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Virtuous People and Moral Reasons

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Abstract
Do we have a unified pre-theoretical concept of *morality*? This paper makes a start on the larger argument that we do not, by countering criticisms of virtue ethics on the ground that it does not adequately capture such a pre-theoretical concept. One criticism is discussed and met, namely that the reasons on which virtuous people act fail to have the special force of *moral* reasons.

Keywords Virtue · Morality · Requirements

Does a virtuous person recognize, and act on, *moral* reasons? –That is, are the reasons she recognizes and acts on, *moral* ones? This is a problematic question; it brings together two ways of thinking about ethics, *virtue* and *morality*, which don't fit easily together. This has become clear since the revival of virtue ethics; criticisms of virtue ethics often take for granted that there is a clearly demarcated and commonly accepted conception of morality which is common ground, while virtue ethicists do not take this for granted, and sometimes reject it.

There is, of course, a generic notion of morality in which it just refers to the whole subject we talk about when talking in terms of morality, virtue or ethics. This is an interesting point and I will return to it at the end. There are also uses which are intended to be more specific, usually appearing in phrases like 'moral rules' or 'moral principles'. These, like 'moral reasons' in my title, are challenging because it's difficult for a virtue ethicist to understand them without further explanation. They are frequently used in articles on ethical philosophy by professional philosophers, but it takes only a little attention to debates with virtue ethicists to see that there is no agreed account of what is meant by 'moral' in them.

One way of beginning to get clarity about morality is to ask, What kinds of reason does the virtuous person - acting virtuously, that is, *as* a virtuous person - act on? After we get some grip on this, we can ask whether this amounts to acting on a *moral* reason, or whether there is something still missing. This is a promising start on the problem of gaining an understanding of what morality is, though it is of course just a beginning.

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1 Virtue Reasons

We have to be careful, right at the start, with the idea of 'the virtuous person'. Sometimes the virtuous person is taken to be the *ideally* or the *completely* virtuous person, and the question is then raised, what use it is for me, when I am nothing like this, to be thinking about such a person? The ideally virtuous person's decisions would be made by applying ideal mastery of the virtues, and this is no help to me, since I lack this ideal mastery. And the ideally virtuous person might not even be in the situation of making my decisions, since my situation might be the product of choices she wouldn't make.[1]

This is not a deep problem, however, because the virtuous person is an ideal that each of us has and aspires to, and each of us has it in their own case. At least, this is so in the type of virtue ethics which I defend, that is, eudaimonist virtue ethics. This is sometimes called 'neo-Aristotelian', but that is misleading: contemporary eudaimonist virtue ethics need not, and for the most part does not, defer to Aristotle on ethical issues like the doctrine of the mean, or meta-ethical issues like naturalism. In this paper I assume only that eudaimonist virtue ethics is a type of theory in which the two central concepts are those of virtue and eudaimonia (happiness or flourishing), and that neither is more foundational than the other.[2]

Aspiring to an ideal is, for me, aspiring to be a better person than I am, and the content of this - how to do it - is to be filled out by the development of my character as I exercise it in the circumstances and situations that I actually live in and deal with. There is, and can be, no such thing as 'the virtuous person' where this is taken to be the person who is virtuous in all circumstances; nobody lives 'in all circumstances', since this makes no sense. Each of us lives our own life in our own circumstances, and, obviously, develops the virtues in those. When we think of the virtuous person in the context of action guidance and decision, then, this is just thinking of the ordinary person, embedded in their life, insofar as they are virtuous - that is, has virtues. The virtuous person is just you or me, considered as having the virtues that we have, to the extent that we have them,[3] and, in having the virtues, continually aspiring to do better (for having a virtue, as opposed to having some other kind of trait, *is* to be aspiring to do better).

So let us suppose a virtuous person – an ordinary person with family, a job, commitments and beliefs of various kinds. She is (to some extent) fair, generous and brave, to take only three virtues. What kinds of reason does she act on, when acting as a virtuous person?

Well, obviously she acts on *virtue reasons*, reasons provided by virtue. She stands up when a child is bullied on the bus because she is courageous, just and compassionate, and sees that that action is what courage, justice and compassion require; she takes on some extra work for a colleague who is feeling sick because she is generous and that's what generosity demands; and so on. We have known, ever since Rosalind Hursthouse pointed it out clearly in *On Virtue Ethics*, that there is nothing at all vague or unspecific about these virtue reasons.[4] It is virtues which make it salient to us that others are in need of help, support and encouragement.

[1] Johnson (2003) raises this issue.

[2] It's not entirely wrong to think of these as Aristotelian, since they are first presented in a reflective and systematic discussion by Aristotle, but they are the basis for ethical thinking in general through Greco-Roman antiquity and far beyond.

[3] Virtue theorists and others dispute about how virtuous ordinary people are, but this does not matter for the present point.

[4] Hursthouse (1999), chapter 6.

How do virtue reasons come to motivate us in this way? To understand this we have to look briefly at the way virtues develop.[5] When young we get told what to do, and given rules about which kinds of action we should do, or not do. But as we grow up, we move beyond just following rules that specify in advance what kinds of actions we are told to do. We start to ask about, and come to understand, the kind of reason that we act on, and the kind of disposition that a person has who acts on certain kinds of reasons. We come to realize that the point of doing the actions that we were just told to do is that they are the kinds of action which express certain dispositions. We were told to do, or to admire, brave and generous actions; we come to grasp that they express dispositions of bravery and generosity, and we then come to understand, by degrees, what bravery and generosity are. At some point we apprehend that these are not just dispositions to do certain kinds of action specified in advance, such as standing up for what is right, or giving people money, actions listed in a rule or principle. Rather, bravery is the disposition (very roughly) to respond appropriately in situations that require enduring adversity for the sake of what is right, or standing up for what is wrongly threatened. Generosity is the disposition (very roughly) to act appropriately in responding to what a certain type of situation demands, one which requires giving money to people who need it, and who need *money*, rather than another kind of help; giving aid to people who need it when you can give the right kind of aid; yielding an opportunity to someone who would benefit from it; and so on. No list of situations can enable someone to demarcate the range of, and then develop, these kinds of practically intelligent dispositions. To act on reasons of virtue, then, is to have developed a disposition to act in ways that require both intelligent discernment and the developed motivation to act in ways that are focussed by that. The person acting on reasons of virtue – because the action is required by compassion, tact or whatever – may employ, as short-cuts or on the way to learning a more nuanced view, rules that specify types of situation in advance. The person learning to be generous, for example, will at first need to learn not to give money impulsively (especially not to unsupported pleas on email). But these rules are 'training wheels', to be discarded as she learns how to respond to the requirements of generosity in an ever wider and more intelligent way.[6]

The virtuous person, then, will respond to, and act on, reasons of virtue, and once we appreciate what this involves we can see that this is a developed, and still developing, way of having actions guided and constrained by virtue. She won't, however, think and decide only in terms of virtue. She will also think in terms of the *right thing to do,* or of what would be *the right action*. What is the right thing to do here? What should you do? If I were to help this student now would it be wrong? What ought a generous person to do in this situation? We think in these terms however virtuous (or not) we are.

'Should', 'ought' and 'right', (so-called *deontic* terms) are 'thin' terms; they convey minimal, or no, information. This point doesn't need argument for 'right', 'wrong', 'ought' and the like. Being told to do what you ought to do or should do, or to do the right thing, leaves you so far completely stranded; before anything further we need to know *what it is* that we ought to do, what the right thing to do here *is*. We learn deontic terms first with the backing of directives from others, and then, as we grow up, in terms of the virtues, as we

[5] We can't understand what virtues are without understanding how they develop; beginning from a mature virtuous person and looking at already developed cognitive and motivational structures is unhelpful. This is one reason why the orthodox distinction between 'normative' and 'motivating' reasons is unhelpful, and can be misleading, in the case of virtue ethics.

[6] This brief sketch is filled out in Annas (2011) chapters 2–3 and (2015).

come to understand those, because we need to understand for ourselves *why* we should do what we are told to do. We start out thinking in terms of the right (and wrong) thing to do when we are reliant on others, such as our parents, to tell us what to do; they tell us which specific actions are right, which kind of actions we ought to do, and so on. We do this, and follow rules in these terms, and, as we do it, we come to learn which actions are generous, brave and so on. We move, as described, from doing actions already specified for us to grasping *why* people with certain dispositions do those actions, and we begin to understand what generosity is. And as we become more generous we become better able to discern for ourselves what is the generous, and so right thing for the generous person to do. And so on. We start out by being taught what the right thing to do is; but as we gain mastery of the virtue terms this reliance drops away, and our uses of the virtue and the deontic terms develop together. Because deontic terms are thin and cannot guide us on their own, our use of them needs to be guided, and constrained, by our understanding of the relevant virtues.[7]

The virtuous person also acts for reasons of duty and obligation. I can't here go into the role of duty and obligation in eudaimonist virtue ethics, except to make the point that in virtue ethics right action is not to be identified with duty and obligation, which are utterly distinct from the right thing to do. To conflate them is to make the 'fusion assumption', which fuses the notion of doing the right thing and doing what is your duty or obligation, something that happens, without being remarked upon, in many ethical theories. I am not arguing this point here, though I think it is a commonsensical one, and that theorists are generally unaware that in identifying duty and obligation with doing the right thing they are making a controversial move.[8]

So, you or I are doing our best to be generous or brave or to act in accordance with whichever virtue makes demands in a particular situation. Given the story I have told, we see that the virtuous person does, for example, the brave thing where bravery is what is required. She stands up and intervenes when a child is bullied on the bus. She does this because it is the right thing to do – and the 'right thing to do' is not empty for her, because it is what is required by bravery, justice and compassion. She discerns that this is a situation where something unjust is being done (justice) and also discerns that she should intervene to rescue the situation (bravery) and that she should rescue the child from the bullying, since the child is suffering and is not going to be able to rescue himself (compassion). All this expresses her developed character, which is such that appreciating these factors is enough for her to get up and intervene. She does not have to reflect and make herself do it; the development of virtue is a development of intelligence and motivation together. The virtues make demands to which she responds, even though there is in this case no duty or obligation for her to respond to.

1.1 Moral Reasons?

So: is the virtue reason a *moral* reason? Here we find lack of consensus. *Is* she, as described so far, acting on a reason of *morality*, or a *moral* reason? Obviously the answer depends on

[7] This is argued in detail in Annas (2011), chapters 2–4.

[8] In Annas (2014) and (2015) I suggest how duty and obligation are distinguished, within virtue ethics, from doing the right thing. These are commonly run together in work on ethics, though there is occasional protest - back in a 1952 article we find recognition that ordinary uses of 'duty' belong with commitments, while in 'the sense usual in moral philosophy' 'duty' is without argument assumed to be just 'the right thing to do' or 'the best thing to do'. (Whiteley (1952), (1969)).

your definition of *morality*, though surprisingly few philosophers who write about morality recognize this point, which is sharply evident with virtue. We can point out that *virtue* and *morality* come out of different traditions, and support can be found for this in the fact that there is no term in Aristotle or other ancient theorists of ethics that corresponds to 'morality'.[9] But this ignores the fact that Aristotle, Hume, Kant, Mill and Nietzsche, despite the different roles of virtue in their theories, are all figures in a continuous history of ethical thinking. Virtue and morality figure in the same history. Refusing to relate virtue to morality is giving up too soon.

Is the problem then that there is a specific aspect of morality not expressed in the virtuous person's actions in the scenario, an aspect sufficiently important that the virtuous person's reasons fail as *moral* ones? Morality in a specific sense has been understood in a variety of ways, so there are a number of different aspects to appeal to when querying the idea that the virtuous person acts on moral reasons. In what follows I am not considering *theories* of morality, of which there are many. I discuss what is supposed to be the everyday conception of morality in the specific sense, the pre-theoretic conception that theories of morality relate themselves to, because it is this which is appealed to when virtue appears to miss, or fall short of, morality.

In what way is the virtuous person in the situation on the bus lacking something that would entitle her to be said to be acting on a *moral* reason? The idea that there is *something* lacking here is, in my experience, quite common, and often rests on the claim that there is something completely obvious here that virtue ethicists are missing: responding to the demands of virtue falls short of what we are all supposed straightforwardly to recognize as a response to *moral* demands. This is a claim about the phenomenology of morality: we are supposed to recognize a moral reason, or the lack of one, in a way which precedes our having a theory about it. We are taken simply to recognize the special kind of force that a moral reason has. A moral reason is a distinct kind of reason with a *distinctive* kind of force, and we are supposed to find this a plain fact of our experience.[10]

This phenomenology is far from universal, and in particular fails to appear in entire traditions (including non-Western traditions) of thinking about good and bad, right and wrong. This makes a claim based on it problematic, to say the least. Sometimes the claim is dismissed on the grounds that, since the phenomenology in question so clearly fails to be universally shared, it can only be a projection of the conventions and mores of specific societies. Elizabeth Anscombe famously dismissed the emphatic 'morally' in '*morally* ought' as having a 'delusive appearance of content' because it had become cut off from the family of concepts within which it had the sanction of divine law, and had retained merely a psychological force with

[9] This has led some to follow Williams (1985) chapter 10, in seeing morality as a distinct 'peculiar institution' within the wider field of ethics. This is too sharp a distinction; virtue, duty and right action are by now intermingled in our ordinary discourse, and a good theory should account for all of them in a reasonably unified way.

[10] Mandelbaum (1969) takes the phenomenology of 'moral experience' to tell us directly about 'judgement of moral rightness or wrongness', with our judgment about virtue and vice only secondary (see chapter 4). In this he has been followed by contemporary philosophers who are concerned with moral phenomenology (see Horgan and Timmons 2008). In Annas (2008b) I make a start on the neglected field of the phenomenology of virtue.

nothing substantive to back it up. This diagnosis was perfectly fair about some of the philosophers she was criticizing.[11]

But dismissing the objection on this ground alone would be too quick. The claim about phenomenology tends to focus our attention on something else interesting that is being pointed to: the nature of the demand that morality is taken to make. People uncomfortable with the claim that the virtuous person described above is acting on a moral reason tend to think that her story *lacks* something important: namely that she is responding to a demand *different from* - and *stronger than* - any demand that could be recognized by the practical reasoning of the virtuous person as so far described. This comes out in the way that we think of it as a *categorical* reason, or one that *silences* or *trumps* or *overrides* other kinds of reason.[12] A moral reason is taken to have a distinctive kind of strength. It's the nature of this distinctive strength that we need to examine.

We are familiar with the *categorical* nature of moral demand: a moral reason is one you *must* act on regardless of certain aspects of you that may resist the demand. What are these obstructive aspects? Not just our desires, since desires also resist demands of other kinds (demands of self-interest or courtesy, for example). A moral reason is supposed to prevail against *all* your other goals, commitments and aspirations, as well as your desires. No matter how much your goals, commitments and aspirations embody all your *other* values, morality must always win. Morality, then, is taken to be distinct from, and potentially opposed to, everything else you desire, aim at, plan for, have as aspirations or goals.

This point is sometimes put by saying that moral reasons are experienced as *external* demands, 'external' here meaning 'external to the deliberating self', where this is constituted by the person's goals, aspirations, projects and commitments and the way these are ordered among themselves. This metaphor of externality presumably comes from the point that intuitively our picture of demand is one person demanding or requiring something of another, and so a moral demand is taken to have the force of a demand from somewhere outside the person on whom the demand is made.[13]

There is an interesting and powerful thought here: the thought that a demand which does not just win against all your other commitments, goals and so on, but silences, trumps or overrides them, must be coming from something distinct from *all* of them. (Hence the experience described by the metaphor of externality.) We are pointed to the idea that no deliberation within and among my desires, ambitions, aspirations and so on could produce a demand which could motivate me *as a whole* with the force that a moral demand has – a demand that silences or overrides *whatever* my desires, ambitions, goals, aspirations and so on are.

Virtue is the ongoing process of developing and integrating our aims and judgements. Above, I described acting on reasons of virtue as having developed 'a disposition to act in ways that require both intelligent discernment and the developed motivation to act in ways focused by that intelligent discernment'. This is the result of ethical development that emerges from deliberations between and among desires, aims, commitments and so on.

[11] Elizabeth Anscombe, (1958), (1997).

[12] These are common metaphors; the idea of 'silencing' in particular here is quite distinct from the very problematic use made of it by McDowell (1979).

[13] For other descriptions of this 'externality' of moral reasons see Glasgow (2012). This is quite different from Williams' distinction of 'internal and external reasons' (1981); Williams (1981, 109) claims that, 'it is very plausible to suppose that all external reasons statements are false,' whereas obviously nothing like this is implied by the present point about conceiving moral reasons as external to the deliberating self.

Virtue is a development which produces an ever deeper integration of the person's reasons and motivations. The virtuous person who acts well on an occasion acts from integrated motivation; there is no internal split. A *moral* reason, however, is supposed to override, silence or trump everything opposing it, being distinctively different from all of them. The result of the virtuous person's deliberations thus doesn't appear to overcome all other motivations as decisively as a moral reason is taken to do. Hence the idea that virtuous people who are acting virtuously still fail to act on a *moral* reason.

1.2 Virtuous Deliberation and the Force of Virtue

I have located the issue using the familiar metaphors of overriding, silencing and so on to describe the nature of moral reasons. I will now go behind the metaphors and show how reasons of virtue function in a person's deliberation. This meets the objection, showing the mistake when we assume that morality gives us reasons that are stronger and more decisive than virtue does.

Virtue develops in the day to day living of our particular lives, in which we have two kinds of aims. One is to achieve what I shall call our *objectives:* having a career, having relationships, caring about parents and children, making money, achieving a certain status or influence. Achieving our objectives is what takes up most of the day: our lives are focussed on finishing the job, writing the paper, shopping, planning and strategizing. This is a mundane fact about the lives of human beings in our social contexts.

We have a different kind of aim as well, one which is not in the same way explicit as we live our daily lives: achieving what I shall call our *overall goal:* that of being a certain kind of person. This is a goal which we are normally not aware of as we go about living our lives. Its presence forces itself on us when we have to consider how our lives are going, something which happens when we have to reflect on how to organize our objectives in our lives, or which objectives to have. It becomes most obvious when the way we are living leads to a conflict within our objectives which we have to solve, and this brings in our overall goal as what is relevant to the solution. Our overall goal is living a certain kind of life: being an honest person rather than greedy and corrupt, being someone with self-respect rather than a toady, and so on. This occupies us in a way different from the pursuit of our objectives, or of smaller-scale goals. We aim at our overall goal differently from the way we aim at our objectives. Our overall goal is what shapes our lives as we go for objectives such as money, prestige or the like, and forms the way we go about aiming for them. Some people passively take over from their parents or education the idea of being a certain kind of person. Most of us, though, start thinking at some point about the overall goal we have as a result of our earlier formation, and try to shape our lives actively. We aspire to become honest, brave, compassionate and generous.[14]

Do I have objectives *and* a goal? Do I aim, for example, to make money *and* to be honest? Yes, but not in the same way, so we have to be careful; we have two distinct kinds of aim that we achieve in distinct ways. It would be a mistake to think that I make money all day and *then*, in the evening, sit down and think, separately, about being honest - and then add up the results. During the day I will have *already* been making money honestly or

[14] Since we aspire from within the life and experience we have, this is often within roles like those of parent, judge or employee; I lack the space to go into this complication here. Also, I shelve issues of people who appear to go for goals like meanness and cruelty; this issue would take us too far from the present one.

dishonestly. Aiming to be virtuous is just to aim to live honestly, and so on, and living honestly is already making money honestly. Being virtuous is not living your ordinary life *and also* being virtuous. The virtuous person is virtuous not separately from living her life but *in* the way she lives her life, making money honestly, being generous in her relationships and so on. It is *in* going for her objectives that she aims at her goal – because, as often stressed, each of us aims to be virtuous in our own life, our own social context. I aim to be honest *in* making money – that is, in making money honestly rather than dishonestly. What then is the relation of honesty to my making money? Honesty is what *guides* my pursuit of money – I go for ways of making money that are clearly honest and do not shade off into dubious areas. And honesty is also what *constrains* my pursuit of money – it demands that I pass by dishonest ways of making money.

Here is an example. Take a young person whose father has successfully run a business honestly for many years. The son learns the business from him, but he is interested only in the objective of making money, and is indifferent to being honest. So, although his objective is in many ways like those of his father, at every point his emphasis is on the objective - how much money is made – and not at all on an overall goal of being an honest person and so achieving the objective in an honest way. Since he focusses only on making money in ways unguided and unconstrained by honesty, he notices not only honest ways of making money that his father practiced, but also dishonest ways of making money - ways that never occurred to his father, whose pursuit of money was guided and constrained by honesty. Going for money in these unconstrained ways the son proceeds to cheat unsuspecting clients. The difference between him and his father is *not* that he is interested in making money while his father was not. Nor is it that his father was interested in making money and also, separately, in being honest. The difference is that for the father his pursuit of money was guided and constrained by honesty, whereas for the son it is not.

We can say that the father acted on reasons of honesty, whereas the son did not. We can see by now that we could equally well say that the father acted on *moral* reasons, whereas the son did not. Each of these ways of describing what happened makes the point that the father responded to a demand which he experienced as coming not from particular objects of desire or aspiration but as a demand on *him*, one with a force distinct from that of any or all of those objects of desire or aspiration. Because honesty guided and constrained his pursuit of money, the demands of honesty, we can say, overrode or trumped temptations to be dishonest. The person who is indifferent to these demands fails to act on the demands of honesty. We can also say that he fails to act on a moral reason. The demands of virtue, we can see, are just as distinct from all the person's other reasons as are demands made in terms of morality. The way we seek the goal of being an honest person guides and constrains how we seek our objectives, and when it requires that we modify or even give up our pursuit of our objectives it functions not as one motivational force among others but as a constraint that we can perfectly well describe in the metaphors of overriding, trumping or silencing. We don't generally describe the demands of virtue as *categorical*, but the reasons for not doing so are just historical; the term has become associated with Kantian or deontological kinds of ethical thinking.

There is an interesting objection to my claim so far. I introduced this conception of moral reason in the way it is often introduced, by the phenomenology of demand, which points to the distinctive nature of the reason experienced. But it is a central point of accounts of virtue in virtue ethics that the mature virtuous person acts on reasons of virtue readily, without felt conflict or opposition from obstructive desires or aspirations. The virtuous person is characterized by a developing integration, sometimes described as

harmony, between her reasoning and her other motivations.[15] However, if acting on a moral reason is a response to a felt demand of a certain distinct, silencing kind, doesn't this look very different from the virtuous person's response to the situation? The virtuous response looked like one operating frictionlessly with the requirements of virtue, the response of a person whose motivations are harmoniously integrated. Can the virtuous response be seen as a response to a *demand*, a demand that she *ought, should, must* do something?

Here we need to note, though, that central to virtue in virtue ethics is the distinction between the virtuous person and the person who is 'encratic' (a term from Aristotle, sometimes translated 'continent'). This is the person who rightly discerns what she should or ought to do, but also experiences conflicting motivations: she realizes that she ought to be generous, but really wants to spend the money on something for herself, or she realizes that she should bravely oppose a political proposal, but fears loss of electoral support. So she does the generous or brave thing, but in a way that is still aware of the force of the opposing motivations, which may take the form of felt reluctance at the time, or regret later. To this person the requirements of virtue are *felt* as a demand, something to be obeyed although she would rather not.

The virtuous person recognizes that the requirements of virtue have the same force whether she wants (aspires, hopes etc.) to do the thing or not, but they are not *felt* as a demand, because they don't have to be. The virtuous person recognizes the nature of the demand – it constrains her whether or not her motivations align with it – but does not need to feel the force of the demand *as demanding*; it's the continent or encratic person who does. (Most of us are, unfortunately, encratic rather than virtuous.) Virtue reasons thus reflect the distinct nature of the demand being made, and the experience of demand is what shows us their distinct nature; but it is felt as demanding by the encratic, while the virtuous do not feel the demandingness, though they are perfectly aware of it. Encratic and virtuous thus relate to the demands of virtue in different ways; the experience of demandingness is the mark of the person aspiring to virtue but still on the way – that is, of all but a very few of us.

When reasons are thought of as divided between moral reasons, taken to be distinctively demanding, and all other reasons, which can be trumped or silenced by the moral reasons, the difference between the virtuous and the encratic is either obscured, or, more seriously, completely lost. When no difference is registered between the person who obeys morality readily and the one who does so reluctantly or regretfully, some important issues become puzzling, or get papered over. From this perspective, why does it matter to be the person who does the moral thing readily rather than the person who does so reluctantly? They have both done what they morally should; what else is there to say? The person who does the moral action readily is more meritorious than the one who struggles with opposing inclinations, but this has to be explained as secondary. This is one way in which virtue gives us a way of thinking about ethics which is richer and more complex than one with only the distinction between moral and other reasons. It is arguably closer to ordinary ways of thinking.

The relation virtue has to our objectives, namely guiding and constraining them, shows how virtue can make a demand on the person as a whole, without being separate and 'external' to all the person's commitments and projects. I started by noting that many philosophers fail to see how a demand could have the force that morality is supposed to have

[15] This is a standard aspect of virtue ethics since antiquity, now rejected only by virtue ethicists who place themselves outside what is called the 'neo-Aristotelian' tradition.

unless it comes somehow from outside all our desires and aspirations. But we have seen that virtue makes forceful demands as it guides and constrains our actions, requiring, not politely suggesting, that we do some things and refrain from doing others. Virtue does not make demands from a point of view totally distinct from the one from which we seek to attain our objectives, as morality is commonly seen to do. It makes demands on *how* we seek those objectives, and it may require us to give up some objectives altogether.

We can now see that, since virtue is not something we can extract from the way we pursue our objectives and weigh against them, there can be no trade-offs between virtue and objectives like money and power. This is a point which is often missed. Supporters of morality often argue that it is fundamental to a moral reason that there can be no trade-offs between it and other reasons, but there are clearly no trade-offs with virtue too; someone who acts dishonestly in no way lessens the dishonesty when there is a huge number of people benefitted.

What then is the missing ingredient the lack of which makes virtue fall short of the force of *morality*? When we look at what virtue is, and what it is to think in terms of virtue and its requirements, we can see that there is no missing ingredient.

Why then do many philosophers persist in thinking that there is? There are many different interesting answers to this, which I cannot pursue. All I have tried to do here is to show how a common claim is mistaken, namely the claim that the reasons of a virtuous person acting virtuously will fail to provide a certain forceful demand which can only be made by a *moral* reason. This comes from assuming that, to put it broadly, virtue ethics is all about aspiring to be good and virtuous, and integrating your motivations with your practical reasoning, while it fails to notice that we also recognize that sometimes, at least, the virtuous thing to do is what we are required to do, what we *must* do, whether we like it or not, and whether or not it goes against our deep goals, commitments and aspirations. This, as I have shown, is just wrong. Virtue ethics demands that we do and not do certain things, as well as that we aspire to do and not do certain things, and the demand that comes from virtue is no less forceful than the demand that is taken to come from moral reasons, as we are pre-theoretically supposed to understand those.

1.3 Back to Morality

I now return very briefly to a point at the beginning. I have tried to locate and answer one objection to the idea that virtue ethics can do what a theory of morality can do. But I have looked at only one conception of morality, namely one that insists on the distinct kind of force had by moral reasons. There are other aspects of morality which have been appealed to in attempts to show that virtue ethics cannot amount to a theory of morality.

It is, for example, still sometimes objected (though less frequently now) that virtue ethics cannot produce anything like a moral reason, because it is egoistic. Virtue is a state of your character, so, the claim goes, developing virtues must be a matter of developing *you*, rather than caring about other people, whereas *morality*, whatever else it is, is essentially about *other* people, not you. Morality is other-centred, virtue is not, so virtue cannot amount to morality. This objection has been so often refuted that it should no longer be taken seriously.[16] The virtues are dispositions to do what's virtuous, and so what's right,

[16] In Annas (2008a) I discuss various forms of this objection, and suggest why they are so tenacious, despite responses to them.

and neither of these refer essentially either to you or to other people. Virtue ethics has principled reasons for rejecting the usefulness of the egoism/altruism distinction in judging what is virtuous. Virtues benefit the person who has them *and* benefit others; they are not, either in their development or in any attempt to justify having them, *about* the person or *about* others.

Another objection is sometimes called the 'action-guiding' objection – the claim that morality essentially tells you what to do, whereas virtue ethics merely tells you the kind of person to be. We've already seen why this objection is a non-starter from the account I gave of the virtuous person: virtue ethics does tell you what to do, it just does it in a different way from giving you instructions, or rules, or commands.[17]

A third objection sometimes made is that, whatever else we can manage to say about it, it is a conceptual truth that morality is universal – moral rules and moral demands must apply to everyone. However, virtue is universal too; it is demanded of everybody. We may fail to notice this because it is not presented to us commonly as a conceptual point about virtue, as it is about morality. But how could bravery be a virtue if I should be brave, but not you? (Well, there might be relevant differences between me and you, but then the requirement to do the right thing in this context would, for the same kind and degree of relevance, provide a moral reason for me but not for you.) This point is sometimes not appreciated because of something already stressed: bravery demands that I act in my socially embedded life and you in yours, but there may be huge differences between these if I am bold and you are timid, or I am a pacifist and you are a Marine. But the demand is equally to be brave: of course this will take a different form in my life from the form it takes in yours, but this is just the everyday point that the circumstances of lives differ, which is not especially relevant to the demands of virtue being the same for all.[18]

I have here just briefly mentioned these common objections and gestured at ways they can be answered.[19] The point of citing them here is to show that we find that when we appeal to morality there are many different aspects of the ethical life that are being appealed to. We are forced to notice this when appeals to morality turn up in criticisms of virtue ethics, when we find that different criticisms rely on different, and sometimes disparate, notions of what morality is.

It is easy to find more conceptions of morality. 'Moral reasons are about only our important and serious concerns'; 'moral reasons emerge from social rules enabling people to get on with one another'; 'moral reasons come from rules that the individual accepts as applying to her (on a variety of grounds)'; 'morality is to be found in classifying actions as required, forbidden or permitted'; 'moral reasons are reasons of duty and obligation'. And there are surely others which I have missed.

These different aspects of morality don't readily combine. Being essentially other-directed, for example, has nothing to do with giving action guidance. Even among the ones that do consistently combine, none stands out as basic in a way that makes it explanatory of the others. Again, I emphasise that I am not arguing against a conception of morality defined by a philosophical theory, nor making the obvious point that morality as defined by one such theory is different from, and often incompatible with, morality as defined by a different theory. I'm making a point about morality understood as the phenomenon that these theories are

[17] Hursthouse (1999) Part I is still the best account of this.

[18] This response unfortunately sometimes leads to another mistaken objection, namely that virtues are relative to the societies they are exercised in, since acting virtuously makes different demands in different times and places. On this objection and responses, see Annas (2011) chapter 4.

[19] I hope in future work to deal in more depth with the disunified nature of our pre-theoretical concept of morality, and its impact on the reception of virtue ethics by the philosophical community.

supposed to be about. It is because we find a dissonant cluster of ideas behind the allegedly unitary and obvious idea of *morality* that virtue ethics has to establish its relations to morality piecemeal. In this paper I have taken on one challenge, but clearly many remain.

Apart from its intrinsic interest, taking note of the many competing conceptions of morality is important, because a supposedly unified pre-theoretical conception of morality is regularly assumed in disputes within morality in the broad sense. It is often appealed to when ethical theories are compared, particularly when the claims of virtue ethics are being contested. What is strikingly absent in many of these debates is worry about what the debate is actually about. Shouldn't we first raise the basic Socratic question about this supposedly unified pre-theoretical idea of morality, namely: What is this thing, *morality*, that we are making use of, and talking about as though we understood what it is?

We have a generic idea of morality, as the field that we are concerned with when we develop our theories of ethics or morality in the specific sense.[20] What happens to the generic idea, if it turns out that there is no one unified pre-theoretical conception of morality, but several, and also that all the specific conceptions of morality do no better in relation to virtue ethics than the one I have discussed here? I suspect that the generic idea of morality will then turn out just to *be* virtue ethics – but that obviously requires a great deal of further argument than I have been able to offer here.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest This work does not contain any conflict of interest or competing interest.

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[20] For other problems with this, see Midgley (1972).