situationist challenges to the psychological reality of stable moral dispositions can be overcome.

or creditworthy way? Is the relationship one of identity? Or does moral motivation correspond to a particular component or aspect of a virtuous state of character – the right kind of *desire*, perhaps, or a disposition to act on the basis of conscientious deliberations, or something else?

2. The *psychological* reality, foundations, and character of such motivation: It is one thing to conceptualize moral motivation within a purely philosophical understanding of the nature of virtue and motivation, and quite another to ground a philosophical account of moral motivation in an established body of psychological theory and research on motivation. An adequate theory of moral motivation would be grounded in the best available science of motivation, with caveats as needed regarding the limitations of that science.
3. The *acquisition* of genuinely moral or virtuous motivation: Given the nature of moral motivation and what can be said with reasonable confidence about its psychological character and foundations, how is genuinely moral motivation acquired? Are there aspects or kinds of social contexts and interactions that make a difference, and if so, which are most favorable? Are there unavoidable sequential steps in the acquisition of moral motivation?
4. *Eudaimonistic* versions of virtue ethics would also address the relationship between moral motivation and eudaimonia, and more generally the place of moral motivation in the constellation of relationships between eudaimonia, virtue, and acting well. Would a eudaimonic *theory of value* ground an account of virtue, and would the rightness of acts be theorized in turn as reducible to the virtuousness of motives (as in Hursthouse, 1999, and Slote, 2001)? Or would eudaimonia ground virtue and acting well *independently*, so

that the possession of virtue *disposes* people to act well, but virtue and virtuous motivation neither ground, nor are grounded in, an account of acting well? Or should the relationships between eudaimonia, virtue, and acting well be understood in some other way?

This paper will sketch a proto-theory of moral motivation, whose aspiration is to eventually address all of 1 through 4 more comprehensively than the confines of a single paper would permit. It will draw together and make explicit some fragmentary materials for such a theory in a series of recent works rooted in a reading of Aristotle's ethics (Curren, 2000, 2010, 2013a, b, 2014a, b, c; 2015; Ryan, Curren and Deci, 2013; Walker, Curren and Jones, in submission).

In presenting this theory-in-progress, I will limit discussion of related contemporary views to the work of Lorraine Besser-Jones (2012, 2014) and some opening observations about Hursthouse (1999). Besser-Jones's work provides the most useful contrasts because the views we have been independently developing over the past couple years share the unusual feature of predicating forms of eudaimonism and accounts of moral motivation on Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which has come to dominate motivation studies in recent years (Deci & Ryan, 2012). These important commonalities coexist with some equally important differences, so a comparison of the two views should serve to clarify the space for elaborating eudaimonic virtue theories of moral motivation compatible with the current state of psychological theory and research on motivation.

A major difference, worth mentioning at the outset, is that Besser-Jones defines a virtuous state of character as one that enables its possessor to perform actions conducive to *her own* eudaimonic well-being or psychic wellness (2014: 100-101). This makes her conception of

acting well fundamentally egoistic, and yields a view of morality and moral motivation that I find implausible, despite the importance she rightly attaches to evidence that a person's well-being depends crucially on *caring* about other people – a dependency mediated primarily by the degree to which a fundamental psychological need for "positive" or mutually affirming relationships is satisfied.[2] She suggests that "a psychologically realistic conception of human nature requires being open to changing some of our preconceptions of virtue," and this evidently includes the idea that knowledge of what is required for human well-being – a scientifically informed eudaimonism – would properly inform an ethic that is focused on our collective ability to live well together, rather than one egoistically focused on an individual's own ability to live well. I am not persuaded that psychological realism or any other considerations favor the abandonment of this "preconception" about morality.

My own view offers an SDT informed account of eudaimonia or living well – understood as living in a way that is both admirable and personally rewarding – and treats it as independently grounding a social (not egoistic) ethic of acting well and a conception of virtuous character as an enabling condition or "Aristotelian necessity" (Foot, 2001; Curren, 2013b) for living well, for its possessor (directly) and for others (indirectly). In both the Aristotelian tradition and in SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryan, Huta & Deci, 2008; Ryan, Curren, and Deci, 2013; Curren, 2013b), flourishing or eudaimonic living consists in fulfilling human potentialities well and enjoying the well-being and satisfaction entailed by such fulfillment. The possession of virtues (*moral*, *intellectual*, and *productive*) is essential to fulfilling corresponding potentialities well, and they are not just instrumentally related to the well-being that results but essentially animated by a proper and admirable regard for what has value not just for the agent but

[2] Besser-Jones is on target in observing that, "in order to develop fulfilling relationships, we ought to be motivated for the sake of the person… We ought to be motivated by care and respect for the other" (2014: 44).

independently of her own well-being. By contrast with Besser-Jones's attribution of only instrumental value to virtuous states of character (2014: 100), I will thus count these states as having both instrumental and intrinsic value. The related basic intuition about moral motivation I will suggest is that the heart of moral motivation is *valuing* what has value, beginning with persons, their flourishing, and the necessities essential to their flourishing, beginning with their possession of good character. Morally motivation disposes a person to be appropriately responsive to the goodness of what is good and the badness of what is bad – responsive to the value of what is ethically significant in the world they inhabit.

1. The nature of moral motivation

Rosalind Hursthouse's book, *On Virtue Ethics,* is unusual in offering a sustained response to the charge that

> virtue ethics cannot give an account of 'moral motivation' – that is of acting from a (sense of) duty, on or from (moral) principle, because you think you (morally) ought to, or are (morally) required to, or because you think it's (morally) right – taking all these different phrases to be equivalent for present purposes (Hursthouse, 1999: 121).

Hursthouse's response, in a nutshell, is that the thoughts about duty, principles, and rightness that may accompany an action are neither necessary nor sufficient for moral motivation; ascriptions of moral motivation are claims about "what sort of person the agent is" – "the agent's character overall" – so what is essential to an act being morally motivated is "that it is done from a state of

character that adequately resembles the state of character from which the perfectly virtuous agent acts" (p. 160).

This view of moral motivation has some appealing aspects. An advantage of its *character holism* regarding motivation is that it escapes an obvious objection to the idea that all compassionate acts that flow from compassion, or all loyal acts that flow from loyalty, are well motivated. There are circumstances in which such acts are inappropriate or worse and in which the motivation is deeply flawed by its lack of responsiveness to the full range of ethically significant particulars of the situation and act; murders motivated by loyalty and compassionate acts that grossly misappropriate resources are ready examples. It would seem similarly evident that appropriate acts issuing from a motivationally isolated "virtue" (a virtue-like disposition whose expression is not mediated by good judgment grounded in good character generally) are morally deficient in their motivation, since such motivation could regularly yield inappropriate acts. There is nevertheless something a bit odd and unsatisfying about this holistic view of moral motivation.

We could concede that morally creditworthy motivation requires the sensitivity to diverse factors that is part and parcel of a generally good character, while still identifying some aspect of a virtuous state of character as what is essential to morally virtuous motivation. We can concede that a properly courageous act is one performed for the right reason, and that a fully virtuous person is the standard of proper motivation and would reliably perform courageous acts for the right reason, but still reasonably ask what the right reason would be.

Aristotle has an answer that is somewhat opaque but arguably helpful. He says that the courageous person stands his ground in battle because it is *kalon* (appropriate, admirable) to do so, and that he stands his ground for the sake of what is admirable (*kalou beneka*). Paula

Gottlieb interprets this by contrasting it with a range of motivations that Aristotle does not count as virtuous: compulsion by a superior; avoidance of reproach, shame, pain, death, or penalties; desire for honors; anger or desire for revenge; ignorance of the danger at hand or false confidence in one's ability to triumph over it (Gottlieb, 2009: 144). Gottlieb does not suggest a positive conception of moral motivation on the basis of what these morally defective forms of motivation have in common, but they are evidently alike in not pertaining to the *goods* at stake in acts of courage and do not involve the agent acting for the sake of those goods or in recognition of their value. Here's a suggestion: The good soldier stands his ground because he sees and embraces the value in it – the value in striving to preserve a state of civic affairs conducive to the well-being of his compatriots, and the value of standing by and with his comrades in arms. To say that he embraces this value is to say that he *values or cares about* his compatriots and comrades and their flourishing, enough to act appropriately for the sake of these goods that are at stake. Apart from the immediate interpretive plausibility of this suggestion, it accords well with the general sweep of Aristotle's theories of value and justice, which are occupied with human flourishing and cooperation to secure the necessary conditions for such flourishing (see Curren 2000, 2013a, b).

Gottlieb is right to call attention to Aristotle's related remark that true friends promote their friends' good *for the sake of* their friends (Gottlieb, 2009: 149; citing *NE* VIII 3 1156b9-10), a familiar and psychologically important aspect of friendship quality (Demir, et al., 2001; Walker, Curren, and Jones, in submission). The best and most complete kinds of friendships, possible only for those who are virtuous, are said to be based on mutual appreciation of the other's good character – appreciation of the goodness of the person as such – and involve acting for the sake of the other's good. Friendship of this kind validates a person's goodness and

facilitates her flourishing, and friendship not based on valuing and willing the good of the person as such is motivationally deficient, by Aristotle's lights. A basic Aristotelian commitment, traceable to elements of Socratic ethics articulated in the *Apology* and *Crito* (see Curren, 2000), is that even the most fleeting human transactions should similarly exhibit friendliness or goodwill motivated by respect for, or valuing of, persons as having the potential (at least) for rational self-determination.[3]

My interpretation of Aristotle's somewhat opaque identification of morally virtuous motivation as being for the sake of the *kalon*, then, is that the virtuous person performs the virtuous or appropriate act *because* it is *appropriate* (*hoti kalon*) or for *the sake of* the *admirable* (*kalou beneka*), *judging* what is appropriate and admirable with reference to living well and what is conducive to it. When a virtuous agent acts well, the motivation that animates the act is responsiveness to what is ethically significant or at stake in the agent's world – *responsiveness to the goodness of what is good and the badness of what is bad, grounded in a proper regard (respect) for what is good*. What is fundamentally good from a eudaimonistic perspective are beings with the potential to live well, lives lived well, and the excellent fulfillments of potential essential to living well. What is fundamentally bad are failures to live well and impediments and threats to living well, such as a threat to civic tranquility that necessitates a soldier's act of courage, or a social order that is uncooperative or insufficiently focused on equipping individuals with the prerequisites for living well.

[3] A longer backstory to this understanding of moral motivation (developed at length in Curren, 2000) begins in the puzzle that Plato leaves unanswered at the close of his dialogue, *Euthyphro*: the virtue of piety cannot be defined as service to the gods as such, but what is it? The hubris of Socrates' interlocutor, Euthyphro, evidently consists of a lack of an appreciation of, and *proper regard* for, the yawning chasm of excellence that separates him from the gods. Socrates is then portrayed in Plato's dialogue, *Apology*, as the most pious of all Athenians (standing trial on the charge of impiety), and when he speaks of piety in addressing the jury, he says, in effect, that it is *properly valuing everything divine*, including the "divine" or best element, namely intellect and reason, in human nature. This suggests an ethic of respect for human beings as rational, self-determining beings, and a view of moral motivation according to which the heart of virtuous motivation is a proper regard for what is valuable.

2 The psychological reality, foundations, and character of morally virtuous motivation

What, if anything, does science tell us about the possibility and psychological character of morally virtuous motivation, so conceived? I will confine my attention to the psychology of motivation and the large and growing body of research associated with SDT.[4] And I will argue that SDT enables us to locate virtuous moral motivation within the structure of human motivation, and clarify its genesis and correlates in ways that are helpful to virtue theory and eudaimonistic ethics.

Developed principally by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, SDT presents itself as a eudaimonistic theory of agency and well-being, in the sense that it conceives of human beings as having innate propensities and potentials whose "positive" expression and fulfillment is the key to happiness or the experience of psychological well-being. These propensities of human beings are to act, explore, learn, form relationships, and self-integrate or organize themselves as psychically integrated agents who act from coherent sets of values and goals they accept as their own. Motivation is understood psychologically as what *moves* people to act, so to say that there are innate and universal human propensities to explore, socialize, and the like is to say that people are all innately *motivated* to do these things. The innateness of such motivation is evident in the fact that people don't need to be *given* reasons or *externally* motivated to do these things. They are generally pained by being prevented from doing them, feel uneasy or bad if they haven't done them in a while, and experience more vitality, enjoyment, and meaning in their lives when they do them. Engagement in activity that is sustained by enjoyment, interest, or other "inherently satisfying internal conditions" that accompany the activity itself is referred to

[4] Approximately 300 new studies are being published each year and the most recent SDT conference, in June 2013, convened 500 collaborators from 38 countries. Citations to SDT research are running at about 3000 per year.

as *intrinsically motivated* (Deci & Ryan, 2012: 88), and SDT research on life goal orientations classifies life goals that fulfill the potentialities activated by these innate propensities as "intrinsic" goal pursuits (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2012). Commitment to such goals tends to be sustained by the inherent satisfaction and other well-being rewards associated with personal growth, self-expression, and positive relationships. Other-directed activities and life goals that might qualify as altruistic, such as helping children succeed in life or becoming a better teacher, can qualify as intrinsically motivated, if such well-being rewards arise from the activities themselves and sustain participation in them. The importance of intrinsic motivation to good teaching, and occupational performance and satisfaction more generally, has been a persistent focus of SDT research and interventions.

The linkage between well-being and fulfilling basic human potentials in "positive" ways is explained through SDT's Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT), which posits the existence of three universal psychological needs whose satisfaction is linked to the fulfillment of related potentials. The needs are for *relatedness* (a supportive social climate and affirming relationships), *autonomy* (self-directedness congruent with personal values and sense of self), and *competence* (experiencing oneself as capable); and the related potentialities can be broadly categorized as social, intellectual, and productive (Ryan, Curren, and Deci, 2013; Curren, 2013b). An important finding, which is now well established cross-culturally, is that the satisfaction of all three of these basic psychological needs through fulfillment of related potentialities is essential to psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryan, Huta & Deci, 2008; Chirkov, Ryan & Sheldon, 2011). As Besser-Jones and I have both argued at some length (Besser-Jones, 2014: 33-48; Curren, 2013a, b; 2014a; Walker, Curren & Jones, in submission), the ethical prerequisites for fulfilling social potential well and satisfying

one's relational needs imply that human beings are not able to experience psychological well-being or live happy lives unless they care about other people and exhibit basic social virtues. The classical ideal of eudaimonia assumes a natural dependency of happiness on virtue, or convergence between living admirably and living happily, and this finding goes a long way toward empirically confirming that assumption.

A final important component of SDT for our purposes is Organismic Integration Theory (OIT), which distinguishes four grades of internalization or adoption of motivating goals and values that are not innate but externally given. The grades of internalization are markedly different in the qualities of actions they engender, independently of differences in "quantity" of motivation, and their ordering is from the least to most autonomous: *controlled, introjected, identified, and integrated* (Ryan, 1995; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 2012). [5] These can be usefully illustrated through examples of virtuous and non-virtuous reasons for standing one's ground in battle.

Action owing to *controlled* motivation is stimulated by an external force, such as a superior's direct orders, threat of punishment, or offer of a reward. People induced to act by such external impositions are paradigmatic of non-autonomous actors. The impositions that control them typically frustrate their need for autonomy, undermining their well-being, and make

[5] Although OIT is fundamentally concerned with internalization of values and goals that are not innate, it is often said to pertain to *extrinsic* motivation, whereby actions aim not at "inherently satisfying internal conditions" arising from the activity itself, but at a "separable consequence" (Deci & Ryan, 2012: 88). This is conceptually problematic. The idea of a separable consequence makes sense when external control of actions takes the form of rewards or penalties artificially attached to acts, but it is not clear how the rewards of actions that satisfy one's sense of self (in the case of identified and integrated motivation) are any less "inherently satisfying internal conditions" associated with the activity than what is present in intrinsically motivated acts. In dismissing intrinsic motivation as an aspirational goal for virtue, Besser-Jones leans heavily on an alternative formulation according to which extrinsic motivation pertains to values, while intrinsic motivation pertains to interests (Besser-Jones, 2014: 139; citing, Deci & Moller, 2005: 591-592). This formulation is a more promising way to distinguish intrinsic motivation from autonomous internalized motivation, and – by adding "goals" to "values" – it might be made to fit non-autonomous (controlled and introjected) motivation, which pertains to the goals of external agents and may have nothing to do with any values of the agent's. Besser-Jones's claim, that "it is highly unlikely that anyone is able to move from a state of extrinsic motivation to one of intrinsic motivation" (139), is nevertheless overstated and not warranted by the considerations she adduces.

them less happy in what they do, even when they were antecedently intrinsically motivated. Impositions that induce them to act in ways contrary to their values (e.g., to arbitrarily exclude people from a game) are especially likely to be stressful and unpleasant, and to be followed by compensatory stress-relieving actions when the controlling imposition is removed (e. g., by voluntarily giving those who were excluded extra turns). It is through such findings that we can perhaps make the best sense of Aristotle's claim that the pleasure and pain that accompany acts are markers of character. Being pained by treating people well is not a sign of goodness, while being pained by treating them badly is – it being assumed in both cases that the actions are induced. Pleasure in voluntarily treating people well would be a sign of goodness or alignment with the agent's values, though there is no reason to expect that all of the virtuous acts of virtuous people would be pleasant.[6]

Motivation is *introjected* when threats of such punishment, shaming, or other external sanctions are internalized and agents act so as to avoid these internalized threats, without

[6] Besser-Jones rightly contests Julia Annas's attempt to vindicate this Aristotelian idea by arguing that virtuous activity, being comparable to the exercise of skills, is intrinsically pleasant in the way that experiences of "flow" are (Annas, 2008, 2011: Besser-Jones, 2012, 2014: 128ff). Virtuous acts often do not have the structure of activities whose intrinsic rewards are enough to sustain the activity, and Besser-Jones is clearly right in arguing that "intrinsic motivation cannot be the *defining characteristic* of the virtuous person" (2014: 135; italics added for emphasis). Yet, she clearly overreaches when she holds that, "*Most* of our virtuous activities are ones we do only because of the separable consequences… They are not ones that people have a propensity to find interesting and enjoyable," (2014: 134; italics added for emphasis). The quantifier, "most," is not warranted by the research on the social rewards of treating people well, cited and relied on in the construction of her theory. Her examples of the unpleasantness of virtuous acts, such as running through the rain to return the wallet of a stranger one has plucked from the mud (134), could be contested on at least two grounds. First, it is not clear that acts that are *notably* virtuous in this way are representative of virtuous acts on the whole. We don't give prizes for listening to people talk about their problems and giving them sound advice, but such acts may be both intrinsically rewarding and more typical of acts that are indisputably virtuous. Second, it is not clear that the unpleasantness of mud, rain, and running in the muddy wallet example have any bearing on whether virtuous acts are pleasant as such for people who are virtuous enough to engage in them spontaneously. A good person might experience intrinsic well-being enhancing satisfaction in the helping, even if the mud, sweat, and rain are unpleasant, and the act might be experienced and remembered as rewarding on the whole despite its inconveniences. In other cases, the negative aspects of the experience might mount in such a way as to overwhelm the inherent rewards of the act's goodness. (Consider two teachers, who both love teaching and would do it for its intrinsic rewards, all else being equal. Now imagine that things are not all equal, and one gives up teaching because the bad alignment between her moral aspirations and the demands of her workplace diminish the inherent rewards of the work and cause those that remain to be overshadowed by difficulties, frustration, and unpleasantness.) The salient contrast, for Aristotle, is presumably that a selfish person might be pained by any thought of returning the wallet.

accepting the value or goal as their own. This is a non-autonomous form of motivation, present in the agent's psyche as an alien intrusion. It is not only extrinsic to whatever inherent (intrinsic) rewards the actions themselves might have, but psychically unrelated to whatever goods might be at stake in acting. The soldier who has been trained to feel shame at the thought of cowardice or defeat and acts from this internalized threat avoidance is not acting *for the sake of* his compatriots, their well-being, or even his own goodness. He is likely to be in a motivationally aroused state but is less likely to perform well than someone who is autonomously motivated.

Action arising from *identified* motivation is attributable to values or goals one identifies with or accepts as one's own, on the strength of reasons and a perception that one is free to accept the reasons and embrace the values or goals or not, as one sees fit (Deci, Eghari, Patrick & Leone, 1994). SDT classifies this as a form of autonomous motivation, or motivation that yields self-governed action, and this idea of *self*-governance involves the idea of a self that endorses the values or goals in question. SDT posits a natural propensity to self-integrate, and attributions of identified motivation in OIT would presuppose that the process of self-integration has advanced to the point of permitting the person to endorse a value as cohering with core commitments essential to her identity. Identified motivation thus requires *some* degree of integration, but genuine endorsement of a value can nevertheless fall far short of *integrating* it into an identified system of values that is well-ordered and relatively free of internal tensions and conflict.

A soldier who stands his ground in battle owing to *identified* motivation would act from values that are his own. This would preclude joining the battle to avoid shame or in anger or a frenzy of blood lust, but the values he identifies with and acts from may not be those that a virtuous person would act from. He might attach great value to honors, and have the prospect of

honors in mind in standing his ground. Or he might have the right values but act without an appreciation of the danger he faces, through ignorance of the circumstances or how well equipped he is to face them. In that case, he would act for the right reason, but not in such a way as to be commended for courage; he would not for the right reason have knowingly faced danger that a person who was not courageous would not have been able to face. He may be virtuously motivated in a dispositional sense, but not creditable as courageous in this instance, because the disposition would not have been activated or be "occurrent." There might also be circumstances in which it is not enough to just be courageous – circumstances that call for courage and other virtues as well, and in which a motivationally isolated disposition to face danger for the right kinds of reasons might monopolize a person's attention, distracting him from morally salient aspects of the challenges at hand. In sum, it seems that the category of identified motivation brings us closer to the motivational state of a virtuous person, but is not yet that of a virtuous person.[7] Endorsement of the right values or goal may be a vital step in the right direction.

Having noted that identified motivation requires *some* degree of integration of a motivating value into an actor's scheme of values, we can now identify *integrated* motivation as the product of more fully integrating identified values or goals into a coherent and well-ordered "self-system." Such integration would reduce the tensions and potential conflict between values that may become apparent in situations presenting constellations of constraints and demands the actor may not have faced before. The work of integration requires self-examination and self-regulatory striving, and greater integration implies that this work results in a greater motivational

[7] Besser-Jones comes to very much the same conclusion, writing that, integrated motivation "nicely captures this image of the virtuous person [as someone who understands the goals of morality and the reasons why it is important for her to act well, and acts from values and goals integral to a state of character she values in herself]" (2014: 136, 137). The argument by which she reaches this conclusion is radically different from my own, however, because it is grounded in her conception of virtue as purely instrumental to acting well, in the sense of acting in a way that reliably advances the agent's own well-being. The crux of her argument is that, "studies consistently find those autonomously motivated are more successful in obtaining their goals than those who experience controlled motivation" (2014: 136-137), and securing one's own well-being requires treating other people well.

holism, whereby the agent's various values would be more seamlessly deployed in response to the complex particulars of situations. It is not unreasonable to see this as harmonizing with important aspects of Hursthouse's *character holism* regarding virtuous moral motivation. The idea of a unity of virtues that attunes agents to diverse ethical considerations in a way that is often automatic or second-nature, but also often mediated by reasoned deliberation, does require a motivational state that is at least very close in its structure to *integrated* motivation as it is conceived in OIT.[8]

The question for a psychological realist guided by SDT, then, is whether and how it is possible for human beings to achieve a state of integrated motivation whose structure incorporates the right values (attitudes, commitments, beliefs in the right way (with the right priorities, based on understanding of the value of things). On the view of virtuous moral motivation sketched in the previous section, the crux of what is required is valuing persons and their flourishing. A value orientation of this kind is not only established as a possibility by SDT research, it is a predictable outcome for people nurtured in a needs-supportive social environment – an environment that models the valuing of persons and their flourishing and practices it by providing sufficient opportunity for the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs as children begin to explore and make their way in the world.

3 The acquisition of virtuous moral motivation

[8] Another aspect of virtue, prominent in classical Greek sources and rightly emphasized by Besser-Jones (2014: 14ff), is that it is supposed to give people the capacity to act well in the face of common obstacles, such as fear and the temptations of pleasure. It is plausible to regard the self-examination and efforts of self-regulation essential to integrated motivation as naturally identifying and deploying strategies of self-management to overcome these obstacles to acting well, but I will set this aside on the revisable presumption that it does not pertain the motivation as such. I address the *efficacy* of agency in connection with SDT and strategies of "precommitment" (Elster, 2000) in the final section of Curren, 2006.

Having noted some aspects of the acquisition of virtuous moral motivation already, and having addressed the cultivation of moral virtue and the good judgment it requires in connection with SDT elsewhere (Curren, 2014b, c), I will limit my remarks in this section to the role of moral *aspiration*. My hypothesis is that the acquisition of virtue requires *aspiring* to be virtuous, and such aspiration would entail a form of moral motivation that is a precursor to virtuous moral motivation as such. Understood within the framework of SDT, this aspiration to be virtuous would be a form of identified motivation that is developmentally essential to achieving a state of integrated motivation characteristic of a virtuous person.

Following Annas (2011), I will assume that a key to the success of moral habituation or guided practice in yielding virtue is the learner's *aspiration* to get better.[9] The guidance that practice requires would need to be reasoned, drawing the learner's attention to the salient factors they must attend to and care about, while being nurturing and needs-supportive in the way SDT understands this. In this way, the learner might be induced to notice and care about what it is essential to notice and care about in order to make progress. And the learner would have the cognitive tools to take ownership of her practice, knowing how to practice in such a way as to become better, and continuing with that practice not in a controlled fashion, but with an autonomous aspiration to become better, or more virtuous.[10] An autonomy-supportive articulation of reasons in moral coaching and habituation, and competence-enhancing receptivity to reasoned give-and-take, would create a basis for an autonomous, identified embrace of the goal of being virtuous. A virtuous state of character could be understood to require and largely originate in such identified motivation and a person's related efforts to *integrate* identified goals

[9] Besser-Jones holds, similarly, that we should strive to be motivated to "do something because it is virtuous, or because it is what a virtuous person would do" (2014: 135).
[10] There are reasons I detail in Curren 2014b, for why a general aspiration to be virtuous is most consistent with actually becoming virtuous.

and values into a coherent whole from which conflicts have been eliminated. We could picture this integration as progressing in a way that is linked to the activities of a life through which virtues, understanding, and capabilities are acquired – activities through which a person attempts to shape her life and person in a desirable and feasible direction.

Note the sharp contrast between the view that begins to emerge from these starting points and Kohlbergian neo-Kantianism. The implied ascent of moral motivation in Kohlberg's scheme is from self-serving desire, through desire or commitment to uphold prevailing conventions, to a commitment to uphold universal moral laws. This is a picture of moral motivation radically disconnected from the developmental and educational realities of children's growing appreciation of and responsiveness to a world of good and bad things related in a variety of ways to living well. A desideratum for a theory of moral motivation I aim to satisfy, is that it would place moral motivation within the larger scheme of appropriate response to value.[11]

4 The place of moral motivation in the constellation of relationships between eudaimonia, virtue, and acting well

Besser-Jones interprets eudaimonism as not just a *theory of value* focused on the intrinsic value of human flourishing, but an *action-guiding* doctrine: although people have different ideas about what it is to live well, all agree that living well is their ultimate aim, *and* eudaimonic virtue ethics should be shaped around the claim that they *ought to* pursue *their own* flourishing. Morality is "*about* and *for the* individual," hence "of utmost importance to the individual," she writes (2014: 3). In order to escape the charge of egoism this invites, some versions of eudaimonism focus on the Aristotelian idea that flourishing is *virtuous* fulfillment of human potentialities. Besser-Jones

[11] For starting points, see Curren, 2013a, 2014a.

turns instead to Basic Psychological Needs Theory as an empirical basis for, in effect, deriving a (more or less) conventional social ethic from an egoistic foundational obligation of individuals to pursue their own *well-being* or healthy functioning:

> Talk of virtuous agency and talk of eudaimonic well-being are really just different ways of describing what is essentially the same thing: a state of positive functioning in which agents are able to thrive in their pursuits. This presents us with a way of thinking about virtue that, while perhaps more limited in scope than other moral frameworks, is essentially connected to an individual's own nature in a way that makes its normative relevance easily identifiable and easily acceptable. This position has long been the aspiration of the virtue ethical approach… (2014: 168).

Besser-Jones and I both look to BPNT for its promise to empirically redeem the ancient idea of an internal psychic dependence of happiness on virtue, but I locate its role in the constellation of value, virtue, and action-guidance differently. Before sketching my alternative, I will note some apparent tensions in Besser-Jones's approach.

There are different ways in which a eudaimonistic theory might be objectionably egoistic, and different responses that can and have been offered. A tension I see in Besser-Jones's approach is that it seems to present morality *to the individuals who are to guide themselves by it* as "*about* and *for*" them, and would presumably endorse teaching of virtue that communicates its (on her view) purely instrumental value for their personal well-being, *while relying on* evidence that, "When we care about others and respect them,… set[ting] aside our own interests…, we will be most likely to satisfy our need for relatedness" (2014: 44). The idea that the action-guiding focus of eudaimonism needs to be on the individual's own well-being in order for virtue

to be "easily acceptable" seems to reflect a presupposition about motivation that is not borne out by the evidence. Virtues of respect and care for others *for themselves* should be easily accepted and integrated into individuals' schemes of value and self-regulation *in settings that support the satisfaction of their basic psychological needs.* A conception of morality predicated on the intrinsic value of *all* persons and their flourishing seems, if anything, a *more* promising basis for nurturing psychological health than one focused on the value of the agent's well-being alone – if psychological health depends, as the evidence suggests, on people committing themselves to things they perceive as having value independently of themselves.

Moral systems are not just used by individuals in managing their lives, but by societies in managing their collective affairs, moreover. Egoistic forms of eudaimonism are ill-suited to this wider context unless they are supplemented with norms of justice that are not natural requirements for success in the individual pursuit of well-being. Justice would then fall, implausibly, outside of the domain of morality. The oddness of this would be compounded by the fact of failing to take advantage of the potent resources SDT's Basic Psychological Needs Theory would offer a eudaimonistic theory of justice. If the basic task of societies is to enable their members to live well, how could they justly ignore the evidence that human beings have three innate psychological needs whose satisfaction is crucial to their well-being (Curren, 2013b)? SDT is indeed already frequently deployed by its developers as a basis for critiquing the design of institutions, the reluctance of psychologists to make normative judgments notwithstanding.

My own view begins from a more Aristotelian understanding of the eudaimonia, or living well, at which everyone is plausibly said to aim, as commonly understood to involve living in a way that is both admirable and personally rewarding. I think this is sustainable both as a reading

of Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, and as a reading of what people want for themselves and their children. SDT can be seen as supporting this, inasmuch as it identifies a need to experience oneself as competent, or to experience success in one's life. The point, for Plato and Aristotle, was to show that in order to secure the satisfaction or personal rewards of living well, people who don't antecedently embrace moral virtue as an aspect of a life lived admirably, will need to revise their view. The foundational role for SDT in eudaimonism, in my own eudaimonism, is thus in holding together the subjective and objective aspects of classical eudaimonism – a view according to which a life that is truly both admirable and personally rewarding is one that fulfills human potentials in accordance with moral and other virtues. (Aristotle places intellectual virtue at the top of the heap and disparages productive activity, but my own neo-Aristotelian eudaimonism accords "productive" equal respect.)

I treat this form of eudaimonism as independently foundational for both virtue and action guidance, and take this to be an essentially Aristotelian approach. I think there is abundant textual evidence that Aristotle conceived of justice, and norms for acting well generally, as grounded in an ethic of universal respect for rational beings and predicated on the members of a society having rights of self-determination and equal claims to the fundamental requirements, or "Aristotelian necessities" for living well (Foot, 2001; Curren, 2000, 2013b). And I have argued that there is a clear precedent for a theory with this structure and basic content in Plato's *Laws* (Curren, 2000, 2015). What grounds justice and action guidance generally is the whole of eudaimonia, or requirements for eudaimonia foundational to a society of human beings living well together. I elaborate this through a contractualist neo-Aristotelianism (Curren, 2013b).

Turning to virtue, I have suggested that it is part and parcel of Aristotle's conception of a science of ethics that the highest good or natural "function" for human beings is activity in

accordance with the highest virtue, and that his theory of virtue is intended to identify the state of character that allows human nature to fulfill its natural function (Curren, 2000, 2010). What defines a virtuous state of character by my lights is not its enablement of well-being or the subjective aspect of living well (as it is for Besser-Jones), but its enablement of the objectively admirable aspect of living well. It is in this context, then, that I would locate the respect and care for others that acknowledges their intrinsic worth – the heart of moral motivation – which is *also* psychically essential to psychic well-being, much as Plato and Aristotle contended.

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