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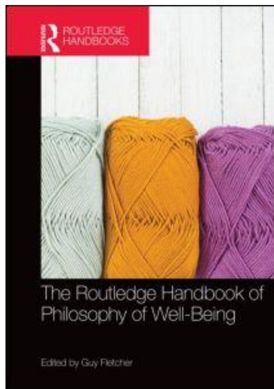

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20
VIRTUE AND WELL-BEING[1]

Anne Baril

Introduction

Ask a non-philosopher whether it's rational to be moral, and she will likely think the answer is relatively clear: intuitively, what is moral is often at odds with what is rational. For example, although giving a dollar to a needy stranger would be a moral thing to do, the rational thing to do would be to keep it for yourself. Among professional philosophers, by contrast, the answer is not so obvious. Philosophers have subtle views of rationality and morality. Seldom, if ever, do they understand norms of rationality as straightforwardly implying that we single-mindedly pursue our own self-interest, narrowly construed, and seldom, if ever, do they understand norms of morality as straightforwardly implying that we should always help others, regardless of our circumstances.

Among philosophers, then, the proposal that it is rationally permissible, or even required, to be moral, is not dismissed out of hand in light of apparent counterexamples. I propose that philosophers should take the same open-minded attitude to the proposal that virtue is compatible with, or even necessary for, well-being. Philosophers have sometimes denied that virtue is necessary for well-being on much the same grounds that our envisioned person on the street dismissed the possibility that morality may be rationally required: by pointing out apparent counterexamples (Haybron 2007: 5–11; see Chapter 15 by Besser-Jones, this volume). But, just like the question "is it rational to be moral?" the question "is virtue compatible with, or even required for, well-being?" cannot be dismissed so easily, because apparent counterexamples depend on only intuitive, commonsense, pre-theoretical understandings of virtue and well-being.

Any claim about the relationship between virtue and well-being must take the form of a conditional—for example: *if* this account of virtue and this account of well-being are correct, *then* virtue is necessary for (or compatible with, or the best bet for achieving, etc.) well-being.[2] This point sets the structure for this chapter. In this chapter, I will (1) sketch an account of virtue, (2) develop a specific sense in which one might argue that virtue is necessary for well-being, and (3) explore the prospects for the proposal that virtue is necessary for well-being, discussing some of the main accounts of well-being in turn. I will argue that on some (though not all) accounts of well-being, there is reason to think that, when we more fully develop an account of the (fundamental, direct, intrinsic) contributors to well-being, we may discover that virtue is indeed necessary for well-being.

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An account of virtue

Among the defenders of most every major ethical theory, there are those who have developed an account of virtue as part of, or as a supplement to, that theory.[3] According to some recent accounts, the virtues are the traits that promote social good (Driver 2001), that are "useful or agreeable to ourselves or others" (Hume 1777/1975: 268; see further Swanton forthcoming), that are possessed by moral exemplars (Zagzebski 2010), that manifest persisting excellence in being positively oriented towards what is (independently) good (Adams 2006; Baehr 2011), or that embody the perfection of agency (Becker 1998), to name just a few.

Some ethical theories are classified as "virtue ethics," paradigmatically the neo-Aristotelian eudaimonist virtue ethics defended by Hursthouse (1999). There is no widely accepted definition of "virtue ethics."[4] For our purposes, it will suffice to say that virtue ethical theories are ethical theories that give the virtues a central, and irreducible, role in their account of how human beings ought to live, all things considered. In this section, I will sketch an account of virtue that (in broad strokes, at least) has been developed by eudaimonist virtue ethicists. Call this account "VE."[5]

According to VE, a virtue is a set of strongly entrenched and systematically interrelated dispositions to act (and to act in a certain manner, for certain reasons), reason, feel, value, choose, perceive, respond (behaviorally, attitudinally, emotionally), and so on. When someone is honest, for example, she has a firm and settled disposition to think, act, reason, feel, etc. in ways that are characteristic of honest people; and, moreover, these dispositions "hang together," mutually supporting one another. Call these sets of strongly entrenched and systematically interrelated dispositions "character traits."[6]

In the most general terms, what makes a character trait a virtue, according to VE, is that it is part of overall virtue: it is part of the collection of character in virtue of which creatures like us—with our psychological dispositions, physical composition, and way of living—are admirable, noble, living excellently and well, rather than badly. The list of virtues, according to VE, includes many traits that also count as virtues on our ordinary, intuitive understanding of virtue, such as honesty, courage, justice, temperance, benevolence, generosity, open-mindedness, and conscientiousness. But these traits may not always match exactly our ordinary intuitive understanding of them.[7] In large part, this is because VE understands each virtue as fitting into a coherent whole: the verdicts of a given virtue do not conflict with the verdicts of practical reason, or the verdicts of any other virtue. I will explain each point in turn.

According to VE, each individual virtue is sensitive to, in keeping with, and generally an expression of, good practical reasoning (Kamtekar 2004; Russell 2009; Hursthouse 2013: section 2). A trait is a virtue only if its verdictive judgments do not conflict with what the agent has sufficient reason to do, all things considered.[8] This contrasts with a commonsense notion of a virtue, according to which the verdictive judgments of a virtue may sometimes conflict with practical reason.

To illustrate: on a popular understanding of honesty, the fully honest person will tell the truth even if there is best overall reason *not* to; on this view, lying is always dishonest, even if it is, all things considered, the best thing to do. Likewise, on a popular understanding of courage, the fully brave person is the one who is consistently willing to risk her own well-being, regardless of whether, upon reflection, that risk is worth taking; on this view, standing down from a challenge or fleeing a fight is always non-courageous, even if, all things considered, it was the best thing to do. This is emphatically *not* the way that VE understands honesty and courage. As VE understands the virtue of honesty, the honest person won't tell the truth when doing so would be stupid or cruel. As VE understands the virtue of courage, the courageous person won't

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risk her life in service of a worthless cause. Traits that offer verdictive judgments that conflict with practical reason are *not* virtues proper.

Understanding virtue in this way has certain counterintuitive consequences. On this account, it seems, the paradigmatically honest person may even, in certain circumstances, tell a lie![9] But understanding the virtues in this way is necessary if our account is to respect what, according to VE, is the more important intuition about the virtues—the intuition that virtues are *excellences* of character.[10]

The virtues, then, will not conflict with practical reason. Nor will they conflict with one another. This is contrary to a certain popular understanding of the virtues, according to which doing what is honest can be cruel, doing what is kind may be unjust, and so on. VE holds that the fully honest thing to do will never be unjust or cowardly, the fully kind thing to do will never be dishonest or intemperate, and so on.

This proposal is often met with skepticism. Surely, skeptics say, it would be a huge coincidence if the virtues just happened to all "fit together" such that there were never any conflicts among them! But the defender of this view replies that it is not a coincidence at all, but just a natural consequence of understanding the virtues as simply the various parts of overall virtue, and as sensitive to practical reason. The individual virtues are coherent parts of a unified whole, dimensions of overall virtue, which, in turn, is understood as part of human excellence.

A full explanation of VE would involve an in-depth discussion of all of these dimensions of virtue and how they fit together into a synergistic whole. Here, I'll just draw attention to some of the main features of the landscape.[11]

Empathy cluster

A central part of virtue is the cluster of traits connected with the capacity for empathy: kindness, generosity, charity, compassion, and forgiveness, to name a few. The virtuous person is sensitive to the needs and feelings of others. She is able to occupy others' point of view and regard others with empathy and compassion. She is not the type of person who is casually rude to sales clerks and servers. She is patient with children crying on buses and planes. When most of us would find ourselves becoming irritated or frustrated by an obnoxious colleague or passerby, she is sensitive to the factors that might lead the person to act as she does. In social situations, she notices when we are inadvertently making someone uncomfortable, and has the skill to try to remedy the situation. She is kind and thoughtful—she remembers that Susan is dieting and is careful not to flaunt rich foods in front of her; she remembers that John's pet has recently passed away and so doesn't ask about him. This requires sensitivity and skill, and it emanates from a genuine concern for other people.

Honesty-integrity cluster

Another dimension of overall virtue is that cluster of traits including honesty, integrity, uprightness. Hursthouse offers the following as an initial sketch of honest people:

> they do not lie or cheat or plagiarize or casually pocket other people's possessions. You can rely on them to tell you the truth, to give sincere references, to own up to their mistakes, not to pretend to be more knowledgeable than they are; you can buy a used car from them or ask for their opinion with confidence.
>
> (*Hursthouse 1999: 10*)

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As illustrated in this passage, a core dimension of the virtuous person's honesty concerns the representation of her self, both to others, and to herself. She does not shy away from confronting her true motives, emotions, abilities, and limitations, and so on.

The honest person is sensitive to when considerations of accuracy are especially important, or at risk of being violated. Hursthouse writes:

> we . . . may notice, if we are fortunate enough to come across someone thoroughly honest, that they are particularly acute about occasions when honesty is at issue. If we are less than thoroughly honest ourselves, they put us to shame, noticing, as we have failed to do, that someone is obviously not to be trusted, or that we are all about to connive at dishonesty, or that we are all allowing someone to be misled.
>
> *(Hursthouse 1999: 12)*

There isn't a simple rule the honest person always follows; honesty involves making sophisticated judgments about what's appropriate in the context. The honest person will be upfront about things with her doctor that she wouldn't be upfront about with casual acquaintances, still less with untrustworthy people whose interest in the information is salacious or malicious. This sensitivity to context is part of the skill of honesty.

Justice–fairness cluster

Another dimension of overall virtue may be characterized as the justice–fairness complex of dispositions. The virtuous person has a clear sense of the moral equality of persons, and her attitudes towards and treatment of others will express respect for persons as moral equals.

As with all virtues, the expression of justice will vary depending on the person's circumstances. She is not the type to take an unfair advantage, by (for example) queue jumping, or taking more than her fair share when she thinks no one will notice. If she is, for example, a manager of a sporting goods store, she may be in a position to determine salaries of employees, distribute the unpleasant duties among the employees, recognize meritorious conduct, and penalize infractions.

An important part of justice is being attuned to decisions or situations that do violence to the moral equality of persons. To continue with the example of the store manager: the fully virtuous person will, for example, notice whether, in group discussions, the women in the room are being undermined in a subtle way, or whether some company policy inadvertently imposes a heavier burden on some than others (for example, whether the policy of expecting employees to have personal experience with the equipment the store sells imposes an unfair burden on poor employees).[12]

The just person does not only *act* justly. She is *fair-minded*—able to consider all sides of an issue, and take a balanced approach. When circumstances warrant it, she is able to abstract away from her own personal circumstances and evaluate positions based on their merits. When she needs to make a judgment about a personal matter—for example, concerning herself or those people or issues close to her heart—she is able to keep her personal feelings from clouding her judgment. (For example, if her children are involved in a dispute with some of the other children at school, and she's trying to work out what happened, she does not see faults in other people's children while being blind to her children's own faults.) Her fair-mindedness extends to her evaluations of more abstract entities, including ideas themselves. She won't show prejudice in her thinking, by, for example, forming beliefs based on what she would like to be true rather than on the evidence.

Open-mindedness

A closely related virtue is the virtue of open-mindedness. Baehr offers the following as an initial characterization of open-mindedness:

> An open-minded person does not cling blindly to her beliefs in the face of challenges or counter-evidence to them. She is not dismissive of beliefs or positions with which she disagrees. Nor does she shy away from rational dialogue or engagement with people who believe differently from her. In these ways, open-mindedness is the *opposite* of traits like narrow-mindedness, closed-mindedness, dogmatism, intellectual dismissiveness, provincialism, and the like.
>
> *(Baehr 2012: 31)*

Open-mindedness has recently been developed as an intellectual virtue[13] (Roberts and Wood 2007: Chapter 7; Baehr 2011, 2012). But, as Nomy Arpaly argues, the truth is often morally salient, and failing to be open-minded—where this is understood as the disposition to be sensitive, not just to truth, but to *morally salient* truth—is not only an intellectual failure, but a moral one. Arpaly gives the example of the colleagues of Ignaz Semmelweis, the doctor who showed that handwashing dramatically reduces fatal childbed fever. Semmelweis's colleagues ignored his results and ridiculed him, even though the evidence was simple and compelling. Perhaps they found it too difficult to admit the truth when doing so would damage their reputations. Perhaps they could not face the thought that they had been inadvertently causing the deaths of the very people they had devoted their lives to helping. Arpaly understands (what she calls) the "moral vice" of closed-mindedness as "exemplified in cases in which someone's mind is closed to the evidence when something morally meaningful is at stake" (Arpaly 2011: 80). Semmelweis's colleagues were closed-minded, in exactly the kind of way that shows how closed-mindedness is not only an intellectual vice, but a moral one: despite the strength of Semmelweis's results, and the fact that children's lives were at stake, they dismissed the results. An open-minded person, by contrast, will be especially willing to look at evidence and reconsider her firmly held beliefs in light of strong evidence that she is wrong when there is something morally significant at stake. (See further Zagzebski 2003, 2004, on the relationship between epistemic and moral value.)

Courage and temperance

Open-mindedness may be understood as (what has been called) an executive virtue: in addition to being an excellence in its own right, it is demonstrably necessary for the acquisition, possession, or exercise of other virtues (Williams 1981: 49). One cannot, for example, make a just decision if one's mind is closed to any evidence that might threaten one's own high opinion of oneself. Likewise for courage and temperance. Roughly, courage is the character trait of responding to threat of harm in accordance with practical reason. The courageous person has the ability "to weigh up correctly the pros and cons of various alternative courses of action when some courses involve danger and the ability to face dangers," and act appropriately (Wallace 1978: 76). Temperance, likewise, is roughly the character trait of seeking and enjoying pleasures in accordance with practical reason. Courage and temperance, like open-mindedness, seem to be not only excellences in themselves, but also crucial for the development, possession, and exercise of other virtues. We all encounter situations in which behaving honestly, or charitably, or justly, or open-mindedly, will have consequences for ourselves—where doing so will risk harming our reputation, our financial stability, or even our life. We won't be able to always act

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as honesty, justice, etc. require if we are incapacitated by fear of adverse consequences of our actions, or if we can't resist the lure of comfort.

The above gives a brief overview of the character traits that, as part of a synergistic whole, constitutes virtue, according to VE. Each virtue, if it is a virtue proper, is responsive to, and expressive of, practical reason, and compatible with all the other virtues—not by happy accident, but because each virtue, insofar as it *is* a virtue proper, is just part of overall excellence qua human being.[14]

Senses in which virtue might be "necessary for" well-being

I have claimed that investigating whether virtue is necessary for well-being requires us to proceed piecemeal, considering philosophical accounts of virtue and well-being, rather than our own brute intuitions. In the section above, I sketched an account of virtue (one that is, in broad strokes if not in detail, widely defended). In the following section, I will give an overview of some of the main philosophical accounts of well-being, and consider the proposal that virtue is necessary for well-being on the assumption that these accounts of well-being are true. In this section, I will consider what is meant by "necessary." As we shall see, those who defend the claim that virtue is necessary for well-being do not always have strict logical necessity in mind.

It is apparent that a person's acting virtuously can make a *pro tanto* contribution to that person's well-being. Many of us feel good when we act honestly or fairly, and many of us have, among our aims, the aim of being a good person. If experiencing good feelings and achieving our aims are among the intrinsic bearers of well-being, then, other things being equal, having and exercising the virtues will make our lives go better.

But the thesis that virtue is necessary for well-being—call this "VN"—is a far stronger claim, in at least the following ways.

1. VN concerns the *possession,* and perhaps the exercise or expression, of virtue, not merely performing individual virtuous actions.[15]
2. VN concerns the possession of virtue *overall*, not merely some individual virtue (e.g., temperance).
3. VN concerns well-being *overall*, not merely some dimension of well-being (e.g., the pleasant feeling of having done one's duty).

Thus, when considering whether virtue is necessary for well-being, it is not enough to note that some honest, or just, or charitable action makes one feel good, or helps one achieve one of one's many aims. To show that virtue is necessary for well-being, we would at least need to show that the possession of virtue, overall, makes a contribution (a net, not merely gross, contribution[16]) to one's overall well being.

Taking these points for granted, there are still a number of issues to clarify in order to understand VN.

First, what is the scope of VN? Is it to be understood as the proposal that virtue is necessary for well-being for all rational beings? all human beings? all rational human beings? Or even *virtually* all, or even just some, rational, human, or rational human beings?

Second, what *degree* of virtue does the defender of VN hold is necessary for what *degree* of well-being? Is it to be understood as the claim that perfect virtue is required for well-being? Or merely some threshold of virtue? Or perhaps even only aspiring towards virtue? And is it to be understood as the claim that virtue is required for perfect well-being? Or the highest degree of well-being that is available to the person? Or some other threshold of well-being?

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Third, what exactly is meant by "necessary"? Philosophers of well-being may be surprised to learn that those to whom VN is frequently attributed don't even always mean strict philosophical necessity. Hursthouse, for example, has argued that virtue is the *only reliable bet* for well-being (more accurately, for flourishing—Hursthouse 1999: 172; see discussion in Chapter 15 by Besser-Jones, this volume). Even those who propose that virtue is, strictly speaking, necessary for well-being may mean merely that virtue is instrumentally necessary, not that it is among the basic contributors to well-being that philosophers of well-being are concerned to identify.

In this chapter, I aim to bring the virtue literature directly into contact with the well-being literature, and so I will not investigate the prospects for VN understood as a claim that virtue is merely instrumentally necessary, or that that virtue is, loosely speaking, necessary (that it is, for example, a "safe or reliable bet"). Rather, as I shall understand VN,

4. VN claims that, for all human beings, some important threshold of virtue is more than merely instrumentally necessary for achieving the highest degree of well-being available to human beings, where "necessary" is understood in the strict, philosophical sense. [17]

In the remainder, I shall understand VN in a way informed by points 1–4.

Virtue and well-being

As has emerged in the last section, the philosophical literature on virtue and the philosophical literature on well-being do not map on to one another perfectly. Philosophers of well-being aim to identify the basic contributors to well-being, understood as what makes a person's life go well *for her*. But many virtue theorists have background assumptions that make it difficult to bring their views about well-being into direct contact with the philosophical literature on well-being. I will note two such background assumptions.

First, some virtue ethicists are critical of the idea that the contemporary well-being literature does indeed identify a distinctive thing, well-being (Brewer 2008). Those in this tradition who talk about virtue as being "good for" a person may not have the same thing in mind as philosophers of well-being. For example, Gavin Lawrence has proposed that the fundamental notion of goodness *vis-à-vis* a human being is the *good of* a human being, and that to the extent that there is a notion of "goodness *for*" a human being, this is derived from the more fundamental notion of the good *of* a human being (Lawrence 2009; see further Toner 2010: 287).

Second, there are some virtue ethicists who appear to understand the connection between virtue and well-being as conceptual, such that virtue is part of the very concept of well-being (Foot 2001: Chapter 6; Toner 2006a). Philosophers of well-being, by contrast—even those who believe that virtue is a basic contributor to well-being—generally do not think virtue is part of the *concept* of well-being (see discussion in Chapter 15 by Besser-Jones, this volume).

My aim in this chapter is to consider whether virtue may be a basic contributor to well-being, as it is understood by philosophers of well-being. Thus, in this chapter, I will proceed on the assumption that: (1) there is some distinctive subject matter about which philosophers of well-being are offering different accounts; and (2) this thing "well-being" does not include virtue as part of its very concept. Granting that there is such a distinctive thing as well-being (in the sense that philosophers of well-being intend), and that virtue is not part of its very concept, I will consider whether, if we assume one or another of the various accounts of well-being on offer, VN (understood in the way I explained in the preceding section) may be true.

I have proposed that any argument for VN must be conditional: *if* some particular account of well-being (and some particular account of virtue) is true, *then* virtue is necessary for well-being. In the remainder, I will assume that the VE account of virtue is true, and consider whether, *if we assume one or another account of well-being*, VN may be true. I will consider a few of the more widely accepted accounts of well-being in turn.

Hedonism

Hedonistic theories of well-being hold that "how good a life is for the person who lives it is equal to the balance of pleasure over pain in the life"; that "the only thing that is fundamentally intrinsically good for us is our own pleasure; the only thing that is fundamentally intrinsically bad for us is our own pain" (Feldman 2004: 25–30; Heathwood 2010: 648; see Chapter 9 by Gregory, this volume). It may seem as though, assuming a hedonistic account of well-being, the connection between well-being and virtue must be merely instrumental: at most, virtue can *bring about* our pleasure, and thus, even if we assume that virtue is necessary for experiencing a sufficiently high degree of pleasure (and a sufficiently low degree of pain) to count as achieving the highest degree of well-being available to human beings, virtue would be merely *instrumentally* necessary for well-being.

Conversely, recall that virtue, according to VE, does not only bring about pleasure; virtue is *constituted*, in part, by the disposition to experience pleasure in certain moments—by, for example, taking pleasure in a just outcome, experiencing joy when one's child does the honest thing, and so on. Such pleasures will be, at the same time, both direct contributors to well-being *and* expressions of virtue.

Still, unless we restrict the pleasures that are eligible to count as direct contributors to well-being, it is implausible that some degree of virtue is non-instrumentally *necessary for* the highest degree of well-being, if well-being is understood in purely hedonistic terms. People—non-virtuous as well as virtuous—take pleasure in all kinds of things. There seems to be no reason to think that without the pleasures of being virtuous one would fail to realize the amount of pleasure in virtue of which one (according to welfare hedonism) achieves the highest degree of well-being of which human beings are capable. That, in any case, is what the defender of VN would need to show, assuming a VE account of virtue and a hedonistic account of well-being (see Chapter 9 by Jeske, this volume).

Informed-desire theory

Informed-desire theories of well-being hold that an individual's well-being is identified with the satisfaction of her informed desires—those desires we would have if we had full information, were rational, sufficiently reflective, and so on (Haybron 2008; Heathwood 2010). What would it take for virtue to directly contribute to well-being, assuming an informed-desire theory?

It would not be enough for virtue to be instrumentally necessary for satisfying desires; somehow the exercise or expression of virtues would have to be *constitutive of* the satisfaction of desires. And it would not be enough for virtue to be constitutively necessary for satisfying the desires of *some* of us, but not others. VN holds that some degree of virtue is necessary for *all* humans to achieve the highest degree of well-being. Thus, for VN to be true (assuming an informed-desire theory of well-being), the exercise or expression of virtues would have to be *constitutive of* (not merely instrumental to) the satisfaction of desires, *for all human beings* (not only for those who happen to desire being virtuous). How could this be?

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For VN to be true, assuming an informed-desire theory of well-being, it would have to be the case that:

1. there are some satisfactions of our informed desires that are constitutive of (or exercises of, or expressions of) the virtues—call these "virtuous satisfactions";
2. these virtuous satisfactions can only be had if a person has a certain threshold of virtue; and
3. for any human being, these virtuous satisfactions are necessary if the person is to achieve the highest degree of well-being available to human beings (they can't be "made up for" by other satisfactions).

By "virtuous satisfactions" of informed desires, we might have in mind desires such as the following:

- the desire to help the needy, satisfied when, for example, one shares one's home with a displaced disaster victim;
- the desire to distribute goods justly, satisfied when, for example, as part of an ethics review board at a hospital, one determines the just distribution of a scarce vaccine.

One might object that, as evidenced in these cases, the virtue doesn't *guarantee* the satisfaction of the desire. But this is beside the point: we are considering whether virtue is (more than merely instrumentally) *necessary* for well-being, not whether it is sufficient.

Still, virtue does not appear to be a necessary part of the above examples of satisfactions of desires. The desire to help the needy, or distribute goods justly, *may* be an expression of a person's virtue, but on the other hand it may be just a passing whim, or even an expression of vice (if, for example, one's desire to help the needy is rooted in a desire for social approbation). To show that virtue is (more than merely instrumentally) necessary for well-being, assuming an informed-desire account of well-being, we would need to show how virtue could be *part of* the virtuous satisfaction of the desire (and, moreover, that such virtuous satisfactions are necessary for the highest degree of well-being human beings are capable of).

To this end, it might be helpful to introduce a distinction drawn by ancient eudaimonists that is much discussed by virtue theorists: the distinction between *skopos* and *telos*. Both are roughly translated as "aim": *skopos* as "aim" narrowly construed—one's immediate target—and *telos* as "aim" widely construed—one's overall aim.[18] To illustrate: imagine an archer aiming at a target. In a narrow sense, the aim is simply the hitting of the target. This is the *skopos*. But we might also imagine that the archer also has a broader aim—to *shoot well*. This is the *telos*. Thus the archer might achieve the *skopos* of her action while failing to achieve the *telos* (if, for example, she shoots badly but, due to the luck of a gust of wind, hits the target anyway); or, alternatively, she might achieve the *telos* without achieving the *skopos* (if, for example, she shoots well but a corrupt official arranges for the target to be moved at the last second, causing her to miss).

I propose that the prospects for VN, if an informed-desire theory of welfare is true, depend on understanding the desires in the "virtuous satisfactions of desires" as wide, rather than narrow—analogous to *telos* rather than *skopos*. Our examples of virtuous satisfactions, then, will not be satisfactions of desires to in fact help the needy or distribute goods justly, but to *give well* or *distribute well* (in the sense that an archer aims to *shoot well*). And since it is plausible, on the understanding of virtue described above, that giving well or distributing well *just is* acting virtuously, virtue will be (more than merely instrumentally) necessary for the satisfaction of *these* desires.

Still, to show that VN is true, assuming an informed-desire theory of well-being, one would need to also show that these virtuous satisfactions are necessary if the person is to achieve the highest level of well-being of which human beings are capable. Is it really plausible that one

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can *only* achieve the maximal satisfaction of desires, and thus the highest degree of well-being, through (what I've called) "virtuous satisfactions" of desires? Even assuming the VE picture of virtue, on which virtues are compatible with the verdicts of practical reason, one might be skeptical that without the virtuous satisfactions of desires a person would be unable to achieve the highest degree of well-being. This is the burden that the defender of VN, assuming a VE account of virtue and an informed-desire account of well-being, would need to meet.

Perfectionism

Perhaps the account of well-being in conjunction with which VN seems most promising is a perfectionist theory of well-being. Perfectionism about well-being "identifies the good with the fulfillment of one's nature: the good life for an x is identified by the core facts about what it means to be an x, by the core account of x-hood" (Dorsey 2010: 61; and see Chapter 10 by Bradford, this volume). According to VE, the virtues are individual excellences in virtue of which creatures like us live excellently. If we understand the individual virtues as dimensions of fulfilling our human natures (as many eudaimonist virtue ethicists do) then it seems as though the very traits whose expression realizes virtue are the traits whose exercise constitutes a good life for us.

Objective-list and hybrid theories of well-being

According to objective-list theories of well-being, there are certain goods that are non-instrumentally good for people, independently of their attitudes (see Chapter 12 by Fletcher, this volume). Objective-list theories are usually pluralistic, and standardly include things like meaningful knowledge, accomplishment, friendship, health, happiness, pleasure, self-respect, autonomy, virtue, and aesthetic experience. These goods—called "basic goods"—are *types* of goods, token instances of which are directly good for people.[19]

According to hybrid theories of well-being, well-being is essentially *both* a matter of having basic goods, such as those listed above, *and* having a certain pro-attitude towards these goods—taking pleasure in them, or enjoying them, for example (see Chapter 13 by Woodard, in this volume).[20] For brevity's sake, in the remainder I will focus on objective-list theory, assuming that what I say may easily be extended to hybrid theories as well.

While objective-list theories take each good on the list as a basic good—as contributing non-instrumentally to the agent's well-being—they needn't hold that a person needs to realize *each* good in order to achieve some relevant threshold of well-being, or even the highest level of well-being of which a human is capable. They might, for example, hold that although every token instance of (true) friendship, aesthetic experience, knowledge, etc. contributes non-instrumentally to the agent's well-being, a life can be just as rich if it contains tokens instances of *most* of these types of basic goods as it would if it contains token instances of *all* of these types of basic goods—that one can be maximally well-off if one's life is exceedingly rich in terms of (for example) knowledge and aesthetic experience, even though it is wholly lacking in friendship. For present purposes I will set this possibility aside and assume that achieving the highest level of well-being requires realizing token instances of *each* type of basic good.

Some objective-list theorists have proposed that virtue itself is one of the basic goods (Fletcher 2013). If this is so (and assuming that achieving the highest level of well-being requires realizing token instances of *each* type of basic good), then it is easy to see how VN may be true.

But what if we don't include virtue as one of the basic goods? May VN yet be true, assuming an objective-list theory of well-being?

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Determining whether this may be so requires looking more closely at the token instances of the types of basic goods. For brevity's sake, I will focus on one type of basic good: friendship,[21] understood as "a distinctively personal relationship that is grounded in a concern on the part of each friend for the welfare of the other, for the other's sake, and that involves some degree of intimacy" (Helm 2013). (My understanding of friendship in this paragraph draws heavily on Helm's presentation.) So understood, friendships can include not only friendships in the ordinary sense of the word, but romantic relationships, and also certain other intimate relationships (such as certain working relationships—for example, a relationship of longtime collaborators on a creative or research project). Friendships are characterized, in large part, by deep-seated dispositions of the friends. Friends care about each other for their own sakes. They are disposed to consider one another's feelings: to take joy in their successes, share in their disappointments, and so on. Friends are disposed to act on their friends' behalves—to promote their welfare, to support them in their pursuit of their aims, and so on, not for any ulterior motive, but just for the friend's own sake. A friend is committed to reminding her friend "of what's really valuable in life and to foster within her a commitment to these values so as to prevent her from going astray" (Whiting 1991; Helm 2013). Friends trust one another in a way that makes true intimacy possible, sharing thoughts or experiences they wouldn't share with other more casual acquaintances. Friends take each other seriously, in such a way that their values, interests, reasons, and so on provide one another with *pro tanto* reasons to value and think similarly. Moreover, the relationship is *dynamic*—friends mutually influence each other's sense of value in a way that supports intimacy (Friedman 1989; Helm 2013). Friends have a sense of solidarity, premised on the sharing of values and a sense of what is important. They feel empathy towards one another, even to the point of sharing in one another's pride and shame (Taylor 1985; Sherman 1987; Helm 2013). Finally, and perhaps most simply, friends spend time together, not only in the sense that they are in one another's presence, but in the sense that they partake in shared activities in an engaged way.[22]

Assuming an objective-list theory on which some friendships are necessary for the highest degree of well-being, could it be that some threshold of virtue is (more than merely instrumentally) necessary for realizing the good of friendship? [23]

This could be the case if a person cannot realize the good of friendship in her life without expressing virtue—if the expression or exercise of virtue is not merely instrumental to realizing friendship, but is *constitutive of* it. Recall our sketch of the dimensions of virtue in the section on an account of virtue, above. It is plausible that genuinely caring about, and empathizing with, the friend—feeling joy in her successes, disappointment in her failures, even sharing in her pride and shame—depends on—and is indeed an expression of—those traits in the empathy cluster. Sharing thoughts and experiences with friends, in a way that makes true intimacy possible, is an expression of honesty.[24] Doing what is needed to help keep one's friend on course—reminding her of what's really valuable, fostering her commitment to the projects she finds most valuable—is an expression of integrity. The dynamic aspect of friendship—taking one's friend's values seriously, and treating them as *pro tanto* reason providing for me—is an expression of open-mindedness.

The suggestion here is that, among the actions, attitudes, emotional responses, and so on that are partly constitutive of the friendship are those that are, at the same time, expressions of virtue. And, moreover, while it is not the case that every action, attitude, etc. that makes up the token, in a person's life, of the type of friendship, it *is* the case that if a person doesn't have virtue (as understood in the section on an account of virtue, above), she will fail to realize the good of friendship in her life. The suggestion is that such expressions of virtue are constitutively necessary for realizing friendship: constitutive in that they, in part, constitute the friendship, and necessary in the sense that without such expressions the friendship would fail to *be* a friendship.

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One might be skeptical that one cannot realize friendship—*any* friendship—without virtue. In this case, I would press a more modest point: that friendships that do not include, as constitutive elements, expressions of virtue are of a poorer quality than friendships that include expressions of virtue, such that even if such friendships directly contribute to a person's well-being, without friendships of the richer kind—the kind that involves expressions of virtue—a person is precluded from having the *highest kind of well-being available to human beings*. It may both be true that low-quality friendships may contribute non-instrumentally to a person's well-being, *and* that without higher-quality friendships such as the one described above (which, I propose, express virtue) a person is not able to achieve the highest level of well-being. VN does not claim that one needs virtue to achieve *any* degree of well-being; it claims only that one needs virtue to achieve the *highest* degree of well-being. If the token instances of friendship without which one cannot achieve the highest level of well-being humans are capable of are constituted in part by expressions of virtue, then some threshold of virtue is constitutively necessary for well-being, and VN is true.

I have assumed an objective-list theory of well-being according to which achieving the highest level of well-being requires realizing token instances of *each* type of basic good. If this is so, then to prove VN, assuming this objective-list theory of well-being, it would be sufficient to show that some threshold of virtue is non-instrumentally necessary for *any one* basic good. If realizing some threshold of virtue is non-instrumentally necessary for realizing token instances of friendship, for example, and tokens of friendship are non-instrumentally necessary for realizing the highest level of well-being, then virtue is non-instrumentally necessary for well-being.

Still, the prospects for VN would be even better if one could show that some threshold of virtue is non-instrumentally necessary for *more than one* basic good. Could the same kind of point be made for any of the other goods objective-list theorists have proposed are basic goods?

Consider token instances of the basic good of aesthetic experience.[25] Imagine, for example, viewing Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, or reading George Eliot's *Silas Marner*. It is plausible that successful engagement with an aesthetic object is partly constituted by expressions of virtue, as understood above—the ability to occupy others' points of view, the open-minded engagement, the honest assessment, the charitable interpretation. (See further, Goldie 2008.)

Likewise for meaningful knowledge.[26] It is important to restrict the basic good to *meaningful* knowledge, since it doesn't seem that every instance of knowledge is even *pro tanto* good for us.[27] We may wish to broaden that category beyond knowledge to what Zagzebski has called "cognitive contact with reality," since there seem to be valuable epistemic goods, such as understanding and acquaintance, that do not count as knowledge, strictly speaking. Paradigm instances of meaningful cognitive contact with reality include coming to have an understanding of some part of the natural world, grasping something deep about human nature, or deeply occupying the point of view of someone of with very different religious or political beliefs than one's own. Like token instances of successful engagement with an aesthetic object, token instances of meaningful cognitive contact with reality will often be expressions of open-mindedness, fair-mindedness, honesty, charity, and the traits of empathy. (See further, Zagzebski's account of knowledge as beliefs arising from acts of intellectual virtue (1996), and her view of the relationship between moral and epistemic virtue and value (2003, 2004).)

As in the case of friendship, one may argue that individuals can realize token instances of aesthetic experience or meaningful cognitive contact with reality that are not, at the same time, expressions of virtue. In reply, one might make the analogous, more modest, proposal that if we take away the instances of aesthetic experience or cognitive contact with reality that were also expressions of the virtues—"getting something" about the human experience or stepping outside one's comfort zone to grasp a religious or secular truth—then the person is missing

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out on something deep and important, such that, although the person may be able to achieve *some* level of well-being, by having some limited aesthetic experience or meaningful cognitive contact with reality, she will be unable to achieve the highest level of well-being of which human beings are capable. If this is the case, VN is true: some threshold of virtue *is* (more than merely instrumentally) necessary for the highest degree of well-being of which human beings are capable.

Conclusion

The proposal that virtue is necessary for well-being might mean a number of different things, ranging from the claim that:

> For virtually all people (with rare exceptions), aspiring to realize some degree of virtue is a safe or reliable bet for achieving perfect well-being.

To the far stronger claim that:

> For each and every person, realizing perfect virtue is necessary for even a moderate threshold of well-being; that one cannot achieve well-being to any desirable degree unless one is perfectly virtuous.

The proposal can be evaluated only when we have in mind a certain account of virtue, a certain account of well-being, and a clear sense of exactly how the former is allegedly necessary for the latter. In this chapter, I hope to have shown that the proposal cannot be dismissed out of hand in light of apparent counterexamples, and to have laid a foundation for future investigation.

Notes

1 I am grateful to all those who have given me helpful feedback on this paper, and especially to Lorraine Besser-Jones, Daniel Danner, Guy Fletcher, Allan Hazlett, Connie Rosati, and participants in the works-in-progress workshop at the University of Edinburgh, June 2014.
2 The approach I propose here is foreshadowed by Hooker (1996). Hooker considers whether moral virtue constitutes a benefit to the agent, and does, as I suggest here, consider a number of theoretical accounts of well-being. However, he relies on an intuitive understanding of virtue.
3 For example, Engstrom (1996, 2002) develops the role of virtue in Kant's theory, and Driver (2001) gives a consequentialist account of virtue.
4 For some proposals, see Solomon (1988), Trianosky (1990), Schneewind (1990), Crisp (1996: 5), Oakley (1996), Crisp and Slote (1997: 2–3), Santas (1997), Watson (1997), Russell (2009: ix) and Snow (2010: 1–2).
5 According to the eudaimonist account of virtue, the virtues are traits whose possession or exercise is partly or wholly constitutive of *eudaimonia* (see Besser-Jones, Chapter 15, this volume). Since *eudaimonia* is sometimes translated as "well-being," one might wonder whether it would be possible, on a eudaimonist account, for the virtues *not* to be necessary for well-being. But not all eudaimonists understand *eudaimonia* as equivalent to well-being, as well-being is understood by contemporary philosophers of well-being. For example, Toner proposes that *eudaimonia* may be understood as essentially a matter of standing in "the right relation to 'objects' according to their degrees and kinds of goodness" (Toner 2006b: 613). See also Foot (2001: 97) and Hursthouse (1999: 167–168). See further Baril (2014). In any case, the account of virtue I develop here does not depend on the eudaimonist claim that the virtues are the traits we need for *eudaimonia*, where *eudaimonia* is understood as well-being (as well-being is understood by contemporary philosophers of well-being).
6 Character traits, as they are understood by VE, are, in John Doris's terminology, "global" rather than "local" traits (Doris 1998, 2002; see further Miller 2013: Chapter 1). In contrast with a virtue ethical

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view that understands virtues as traits that span only a narrow range of circumstances (for example, classroom-examination-honesty or online-survey-honesty), VE recognizes a virtue of honesty, understood as a single coherent trait that may be expressed in test taking, online surveys, conversations with friends, and in many other contexts.

7 The same will be true of any account of the virtues. No account of the virtues can capture all of our intuitions about the virtues since, as we shall see, some of our intuitions about the virtues are in conflict with others.

8 One might be concerned that, if we allow virtue to be sensitive to reason in this way, we are guaranteeing the truth of the claim that virtue is necessary for well-being. But that would only be the case if practical reason tells us that our sole, ultimate aim should be to maximally promote our well-being—something that virtually no philosophers of well-being believe.

9 That is, if we assume that there are some circumstances in which telling a lie is the best thing to do in the circumstances, all things considered.

10 One might object that it violates intuitions to call a character trait that includes a disposition to lie on occasion "honesty." But there is no philosophical account of an individual virtue that exactly matches our intuitive idea of what the virtue should be. At some point, if the trait that a theorist counts as a virtue looks different enough from our intuitive picture of that trait, then that theorist should give that trait a different name, to avoid confusion. But that decision is a merely terminological one.

11 For some discussions of particular virtues and vices, see: Foot (1978); Wallace (1978); Pears (1980: discussing courage); Williams (1980: discussing justice); O'Connor (1988); Young (1988: discussing temperance); Hursthouse (1999: especially her discussion of honesty, courage, and charity); and Curzer (2012). Most discussions of individual virtues are of Aristotle's virtues, or from a loosely Aristotelian point of view. For a discussion of particular virtues from a non-Aristotelian point of view, see Driver (2001: Chapter 2).

12 The person of developed virtue will be not only sensitive and skillful in her own narrow social sphere; as she develops, she will see how these same qualities commit her to taking steps on behalf of more abstract causes. See further, Becker (1998: 112).

13 Just as there are a number of different accounts of what makes a trait an ethical virtue, so are there different accounts of what makes a trait an intellectual, or epistemic, virtue. James Montmarquet, for example, understands an epistemic virtue as a trait a truth-desiring person would want to have (Montmarquet 1993). See Baehr (2011) and Roberts and Wood (2007) for alternative accounts of intellectual virtues, understood as character traits.

14 This will be important to remember when, in the section on virtue and well-being, I consider whether virtue is necessary for well-being. At various points, I will focus on one dimension of virtue or another, but the reader should keep in mind that what we are asking about is virtue as a whole, not some individual virtue considered independently.

15 I intend "virtuous actions" to be neutral between actions performed from virtue, and the actions the virtuous person would perform. See Audi (1997: 174–189); Swanton (2003: 231–233); Van Hooft (2006: Chapter 5); and Van Zyl (2014).

16 "Net" in the sense that the overall positive contribution of the virtue is not outweighed by the overall negative contribution of the virtue (as, for example, the good feeling one gets from telling the truth might be outweighed by the harm that telling the truth may do to one's reputation).

17 VN, then, as I shall understand it, is not an empirical claim that can be supported or undermined by empirical psychological studies. For an argument on behalf of an empirical connection between virtue and well-being, see Snow (2008).

18 There are a number of ways of drawing this distinction. Here I follow Annas (2003: 24–25). See also Annas (1993: 34).

19 For example, friendship is a type, token instances of which—A's friendship with B, or C—are directly good for A. As Lauinger puts it: "Some (any) state of affairs, X, is a component of the well-being of some (any) human being, A, if, and because, X is, for A, an instance of one of the basic goods" (Lauinger 2013: 272).

20 An objective-list theorist may, however, hold that realizing some token instance of one of these goods in one's life *implies* certain pro-attitudes. On this view, friendship, for example, involves—is in fact partly constituted by—certain pro-attitudes, such as caring about one's friend for her own sake (Fletcher 2013).

21 Objective-list and hybrid theorists who suggest that friendship, or "loving relationships," are a basic good include Finnis (1980), Murphy (2001), Fletcher (2013), Lauinger (2013) and Rice (2013).

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22 "He ought therefore at the same time to perceive the being of his friend, and this will come about in their living together and exchanging words and thoughts; this is what living together would seem to mean in the case of people and not, as in the case of cattle, grazing in the same place" (Aristotle 2000: 1170b).
23 Aristotle claimed that true friendships, of the most valuable kind, are only possible between virtuous people (Aristotle 2000, 1156b). I shall set aside the question of whether I can be friends with someone who is not virtuous. The present question is whether I can realize the good of friendship in my life without being virtuous myself.
24 See further, Graham and LaFollette (1986).
25 The view that aesthetic experience or "awareness of true beauty" is a basic good is defended by Finnis (1980) and Murphy (2001), suggested by Lauinger (2013).
26 The view that knowledge, or "meaningful knowledge," is a basic good is defended by Finnis (1980) and Murphy (2001), suggested by Kagan (2009), Lauinger (2013), and Rice (2013).
27 Consider, for example, cases of knowing that there are 32 dust motes on the table, or that the last name of the 16th entry on the 16th page of the Albuquerque phone book is "Alvarado."

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