Against Idealization in Virtue Ethics

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*Perhaps [the society which we have been describing] is laid up as a pattern in heaven where he who wishes can see it and found it in his own heart. But it doesn't matter whether it exists or will ever exist. – Socrates (*Republic* 592b)*

*Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" … No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may do it. – Moses (*Deuteronomy* 30:11-14)*

PERFECT PEOPLE?

One way of categorizing the varieties of virtue ethics is: Aristotelian/eudaimonistic, Humean/sentimentalist, Nietzschean/pluralist, Aquinian/Catholic, Confucian/???, etc. But I shall divide the virtue ethics pie rather differently. I shall distinguish between idealizing and realistic virtue ethics. Idealizing virtue ethics makes use of an ideal – the concept of a perfect character (or aspect of character), a character that is at best approximated, but never realized by real people**.** Realistic virtue ethics is simply non-idealizing virtue ethics.[1] In this section I shall argue against the use of ideals (*idealization*) in virtue ethics on both theoretical and practical grounds. The widespread, implicit assumption that ideals are necessary bits of theoretical machinery is not only false, but counterproductive. The widespread use of ideals as goals is not only unhelpful, but pernicious. In the remaining sections, I shall identify three familiar doctrines as idealizations: the corrective doctrine of virtue, the doctrine that an act is right if and only if it is what a virtuous agent would characteristically do in the circumstances, and the reciprocity of virtues doctrine. As I rebut each doctrine I shall recommend an alternative. Thus, my own theory of virtue ethics will emerge bit-by-bit, along the way.

Ideals are theoretically problematic.

There are many theoretically problematic aspects of ideals. I shall not delve their depth or span their breadth, but merely mention a few notorious problems. First, ideals are ontologically problematic. They do not exist physically, as entities in time and space, or mentally, as ideas in the minds of people. In what sense do they exist? Second, ideals are epistemologically problematic. Knowledge (or even a minimal grasp) of ideals is not innate. or gained by extrapolating from non-ideal items. If we do have knowledge of an ideal, how is that knowledge obtained? Third, ideals are normatively problematic. Why think that we *should* strive to approximate ideals rather than striving for a different sort of goal such as the goal of being pretty darn good? After all, a duty to get as close as possible to an ideal violates the widely-held dictum, "Ought implies reasonably can." Fourth, ideals are practically problematic. Which ideal should we try to approximate? We cannot rule out the Giraffe ideal on the grounds that it is unachievable since the Human ideal is also impossible for us to achieve. If we begin with what we actually can do, and extrapolate from a series of possible improvements, then the Human ideal is a better fit, a more natural extension of our real potential. But this line of thought uses the actual to calibrate the ideal rather than using the ideal to calibrate the actual.

I do not claim that these questions are unanswerable. My purpose in raising them is to show where the burden of proof lies. Ideals stand in need of ontological, epistemological, normative, and pragmatic justification before they can be invoked; they are not free. Supporters of ideals have a lot of work to do.

Once postulated to serve as standards, ideals call sweetly to thinkers, begging thinkers for further roles. Idealization often leads to the problematic doctrine that only ideal virtue is properly called "virtue."[2] *Virtue equals ideal virtue* (V=IV). Only perfect people are virtuous. Since every actual person's disposition is imperfect, V=VI implies that no one is virtuous. We are merely failures, or sinners, or potentially virtuous, or striving to be virtuous, or sorta-kinda virtuous or…

But this misanthropic picture is not true to our moral experience or language. Most of us see ourselves and see others as virtuous, although not perfectly virtuous, with respect to most things. If asked, we might say something like this. "Algernon may not handle money or anger as well as he should, but he handles physical risk and sensual pleasure just fine (although there is still some room for improvement). Algernon is a courageous, temperate person." Thus, V=IV clashes with common sense.

Another drawback of V=VI, is that it leaves no room for heroic virtue which is the virtue ethics analog of supererogation. Heroic virtue is a disposition to do great things in benign circumstances, and good things in circumstances so malignant that doing bad things would be excusable. If virtuous people are perfectly virtuous – if they think, feel, and act perfectly on every occasion – then there is no way to distinguish between virtue and heroic virtue. Important distinctions and plausibility are lost. If people who reliably do good, but not great things lack virtue, then the theory is too stringent. If people lack virtue even if they crumple only when crumpling is excusable, then the distinction between excuse and justification vanishes.[3]

To summarize, idealization is highly problematic in several respects, and leads easily to the counterintuitive claim that V=VI.

Ideals are unnecessary.

Virtue ethics offers evaluations and makes comparisons of character. Courage and justice are good; cowardice and injustice are bad. Virtue is a better character trait than continence which is, in turn, better than vice. Does evaluating or ordering character traits require ideals? To his credit, Russell argues for what many simply assume, namely that "good" ("better") cannot be defined in any other way than "close (closer) to the ideal."[4]

In ethics as in the rest of philosophy, the Platonic picture hypnotizes philosophers. Socrates tests the views of his interlocutors against the obvious facts of ordinary life. Let us test the claimed necessity of idealization in this way. When we assert that chair A is a good chair (or a better chair than chair B), are we saying that chair A is close to the ideal Chair (or closer than chair B)? No, we don't have an ideal of Chair in mind. Indeed, we have no idea of what the ideal Chair looks like. Is it upholstered? Does it have arms? Legs? Back? Wings? Yet even though we have no conception of an ideal Chair, we have no trouble seeing and saying that some chairs are good (or better than others). Similarly, when we assert that Bettee is beautiful, her paper is an A paper, or the cockroach in her backpack is well-adapted to urban life, we are not thinking of a Perfectly Beautiful Person, Perfectly Written Paper, or Perfectly Adapted Organism. To return to virtue ethics, we all consider some people to be generous (or more generous than others), even though none of us has a concept of a Perfectly Generous Person. Similarly for all of the other virtues. Contra Russell, we can know "better" without knowing "best," let alone "perfect." In general, ideals are completely unnecessary for evaluations and comparisons.

If we do not use ideals, how do we manage to evaluate and compare? We use different methods in different contexts. For example, in some cases, we use function, rather than an ideal as a calibration mechanism. X is better than Y if and only if X is better at achieving a goal than Y. Casper's investment strategy is better than Daisee's because it is more profitable and less risky. In other cases, we use a non-ideal standard to calibrate. X is better than Y if and only if X more closely resembles Z, where Z is non-ideal. Daisee is a better cook than Casper because Daisee's cooking is more like my mother's cooking. We need not have in mind a perfect investment (earning infinitely many dollars at zero risk), or a perfect cook (whatever that means).

But many people report that they do use ideals as role models. Some ask, "WWJD?" or "WW 🦇 D?" or "WW🎀D?" for example. How can these reports be explained away? I speculate that what actually happens in these cases is that one thinks of a real person who has done some excellent things, modifies the thought to exclude identifying features, and calls the resultant fuzzy thought, "ideal." People lack concrete conceptions of Jesus, Batman, or Barbie, but merely substitute someone (or an amalgam of someones) whom they do know, instead.

Alternatively, people reporting that they use ideal role models may be using the "better than me" strategy. They think of themselves at a certain point on a development path. Extrapolating a bit, they envision a point somewhat further along. Then they work toward that point, while thinking of it as ideal.

Anyway, ideals are not necessary. As we all know from personal experience, role models need not be ideal people. At various points in time, we have all used people we know directly (e.g. parents, friends, neighbors) and indirectly (through news media, biographies, historical accounts, religious teachings, etc.) to evaluate, compare, and motivate. We have even used fictional characters.

To summarize, ideals are problematic and unnecessary. Ideals don't exist. Even if they did exist, we could not know them. Even if we could know them, they would have no normative force. Even if they had normative force, we wouldn't know which to pick. Even if we did know which to pick, they would be unnecessary. We don't, shouldn't, can't, and needn't use ideals for evaluation or comparison.

Ideals are practically problematic.

Aiming at (the illusion of) ideals can be useful for wholesome projects of moral improvement. However in practice, ideals have a dark side. They tend – not inevitably but typically – to cause several sorts of serious problems. Moreover as mentioned above, the benefits can be obtained without ideals and their drawbacks. Even if the benefits could not be obtained without using ideals, the drawbacks might well outweigh the benefits.

Ideals tend to put people on narrow paths and retrofit them with blinders. While focusing on a single, specific ideal, trying desperately to live up to their ideal, and obsessing about the failure to live up to their ideal, people miss wonderful things that are not on the path to the ideal. Ebenezer spends his life frustrated because he does not have his dream job instead of enjoying the great job that he does have. Fifi rejects Ebenezer because he is not Fifi's ideal guy, instead of noticing that he is a terrific guy. Or Fifi keeps trying to make her relationship with Ebenezer work "the way it is supposed to work," instead of noticing that the relationship is working just fine in a non-standard way. Defenders of ideals might maintain that Fifi and Ebenezer have chosen the wrong ideals, but if ideals are to function, they must be concrete, and no matter what concrete ideals are chosen, some worthwhile alternatives will be excluded.

Pursuit of ideals rather than realistic goals can lead people to rationalize immoral action. If the ends justify the means, then extreme ends justify extreme means. "We are going to bomb this movie theater now in order to achieve our utopian political vision."

Ideals can be daunting; they can cause imperfect perfectionists to give up. "Since I can't become perfectly good, beautiful, productive, popular, etc., I might as well let myself be nasty, ugly, lazy, friendless, etc." As all clergy know, questions such as "WWJD?" sometimes breaks people.[5]

People who don't give up, may nevertheless be damaged by ideals. Ideals can induce low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, etc.[6] Parents worry about the impossible standards of appearance set by Barbie dolls; we should also worry about impossible standards of behavior set by character ideals. When girls in our culture try to improve their own appearance by asking "WW😊D?" (understood as a question about appearance), their egos and maybe even their mental health are at risk.[7] Perhaps "WW 🦇 D?" poses a parallel peril to boys, although mitigated to some extent by male privilege. Character ideals are dangerous in similar ways.

Ideals are not used solely by people trying to improve. Once promulgated, they are available for all sorts of uses – some of them not very nice. Turning from individuals to groups reveals that ideals tend to become tools for psychological exploitation and domination.

Ideals tend covertly to privilege certain sorts of people, types of practices, and ways of life while illegitimately, and often covertly excluding or disparaging others. One example is the "reasonable man" legal standard that denigrated women while posing as an ideal standard of rationality. Similarly the ideal, "Forgive those who trespass against us" is manageable when one is well-off, and the trespasses to be forgiven are peccadillos. Subordinated and abused people have it tougher, for this ideal demands that they forgive their oppressors. In general, ideals are culturally relative, and deployed by dominant groups, yet pose as absolute standards, and thus further disadvantage the already-disadvantaged.[8]

Idealization's focus on the gap between the real and the ideal produces inadvertent or deliberate selective denigration of people and practices. While seeming to compare X and Y to each other, Garrick compares X to an ideal while comparing Y to a more realistic, lower standard. This maneuver enables Garrick to demonize some people, practices, institutions, and countries while praising rival people, practices, institutions, and countries which are actually worse. X is excoriated for falling very short of perfection, while Y is admired for doing better than Z who/which is actually worse than X.

The unscrupulous take advantage of impossible longings to bilk or manipulate people. "Buy this diet drug and you'll look like Barbie." "Buy my book and master mindfulness in 6 weeks."

Perhaps the worst problem is this. Oppressors routinely appeal to idealizations not only to rationalize their acts to others, but also to undermine the self-esteem of victims by convincing them that they deserve to be put down or kept down. "Look at the distance between you (or your project) and the ideal. You are a failure." This is a favorite of spouse-abusers. Often, the denigration is eventually internalized by the victim, and then the victim destroys his or her own self-esteem. Hearing, "You are fat!" the victim nods and repeats, "I am fat!" "You are a sinner!" becomes "I am a sinner!" The results are terrible. The psychologically strong become filled with self-doubt; the psychologically weak become broken, subordinated people.

Overall, promulgating and aiming at ideals are such dangerous projects that they are arguably counterproductive. We are better off without ideals, even if we could have them.

Objections

Some might deny that psychological and social harms are real harms. I shall assume that not only that these are real harms, but also that they are not in any way intrinsically less serious or important than physical harms.

Some might deny that ideals can be so influential. Philosophers must struggle to assure administrators, students, and themselves of the relevance of philosophy, but presumably, I shall not have to convince my readers that ideals can have a major impact.

Some maintain that we ought to seek and spread the truth, and let the chips fall as they may. This has a sort of nobility about it. Aristotle says, "it would perhaps be thought to be better, indeed to be our duty, for the sake of maintaining the truth even to destroy what touches us closely; … for while both are dear, piety requires us to honor truth above our friends" (1096a14-16). However, positing an ideal is not analogous to discerning and disseminating the truth. The gulf between these is the chasm between "is" and "ought." Positing an ideal is creating rather than discovering and reporting. Ideals are tools, not facts.

Some maintain that we should not be deterred from positing ideals, for like other misusable technologies, suppressing them is futile. This sounds good, but unlike discoveries, there is no reason to think that ideals will eventually be deployed. Moreover like engineers, philosophers should not plunge heedlessly into the development of "dual-use technologies." If the pen is mightier than the sword, then we must be careful with our pens. Philosophers who create ideals are creating weapons which may have serious, real-world consequences.[9]

My Account: The Threshold Doctrine

Each virtue is a character trait consisting of a package of dispositions to respond to situations of a different sort. I shall call the collection of situations governed by a virtue the *sphere* of that virtue. For example, the sphere of courage consists of situations in which agents confront physical risk. The defining good at stake in such situations is physical safety. Similarly, the sphere of temperance consists of situations in which agents confront opportunities for sensual pleasure, which is, of course, also the defining good at stake in such situations. The sphere of good temper consists of situations in which agents confront opportunities for presenting themselves. The defining good at stake in such situations is reputation. And so on.

A character trait is a package of dispositions of perception, passion, desire, reason, choice, and action.[10] Eschewing idealization (rejecting V=VI), I take virtues to be dispositions to do these things *well* rather than *perfectly*. I maintain that "virtues" should be defined in terms of thresholds. A character trait is a virtue if and only if it surpasses the appropriate thresholds for each of these *components*. One need only see, feel, want, think, choose, and act reliably "good enough" in order to be virtuous.[11] Virtuous people know what to do most of the time, but not always, value most of the right things to more-or-less the right degree, perceive most situations pretty well, etc.

Each component may be subdivided into *parameters*. The parameters of the passion, desire, choice, and action components include objects, amount, occasion, and duration. For example, a disposition to feel courageously requires reliably fearing dangerous things, to a degree proportionate to the risk, when the danger is real, for the duration of the danger. Similarly, a disposition to act courageously requires taking risks, with appropriate precautions, when the likelihood and degree of benefits make the risks worthwhile, etc.

Responding well consists in surpassing the appropriate threshold for each parameter of each component. For example, courageous people reliably (but not always) perform morally

acceptable acts (but not necessarily the best) acts in situations involving physical risk. Truthful people (mostly) tell the truth about themselves to (most of) the right people on (most of) the right occasions. Thus, *the Threshold Doctrine of Virtue* says that a character trait is a virtue if and only if it is a disposition to respond above the appropriate threshold with respect to each relevant parameter of each relevant component.

An important implication of the Threshold Doctrine is that people who act wrongly, but only very rarely are nevertheless virtuous. They act rightly on sufficiently many occasions, so they are over the threshold of the occasion parameter.

Transition

In the next sections, I shall show that three doctrines espoused by many current virtue ethicists are, or require idealizations. I shall rebut these three doctrines, and suggest my own alternatives.

These are not the only doctrines which need refuting. Tessman reminds us that almost all virtue ethics is built on the wildly false assumption that "we" live in circumstances in which the character traits considered virtuous by common sense are actually conducive to *eudaimonia*. Since heterosexual, non-disabled, wealthy, male WASPs are rare, most people are members of some exploited/oppressed group(s). Some of the character traits available to such people are burdened virtues; traits which are not in the best interest of their possessor, but should be part of a person's character.[12]

Another radical fictionalization is the implicit assumption that we are separate individuals who autonomously decide whether or not to enter into various relationships and accept or reject various roles. Heidegger is right to insist that we find ourselves in relationships and roles without having chosen them, and that our autonomy is radically limited by the menu of options made available to us by society.[13] Since we are (almost?) always in a role, the project of describing the virtues of individuals outside of roles should not be the focus of virtue ethics. Instead, virtue ethics should be role virtue ethics.

When explaining mechanics, physicists first describe the mechanics of frictionless surfaces, even though there are no frictionless surfaces. Crucially, they go on to complexify the picture by adding friction. After all, a frictionless surface models real pool tables in a sense, but studying how balls move only on a frictionless surface will improve your pool game very little. For similar expository reasons, I shall proceed by first working out a theory of virtues of separate, autonomous individuals, and then complexifying the theory by taking account of the insights of Tessman and Heidegger.

CORRECTIVE DOCTRINE OF VIRTUE

One way of defining virtues is in opposition to temptations.[14] Roughly speaking, the *Corrective Doctrine of Virtue* defines a virtue as a character trait which enables agents to avoid some Bad Thing.

Fans of the Corrective Doctrine of Virtue could go on to say that a virtue is a character trait which gets agents *far enough* from the Bad Thing. Going further is not required. For example, on this view courage includes a disposition to feel a degree of fear in the face of risky situations which enables the agent to take reasonable risks often enough to avoid being a coward. Defining virtue in this way would be compatible with the Threshold Doctrine. Just get far enough away from the vice, and you are over the threshold and virtuous. So far, no idealization is

yet involved.[15] However, it is counterintuitive to maintain that Ichabod, who is barely over the threshold, is no worse than Henrietta, who is way over. For example, suppose Ichabod is more-or-less sober for all but six of the classes he teaches each year, while Henrietta is completely sober for all of her classes. Suppose that every year Ichabod donates just enough of his time and/or money so that one couldn't … quite … call him stingy, while Henrietta reliably donates half of her disposable income. To say that Ichabod and Henrietta are equally temperate and generous would be bizarre. The Corrective Doctrine of Virtue cannot be plausibly coupled with the doctrine that once over the threshold, further improvement is impossible.

Fans of the Corrective Doctrine of Virtue might claim that everyone over the threshold is virtuous, but some are more virtuous than other. This combination of claims is still idealization-free, and it would allow one to acknowledge that Henrietta is more virtuous than Ichabod. However, the combination of comparative and corrective doctrines raises an obvious question: where does one stop? Is Henrietta is more virtuous than Ichabod so long as she does not give more than 60% of what would be reasonable, and if she gives even more then she gets no better? 70%? 80%? Any stopping point seems arbitrary, and would create a threshold which has the same problem mentioned above.

The Corrective Doctrine is an Idealization

Fans of the Corrective Doctrine of Virtue might decline to specify a stopping point. That is, they might maintain that the farther one is from the Bad Thing, the more virtuous one is.[16] This claim implicitly assumes the ideal of being perfectly far from the Bad Thing, and specifies that this ideal is to be approached asymptotically. This view has all of the general problems of idealization mentioned above plus the special problem that it yields additional counterintuitive claims. According to a familiar version of this view, ideal people not only forgive all wrongdoers, but also forswear sensual pleasure, filthy lucre, the admiration of society, and so on. We should extirpate certain passions and desires, thus transcending our human nature. Of course, none of us flesh-imprisoned mortals can actually achieve this ideal, but we should try. However, the claim that one should try to (a) achieve as little sensual pleasure as one can, (b) give away all of one's money, (c) minimize one's good reputation, and so on are quite counterintuitive. Some people in the modern world give lip service to ideas like this, but almost no one acts on them or teaches them to their children.

Some people go even further; they maintain that a character trait is a virtue if and only if it is *maximally effective* at avoiding the Bad Thing. Virtue and vice lie at opposite ends of a continuum so the further away from vice we get, the closer to virtuous we become. But we don't ever get to virtue, for we fall short of the ideal. This is an even more explicit idealization, a combination of the Corrective Doctrine of Virtue and V=IV. But such an extreme position is dysfunctional. Thus, despite the lip service sometimes given to this ideal, it is ignored in practice.

My Account: The Doctrine of the Mean

A natural way to avoid the idealization of the Corrective Doctrine of Virtue is to maintain that a virtue is a character trait which gets agents far enough from the Bad Thing, but does not take them *too far*. Going too far – going across a second threshold – would lead to a different, opposite Bad Thing. Of course, this is the *Doctrine of the Mean*. Each virtue lies between two vices; extremes of action and passion are vicious. One might characterize the Doctrine of the Mean as a two-way Corrective Doctrine of Virtue. The Doctrine of the Mean is clearly a bulwark

against the idealizations above. While these doctrines urge us to be extreme, the Doctrine of the Mean urges us to be moderate. More precisely, the Doctrine of the Mean enjoins moderation with respect to each parameter of each components of each virtue. To be virtuous is to do and feel enough, and not too much of the right things, on enough, and not too many occasions, toward enough, and not too many people, and so on.

While the Doctrine of the Mean blocks the valorizing of extreme character traits, it does not inoculate against all sorts of idealization. For example, even if virtue ethicists accept the Doctrine of the Mean, they might maintain that the mean is a point rather than a range, and that virtue consists in hitting the mean point perfectly. However, maintaining that only those who always hit the exact midpoint between the two extremes (or any other point) are virtuous is just a different sort of idealization. Even the best of us occasionally nod. I shall maintain that the mean is a range on each parameter. Virtue consists in lying within the range on all of the parameters.

Truth or Consequences

Rejecting the Corrective Doctrine of Virtue is costly. Many widely admired people seem to lack virtue according to the Doctrine of the Mean. Mother Teresa is too generous; Nelson Mandela is too forgiving; Martin Luther King is too civil; and so on.

A general reply to all such proposed counterexamples is that some admired traits are not virtues. Cultures can be wrong about whom to admire. Even without falling back on this general answer, many counterexamples can be explained-away on a case-by-case basis.

As a nun, Mother Teresa is a member of an organization which provides for her needs. She need not save for retirement, budget resources to handle expensive healthcare therapies, etc. Roughly speaking, all of her monetary resources are disposable, so donating all is not excessive. She spends all of her time and energy helping others which might seem to be a problem for eudaimonist virtue ethics. However, while everyone needs some goods of fortune, some need only a smidgeon, and find their happiness in narrowly-focused projects. Thus, Mother Teresa's devotion is not necessarily excessive.

Nelson Mandela doesn't actually forgive; he transfers his anger from individual people to the system within which they operated. Rather than blaming and revenging himself upon individuals, he blames apartheid. Arguably, he is correctly targeting his anger. Thus, he is not excessively forgiving.

Civility is excessive if it is ineffectual, but what works is a function of context. The civility of Martin Luther King might not have worked in other contexts, but did work in the time and place he deployed it, perhaps because while he was leading non-violent, orderly, *civilly* disobedient demonstrations, other groups were using or threatening violence, riots, and non-civil disobedience (i.e. law-breaking without willingness to accept punishment). The existence of these groups made King look moderate. The establishment caved because the alternative was scarier. So King was not excessively civil; he was appropriately civil for the situation.[17]

CHARACTERISTIC ACTION IS VIRTUOUS ACTION (CA=VA)

Hursthouse says, "An act is right if and only if it is what a virtuous agent would characteristically (i.e. acting in character) do in the circumstances"[18] (CA=RA). I shall break this thesis into two parts. In this section, I shall rebut the claim that an act is *virtuous* if and only if it is what a virtuous agent would characteristically do in the circumstances (CA=VA). In the next section I shall rebut the claim that an act is morally *right* if and only if it is virtuous (VA=RA).

What does acting "characteristically" mean?

The *virtue interpretation* says that an act is characteristic of Jocko in a situation if and only if it is what Jocko would do in that situation when acting virtuous. It is characteristic of Jocko *qua* virtuous. People act out-of-character if their acts are not virtuous. The *predictability interpretation* says that an act is characteristic of Jocko in a situation if and only if it is what Jocko would probably do in that situation. People act out-of-character if their acts are unexpected by those who know them very well. The *character trait interpretation* says an act is characteristic of Jocko if and only if he has a character trait (or vector sum of character traits) that disposes him to perform that act.[19] Acting characteristically is acting in accord with one's character traits. People act out-of-character if their acts do not accord with any of their character traits (or all of their character traits together).

Which interpretation is correct? The virtue interpretation is easily dismissed. It begs the question. The point, after all, is to define VA in terms of CA rather than the other way around. The predictability and character trait interpretations are more plausible. They diverge in cases where a person would predictably do something that is not in accord with any of his or her character traits (or their vector sum). I favor the character trait interpretation. Suppose that Kassidee is threatened or tempted to doing something. Finally she cracks and, feeling guilty, she does it as predicted. It is counterintuitive to claim that Kassidee is acting in-character if she is completely disengaged from her act, if she is "not herself," if every fiber of her being is crying out for her to do something else. Indeed, acting against one's dispositions is practically the definition of acting out-of-character. Kassidee has not acted characteristically, but rather she has predictably acted out-of-character.

CA=VA is an idealization

I shall maintain that the following cases are vicious acts, characteristic of virtuous people. They are counterexamples to CA=VA. Denying that these acts are vicious or characteristic of the agents would be hard whether one accepts the predictability interpretation or the character trait interpretation of "characteristic" action. However, to deny that the following people are virtuous one must reject the Threshold Doctrine. That is, to hold onto CA=VA, one must idealize virtue. CA=VA is an idealization

Integral glitch: Larry has the right attitude toward sensual pleasures, and enjoys the right sensual pleasures, on the right occasions, to the right degree, etc. with great reliability. However, Larry is temperate almost all of the time *because* he permits himself to binge exactly once every 10 years on the fourth of July. When Larry is tempted to drink to excess, the memory of past binges and hope of future binges keeps Larry sober. On that once/decade occasion when Larry acts from this glitch, he is not acting out of character. He is acting from a core bit of his own character, the keystone that makes the rest of his character work. So either Larry's binge is a temperate act, Larry is not a temperate person, or CA≠VA. But Larry is clearly temperate, and his binge is clearly intemperate. Thus, CA≠VA.

Unfamiliar situation: Mashie is a good money-manager. However, when her husband unexpectedly absconds with the family savings and she becomes destitute, Mashie predictably takes a few weeks to shed her previous financial values and habits, and acquire the attitudes and practices with respect to money that are appropriate to poverty. During those weeks, she occasionally finds herself buying pastries rather than necessities with her meager funds, for example. Learning to spend money in a manner appropriate to her new circumstances is not a

change of character. So either Mashie's pastry purchases were liberal acts, Mashie is not a liberal person, or CA≠VA. Again, it is clear that CA=VA is to be rejected.

Masking: Niblick typically sympathizes with, and helps needy people to the right extent, in the right way, etc. But she is also a coward. If she thinks that helping would be risky, her cowardice masks her generosity, and she does not help, even though she wants to help. For example, she volunteers as a tutor, but big, muscular men make her nervous, so she reluctantly refuses to tutor football players, even in crowded rooms in the middle of the day. Luckily, such situations come up rarely and Niblick compensates by being extra helpful in other situations. So either Niblick's refusals are generous acts, Niblick is not a generous person, or CA≠VA.

Triviality: Obadiah reliably allocates important goods and burdens in a fair enough way to the right people, on the right occasions, etc. However, Obadiah doesn't think that small matters matter, so he does not bother to be fair with respect to them. He doesn't contribute his share to the coffee klatch, palms aces at penny-ante poker, inflates his travel expenses to collect a few extra dollars of reimbursement, etc. Luckily, although these transgressions are frequent, they are trivial. So either Obadiah's small-scale cheating is just, Obadiah is not a just person, or CA≠VA.

Perfectly virtuous people act perfectly every day throughout decades, when transformed from riches to rags, no matter what goods are at stake, and in small-stakes situations. But although Larry, Mashie, Niblick, and Obadiah are less-than-perfect, they are not less-than-virtuous according to the Threshold Doctrine. Indeed, their problematic acts come from imperfections of their character traits, and their character traits are virtues, so their problematic acts arise from their virtues rather than despite them. Therefore, Larry's binges are intemperate, Mashie's purchases are profligate, Niblick's refusals are ungenerous, and Obadiah's peccadilloes are unjust.[20] In order to hold onto both common sense and the Threshold Doctrine, I shall reject CA=VA, and sketch my alternative to CA=VA below.

VIRTUOUS ACTION IS RIGHT ACTION (VA=RA)

Much of the dispute among Deontology, Consequentialism, and Virtue Ethics centers on the question of whether right action should be defined in terms of virtue, or virtue in terms of right action. Interestingly, this dispute rests upon treacherous common ground.

Some deontologists maintain that morally right acts are first specified by moral rules. Then virtues are defined as dispositions to perform these acts. Courage, for example, might be defined as the disposition to perform the right acts in risky situations plus dispositions to have and express passions, desires, judgments, etc. that promote right action in risky situations, where the right things are determined by the Categorical Imperative.[21] Some consequentialists also take virtues to be based, in one way or another, on morally right acts, which are in turn based upon some intrinsic good(s).[22] Rather than defining virtues in terms of right action, Virtue Ethicists define right action in terms of virtues.[23] Virtues are excellences. How could an excellent character trait endorse wrong actions? This account is also supported by the intuition that a single, unified faculty – practical wisdom – determines what is right. Each virtue makes an all-things-considered judgment about what to do in each situation. Each virtue always takes account of all of the morally relevant considerations in a situation, and then recommends one or more acts. These are defined as the morally right acts for that situation. Of course, so long as virtues are defined as dispositions to perform morally right acts, or morally right acts are defined as acts that accord with virtues, there can be no conflict between the right and the virtuous. Although

they come at it from different directions, so to speak, many Consequentialists, Deontologists, and Virtue Ethicists agree on the following biconditional. *An act is right if and only if it is a virtuous act (VA=RA).*

How nice that advocates of so many different moral theories can agree on this biconditional. What sweet harmony! What shoulder-to-shoulder solidarity! It would be even nicer if VA=RA were true, and not an idealization.

VA=RA is an idealization

In your favorite heist movie, the protagonists perform a daring, ingenious robbery. It is unjust, but you root for them, anyway. VA=RA says that you are wrong to admire their daring and ingenuity. The robbers are supremely skillful, but skill in the service of immorality cannot be virtue. Because they issue in wrong actions, the daring and ingenuity of the robbers are not the virtues of courage and practical wisdom. Instead, they are enablers of injustice. I shall argue not only that this counterintuitive conclusion should be rejected, but also that it is arrived at because VA=RA is an idealization.

I shall maintain that the following cases are virtuous, wrong acts – counterexamples to VA=RA. Denying that these acts are wrong would be hard. However, to deny that they are virtuous acts one must reject the Threshold Doctrine. That is, to hold onto VA=RA, one must idealize virtue. VA=RA is an idealization.

Conflict of virtue: Suppose that two applicants are vying for one job. Paisley, the manager, knows that one applicant is more needy while the other is more deserving. Suppose that in this situation Paisley should select the more deserving applicant; awarding according to need would be morally wrong. According to VA=RA, hiring the needier applicant would therefore not be a virtuous act. In particular, it would not be benevolent. But that is counterintuitive. Almost everyone would describe the act of hiring the needier applicant as a benevolent act, which is why it would be admirable. But it would also be a vicious (unjust) and wrong act, which is why it would be deplorable.[24] Hiring the needy applicant would be admirably immoral; hiring the deserving applicant would be a morally right, dirty hands act. Both acts are counterexamples to VA=RA.

Overcompensation: Quigley knows that a common error when distributing goods is to grab too large a share of goods (or too small a share of burdens), yet think that they are acting justly. Quigley worries that he might be such a person, so the infrequent occasions when he is in conflict-of-interest situations, Quigley goes to the other extreme. He shortchanges himself a bit in order to avoid this failure mode. Common sense might say, paradoxically, that he is just-to-a-fault. Taking these precautions is a virtuous thing to do, but of course mal-distributing goods and burdens is wrong. Thus, Quigley's precautions are counterexamples to VA=RA.

Learner virtue: Rosy is a recently reformed alcoholic. She knows that it is crucial to take precautions against a disastrous relapse. Avoiding parties with open bars is a top priority, so she turns down an invitation to her best friend's wedding, even though she knows that doing so will offend her friend. This is clearly the right thing for Rosy to do, but not the temperate thing to do. The temperate choice in this situation would be to attend the wedding and drink moderately. Rosy's refusal to attend the wedding is counterexample to VA=RA.

Role virtue v. virtue: Stanley is a trial lawyer. His role in the justice system sometimes requires him to manipulate and deceive juries. Assuming that the justice system is adversarial and reasonably fair, Stanley is acting rightly. But these are not honest acts. Stanley's deceptions are counterexamples to VA=RA.

Why does VA=RA yield counterintuitive results in the cases of Paisley, Quigley, Rosy, Stanley, and the heist movie protagonists? VA=RA is the thesis that each virtue gets it right in absolutely every situation. All actions which are not right are not virtuous, and all non-virtuous acts are not right. But this is the idealization that V=VI with respect to the component of action.

My Account: The Perspective Doctrine of Virtue

I have provided counterexamples to CA=RA, but that is insufficient. All doctrines have problems. To defeat CA=RA, I must provide a better alternative.

When identifying virtues, some thinkers envision a choice between (a) character traits so flexible and knowledgeable that they always issue in right action (i.e. CA=RA), and (b) character traits so inflexible and ignorant that they produce mere rote behaviors (i.e. dispositions to feel and react to circumstances in a rigid, unvarying way).[25] These thinkers accept the VA=RA account of virtue because they take the alternative to be worse. I shall offer a third alternative.

As I mentioned above, each virtue has its own proper sphere, a set of situations that it naturally governs. Courage governs situations involving physical risk; temperance governs situations involving physical pleasure; and so on. Virtues consist of components including passions and desires, so different sorts of situations activate different passions and desires. The situations governed by courage (risky situations), provoke fear and confidence, for example, but the situations governed by good-temper (insults and injuries) provoke anger, instead.

The components of each virtue (perception, passion, belief, desire, choice, and action) interrelate with each other in various ways. For example, passions and desires become salience projectors; they influence what agents perceive by foregrounding some things and backgrounding others.[26] That is, they structure perception. Of course, this is only half of a feedback loop, for it is an initial perception of the situation which activates the passions and desires in the first place. There are multiple feedback loops. Like passions and desires, beliefs and choices are activated by the perceptions of situations, and these, in turn, also structure perceptions of those situations.[27] Overall, the interrelated dispositions that make up a virtue combine to generate a pattern of appropriation of situations through perception, as well as patterns of rational, emotional, and actional responses. Speaking somewhat figuratively, I shall summarize this complex set of interactions by saying that *virtues picture situations in appropriate ways and push agents to make appropriate responses*.

Combine the facts that (a) different virtues involve different passions and desires, and (b) these passions and desires of virtues structure the way in which agents perceive situations. It follows that different virtues provide different sorts of pictures and push the agent to make different sorts of responses. Courage presents situations in terms of risks and precautions, and pushes agents to feel fear and confidence, and to take precautions and risks. Benevolence presents situations in terms of resources and opportunities to help the needy, and pushes agents to feel sympathy and use resources to help needy people when opportunities arise. And so on.

Since virtues are excellences, each virtue generally presents the right pictures, and urges the right responses to situations within its sphere *in a limited sense*. Courage will give better pictures and responses to a burning house than cowardice or rashness. It is the best character trait for dealing with the sphere of physical risk. But some situations of physical risk also involve matters of sensual pleasure, reputation, insult, neediness of others, etc., and these will be backgrounded by courage. Courage will not give excellent *overall* pictures and responses in overlap situations, but only excellent pictures and responses with respect to matters of risk, fear, etc. Virtues are specialists; they do great jobs within their sphere of competence, but each virtue

cannot do everything. If a single virtue could produce the right picture and response with respect to all matters in every situation, then functionally there would be only one virtue. Unlike Socrates, Aristotle sees the need for multiple virtues to cover different sorts of situations. They also cover situations which involve multiple goods. I shall call these situations where spheres intersect *overlap situations*. Courageous people will see a burning house as a risky place to be avoided, or entered only for very important reasons and with careful precautions. They will be watching out for flames, smoke, and collapsing beams. Benevolent people will see a burning house as a place in which others may need rescuing, comforting, loans to get back on their feet, etc. Benevolent people will be looking around for injured, trapped, mourning, destitute people to help. A courageous and benevolent person will do both, but they are two different things. Just as complex tasks require multiple specialists, so overlap situations require multiple virtues.

To summarize, since the components of different virtues differ from each other, they generate different pictures and responses. Each virtue generally gives the right pictures and responses from its perspective, but these may not be the overall right pictures and responses. I shall call this the *Perspective Doctrine of Virtue*.[28]

Together, the Threshold Doctrine and Perspective Doctrine provide better accounts of the counterexamples cases above. The straightforward application of the Threshold Doctrine conforms with common sense in cases of integral glitches, unfamiliar situations, triviality, and overcompensation. In cases of masking, each agent lacks one of the relevant virtues in an overlap situation, and this masks the fact that he or she possesses another relevant virtue. Learner virtues sometimes push agents to do the right thing, rather than the virtuous thing in overlap situations.

In overlap situations, virtues generally agree about what should be done, but sometimes they present *incompatible* pictures and responses. These are situations where two virtues conflict or a virtue conflicts with a role virtue. Paisley faces a situation in which benevolence and justice disagree, for example. Overlap situations where virtues disagree present dilemmas. If the stakes are very high, they are tragic dilemmas. The best that agents can do in such situations is to act in accord with one virtue, but in conflict with another. These acts will be both virtuous and vicious.

My Account: The Target Doctrine

I have argued against CA=RA by presenting counterexamples based upon common sense. Not only do some virtuous people occasionally slip out of character and perform vicious, wrong acts, virtuous people are sometimes driven by imperfections inherent their very virtues to perform vicious, wrong acts. Some people perform vicious acts despite their virtues, and paradoxically other people perform vicious acts because of their virtues. That is, some act wrongly because their virtues have gaps, i.e. because they do not engage in situations where they should engage. Others have virtues which over-engage.[29]

Virtuous acts are not defined in terms of what particular virtuous agents actually or predictably do, for virtuous agents sometimes act inappropriately, and then they are not performing virtuous acts. CA≠VA. Yet others perform wrong virtuous acts. Thus the virtuous and the right come apart when spheres overlap. VA≠RA.

Fans of CA=RA could make two moves. First, they might add exceptions to the claim that CA=RA. Hursthouse takes a step down this path. She is exquisitely aware of the fact that tragic dilemmas constitute counterexamples to her initial account of right action. She qualifies her account in the following way.

An act is right if and only if it is what a virtuous agent would characteristically (i.e. acting in character) do in the circumstances, except

for tragic dilemmas, in which a decision is right iff it is what such an agent would decide, but the action decided upon may be too terrible to be called 'right' or 'good'. (And a tragic dilemma is one from which a virtuous agent cannot emerge with her life unmarred.)[30] [31] [32]

Fans of CA=RA might add other epicycles to CA=RA, too. For example, they might maintain that right acts are the ones which *most* virtuous people would perform.

Alternatively, fans of CA=RA might reject some of the common sense intuitions. For example, they might maintain that common sense is mistaken to think that trial lawyers are acting rightly when they manipulate and deceive juries.

Adopting both strategies, I recommend tinkering with the initial claim of CA=RA, and also rejecting or modifying some of the intuitions which constitute counterexamples until the tweaked theory and tweaked set of intuitions match. Of course, this is *reflective equilibrium*. Reflective equilibrium is neither a top-down nor a bottom-up process, but rather it is a combination of both. Done well, reflective equilibrium will yield a plausible account of which acts are virtuous and which are right.

I shall define virtuous acts as acts which hit the *target of the virtue*. Targets are determined by a process of reflective equilibrium which takes as starting points (a) what most virtuous people see, feel, think, and do in each situation, (b) the considered judgments of reasonable people, taking care to include the judgments virtuous people with different cultural backgrounds, (c) theories of ethics, particularly virtue ethics, and (d) common sense. This process is, of course, one of the tasks of practical wisdom. I shall call the thesis that the targets of virtues are set by reflective equilibrium the *Target Doctrine of Virtue*.[33]

The behavior and beliefs of virtuous people are taken into account by this process, but do not constitute the sole touchstone for determining which actions are virtuous. In simple cases, what most virtuous people do is right. Considering only simple cases leads to CA=RA.

Similarly, particular philosophic doctrines are taken into account, but are not, by themselves, sufficient. For example, I am a eudaemonist about virtue. That is, I take the virtues to be character traits which are conducive to the happiness or well-being of their possessors. This might seem to be a purely scientific question. Specify well-being, and then investigate which character traits are more likely to lead to it. But because science is neither complete nor normative, eudaimonists must appeal to (a) through (d), above.

RECIPROCITY OF THE VIRTUES

The *Reciprocity of Virtues Doctrine* (says that if a person has one virtue then he or she has all virtues. RV does not seem to be an idealization. If the Particularity Doctrine is accepted, it is hardly impossible, or even terribly rare for a person to have all of the virtues. However, I shall show how the argument for the Reciprocity of Virtues Doctrine involves an ideal, and why the doctrine should be rejected. The Reciprocity of Virtues Doctrine may be formalized thus:

(1) A virtue consists of cognitive components (including a part of practical wisdom) and non-cognitive components (habits of passions, desires, and actions). Courage = courage-knowledge + courage-habits. [definition]

(2) If Titania has any proper virtue, then she possesses a part of practical wisdom. [from (1)]

(3) If Titania possesses one part of practical wisdom, then she also possesses all of the other parts of practical wisdom. That is, if Titania knows which acts are in accord with one virtue, then she also knows which acts are in accord with all of the other virtues.

(4) If Titania has all of the parts of practical wisdom, then she possesses the practical wisdom component of all of the virtues. Practical wisdom = courage-knowledge + temperance-knowledge + benevolence-knowledge + … [definition]

(5) If Titania possesses one part of practical wisdom, then she possesses the practical wisdom component of all of the virtues. [from (3) and (4)]

(6) If Titania possesses the practical wisdom component of a virtue, then she also possesses the character virtue component of that virtue. That is, if Titania knows which acts are in accord with one virtue, then she also has the habits of passion, desire, and action appropriate to that virtue.

(7) Therefore, if Titania has any one of the proper virtues, then she possesses them all. [from (5) and (6)][34]

This argument for the Reciprocity of Virtues Doctrine fails.

Lines (1), (2), (4), and (5) of this argument are uncontroversial. As others have observed, continent and incontinent people are counterexamples to (6). Practical wisdom is conducive to the eventual acquisition of moral virtue, and hinders the loss of moral virtue. But that is not enough, for (7) rules out the possibility that a person could possess one moral virtue while struggling to acquire others, or while having lost others.[35] To accommodate this point one might replace (6) and (7) with the following:

(6') If Titania possesses the practical wisdom component of a virtue, then her ability to gain and retain the character virtue component of that virtue is enhanced.

(7') Therefore, if Titania has any one of the proper virtues, then her ability to gain and retain the other virtues is enhanced.

Is (6') true? Moral development within one sphere affects the moral development within the others, but backwardness in one sphere does not *always* retard progress in others. Some people act well in some spheres solely because they are morally backward with respect to others. Trying to compensate for a failing can lead to a success, often in a different arena. Conversely, progress in one sphere may trigger an overall decline in a person's character. Success can make people cocky, and then they give themselves permission to let down their guard. So although (6') is less bold than (6), (6') is also false.

Even if (6') were true, it would not suffice. While (7') is much more plausible than (7), it is also quite far from the Reciprocity of Virtues Doctrine.

I shall focus on a different problem. Why believe (3)? Presumably, the reasoning underlying (3) is this. Values must be balanced against each other in various situations. For example, courage requires understanding the proper relationship between physical safety and other values. Now, there is no single thing which is *the* value of safety. Rather there is the value of safety in this trade-off, that trade-off, the other trade-off, etc. In order to know which acts are courageous, Upton must know which goals are worth which physical risks. He will need to know how to balance safety against sensual pleasure, for example, in situations where gaining some sensual pleasure is risky. Now a fully courageous person must have the knowledge to deal correctly with *all* sorts of situations involving physical risk. So Upton must correctly value not only safety and sensual pleasure, but all other goods, too. Courage-knowledge includes knowledge of when to sacrifice safety for sensual pleasure, for money, for honor, and so on. That is, courage-knowledge includes the knowledge of what to do in all overlap situations involving courage, and this requires having a proper understanding of the relative worth of all goods. Thus,

a courageous person must have the knowledge components of all of the other virtues. A similar argument would show that a person with *any* virtue must possess all of the other virtues. Thus, in order to reliably act, feel, and think correctly with respect to any sort of situation, Upton must reliably act, feel, and think correctly with respect to all sorts of situations.[36]

However, the fact that courage-knowledge includes knowledge of what to do in overlap situations does not imply that courage-knowledge includes all virtue-knowledge. After all, some situations are not overlap situations. Temperance-knowledge, for example, includes knowledge of when to sacrifice one sort of sensual pleasure for another. But this is not part of courage-knowledge. Moreover, some overlap situations do not involve safety. Temperance-knowledge includes the knowledge of when to sacrifice honor for sensual pleasure. But this is not part of courage-knowledge. There is certainly some interrelationship among the parts of practical wisdom, but Upton doesn't need to know *everything* there is to know about temperance in order to know *everything* there is to know about courage. So Upton can have all of courage-knowledge without having all of temperance-knowledge. Violet may have some parts of practical wisdom without having all of them. In general, (3) is false; practical wisdom is not a unity.[37]

The Reciprocity of Virtues Doctrine is an idealization.

Suppose the Reciprocity of Virtues Doctrine and the Threshold Doctrine are both true. Concretely, suppose that to have a virtue one must handle merely 99.5% of the situations within the sphere of that virtue well. Suppose further that there are ten virtues, and that each has a sphere consisting of the same number of situations. Finally, suppose that Violet handles 99.6% of the situations involving sensual pleasure well, and .1% of the remaining situations involve physical risk. Similarly, Violet handles only 99.6% of the situations involving money well, and a different .1% involve physical risk. And so on for the remaining seven virtues. Now Violet has nine of the ten virtues, but is she courageous? It follows from the fact that the other nine virtues go wrong when they overlap with courage that Violet only handles at most 99.1% of the situations involving physical risk well. Since she falls below the 99.5% threshold, Violet is not courageous. Since Violet has the other nine virtues, he is a counterexample to the Reciprocity of Virtues Doctrine.[38]

Notice that no matter what threshold is chosen, a similar reductio can be constructed. The theoretical assumptions in this reductio are the Reciprocity of Virtues Doctrine and the Threshold Doctrine. To save the Reciprocity of Virtues Doctrine, its fans must idealize the virtues by rejecting the Threshold Doctrine.

The Reciprocity of Virtues Doctrine insists that if a person lacks even one virtue, then he/she lacks all virtues. Yet we all know people who act, feel, desire, believe, reason, and perceive very well in some spheres of their life despite their weaknesses and even failures in other spheres. Moral development takes place at different rates, in fits and starts, along different routes for each sphere of human life. Many people have made it to the highest stages of moral development with respect to some spheres, while simultaneously remaining stuck at low stages with respect to other spheres. The Reciprocity of Virtues Doctrine clashes with common sense by denying that these people are virtuous. Unevenly virtuous people are counterexamples to (3).

Virtue ethicists tend to focus on moral progress, but backsliding highlights the counterintuitiveness of the Reciprocity of Virtues Doctrine. Suppose that Wiggins has all of the virtues, and then loses one. Suppose for example, that after a tour of duty in Iraq, he returns with PTSD which expresses itself as inappropriate fears. Now Wiggins is no longer courageous. Suppose further that in overlap situations, his other virtues mask his lack of courage. He

continues to enjoy the same sensual pleasures, perform the same generous acts, tell and tolerate the same jokes, etc. that he did before going to Iraq. The Reciprocity of Virtues Doctrine implies that Wiggins is no longer temperate, generous, witty, etc. But that is quite a counterintuitive implication. Virtues are stable dispositions. They do not change quickly or easily. His PTSD may erode his other virtues eventually, but for a while, Wiggins will have the same dispositions he had before Iraq with the exception of courage. The Reciprocity of Virtues Doctrine implies that these dispositions are no longer virtues, even though they have not yet changed.[39]

My Account: Unevenly Virtuous People

To avoid idealization, accept the possibility of incontinence, and replace the Reciprocity of Virtues Doctrine with the *Unevenly Virtuous People Doctrine* which simply says that a person can have some, but not all of the virtues.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that in a virtue ethics context, idealization is theoretically problematic and practically counterproductive. Virtue ethicists should shun it. But shunning will not be easy. Three widely-held doctrines (the Corrective Doctrine, CA=RA, and the Reciprocity of Virtues Doctrine) depend upon idealization, and thus must also be rejected. I have suggested substituting the Doctrine of the Mean, the Target and Perspective Doctrines, and the Unevenly Virtuous People Doctrine.[40]

The best is the enemy of the good. – Voltaire in <u>La Bégueule</u>

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ENDNOTES

[1] Many theories of virtue ethics utilize ideals implicitly or explicitly at key points. Swanton is one of the few swimming against this current. Aristotle is another. See Curzer 2005, 233-256, Swanton 207.

[2] Russell is an exception. See Russell 111ff.

[3] Russell explicitly separates an idealized model in which the virtues are unified from real people in whom virtues are not unified. See Russell pp. 367-373. Russell takes an idealization account to model actual people, but I suggest that an idealization account is more misleading than helpful.

[4] Russell 111-130.

[5] Swanton 206ff.

[6] Frost et al 1990, Hewitt and Flett 1991, 1996.

[7] Hausenblas 2013.

[8]

[9] I am not suggesting that ethicists who promulgate idealizations are the ones who deploy them in nefarious ways, but only that once promulgated, ideals are available to be so deployed. Ideal-creators are not exploiters, but they are enablers.

[10] By "perception," I do not mean awareness of simple particulars (e.g. color patches, smells), but rather awareness of much more complex particulars (e.g. comfy chairs, insults). Forms of cognition might be arranged on a spectrum with awareness of simple particulars on one end and complex syllogisms on the other. Somewhere on that spectrum one must divide perception from reason. I shall bundle quite a lot of the spectrum into perception.

[11] Swanton 24-25.

[12] Tessman 162-168.

[13] Heidegger ---

[14] Foot 8-9.

[15] The Corrective Doctrine is also worrisome because it defines the good in terms of the bad.

[16] Walker 54.

[17] Curzer 2011 88.

[18] Hursthouse 28.

[19] The act need not actually flow from these dispositions; it need only be the sort of act that would typically flow from them. If Jocko does something under hypnotic suggestion that he would have done anyway, the act is characteristic of Jocko even though it did not actually flow from his character.

[20] To preserve CA=VA without outraging common sense, might fans of CA=VA opt for the virtue interpretation of "characteristic" action? No. Not only does it beg the question, the virtue interpretation also depends upon an idealization, namely the person who acts perfectly. If fans of

CA=VA tamper with the other side of the equation by maintaining that only perfect people are virtuous, they would be opting for a different idealization, namely V=VI.

[21] For example, Gert says that a moral virtue is "any character trait that involves justifiably obeying the moral rules or following moral ideals" (Gert 156). Kant defines the virtues as a sort of ability exercised in following the edicts of the Categorical Imperative. "Virtue is…moral strength in pursuing our duty…" (Kant 147).

[22] Driver maintains that virtues are character traits that tend to produce good consequences for others. See Driver 122. Sidgwick takes virtues to be dispositions to perform obligatory or supererogatory actions. See Sidgwick 221.

[23] After deploying an account of virtue, Slote takes an act to be morally right if and only if it is *actually motivated* by the virtue of a virtuous agent. See Slote 5ff. See also Oakley 36. Hursthouse is less strict. She says, "An act is right if and only if it is what a virtuous agent would characteristically (i.e. acting in character) do in the circumstances" (Hursthouse 28). See also Zagzebski 135. So unlike Slote, Hursthouse maintains that acts that are merely *in accord with* a virtue are right even if they do not actually flow from a virtue.

[24] This act is both benevolent and unjust according to CA=VA under either the character trait or predictability interpretation of "characteristic."

[25] Badhwar 310-312, Russell 339-342.

[26] Barrick et al. 67–71.

[27] Gegenfurtner et al, ---

[28] Similarly, Swanton distinguishes between acts which are *virtuous* (they hit the target of a particular virtue) and acts which are *overall virtuous* and therefore right (they are the best acts available in the circumstances). These diverge in cases such as Paisley's case. See Swanton 239-240.

[29] VA=RA yield counterintuitive results in the cases of Larry, Paisley, and Obadiah, too, under either the character trait or predictability interpretation of "characteristic," but not on my alternative to VA=RA.

[30] Hurshouse 79.

[31] For criticism of Hursthouse's distinction between act-evaluation and act-guidance see Van Zyl 50-61.

[32] Hursthouse is saying that CA≠RA, but she does not break CA=RA into CA=VA plus VA=RA. Thus, it is unclear whether her view is that acts chosen by virtuous agents in tragic dilemmas are (a) virtuous, but not right (counterexamples to VA=RA), or (b) characteristic, but not virtuous (counterexamples to CA=VA), or (c) neither.

[33] I take the target doctrine and terminology with some modifications from Swanton.

[34] Similar arguments for full or partial unity of ideal virtues are advanced by many. See Annas 73-79, Badhwar 306-328, Cooper 87-88, Irwin 66-69, Watson 57-74, and Wolf 148-163.

[35] Telfer 35-48.

[36] Eudaimonists might further explain that courage-knowledge includes the knowledge of how safety fits into the good life, so it requires at least a vague grasp of the good life as a whole.

[37] Badhwar 313-315.

[38] If VA=RA, then all virtues relevant to a situation must concur with each other about what acts are right in that situation. Wesley's courage cannot respond to these overlap situations appropriately while his temperance, benevolence, etc. respond inappropriately because this

would be a counterexample to VA=RA. Therefore, there is really only one determination being made by the unified faculty of practical wisdom.

[39] Badhwar defines a *domain* as an important, compartmentalizable area of life. Her *Limited Unity of Virtue Doctrine* says that the Reciprocity of Virtues Doctrine is true within, but not across domains. More precisely:

    (a) Possession of one virtue within a domain implies possession of all of the virtues within that domain. An example of a virtue within a domain is generosity-with-respect-to-family-members.

    (b) Possession of one virtue within a domain implies lack of vice (in particular, lack of moral ignorance) in most other domains.

    (c) Possession of one virtue within a domain does not imply possession of that virtue, or any other virtue within other domains. (Badhwar 308)

Does the Limited Unity of Virtue Doctrine capture the intuitions underlying the Reciprocity of Virtues Doctrine without its drawbacks? Well, my arguments against the Reciprocity of Virtues Doctrine work within domains, refuting (a). After all, if people can compartmentalize with respect to domains, why not with respect to spheres of virtues? Badhwar, herself, says that thesis (a) would have to be abandoned if "[d] the psychological dispositions needed for certain virtues inevitably conflicted with those needed for certain others, or if [e] human beings were prone to habitual – dispositional blind spots in every domain" (Badhwar 325). But (d) is arguably true (Slote 30-31, 41-45, Walker 47-53), and (e) is obviously true.

Badhwar says that (b) is true because, "vice entails a fundamental (and culpable) ignorance, [about some aspect of the good. But] … an individual who is wise and virtuous in one domain … will necessarily have an *understanding* of the good in most domains" (Badhwar 320). However, it is quite possible – even common – for people to be totally clueless outside of a domain within which they are knowledgeable. Since domains are, by definition compartmentalizable, then there is no reason to accept (b).