

# 3

## *Dubious Virtue Psychology*

In the previous chapter we considered arguments against a particular psychological or cognitive requirement for virtue. The virtues of ignorance count against a knowledge, or correct perception, requirement for virtue. If I am correct, to have some virtues the agent need not have knowledge of morally relevant facts. There are other very specific kinds of psychological states that have been viewed as necessary to virtue throughout the historical development of virtue theory. This chapter continues the assault on an internal requirement for moral virtue. I argue that any account of virtue that defines virtue in terms of some specific sort of psychology will fail because such an account will be too narrow.

### 1. THE VIRTUES AS CORRECTIVES

Facts about human psychology have frequently been considered crucial in defining virtue. For example, one popular view of the virtues, which can be traced back to Aquinas and has been recently developed by Philippa Foot, is that they work to “correct” for the baser human impulses and motives (Foot 1978). The idea is that humans are naturally self-interested and motivated by considerations of selfishness, by the desire to promote their own good, and by an aversion to whatever constitutes something bad for them as individuals. This type of view is articulated by Philippa Foot in *Virtues and Vices*. Virtues correct both for temptations that humans typically experience and for deficiencies of motivation to do good.

. . . there is, for instance, a virtue of industriousness only because idleness is a temptation; and of humility only because men tend to think too well of them-

selves. . . . With virtues such as justice and charity it is a little different because they correspond not to any particular desire or tendency that has to be kept in check but rather to a deficiency of motivation; and it is this that they must make good. If people were as much attached to the good of others as to their own good there would no more be a general virtue of benevolence than there is a general virtue of self love. (Foot 1978, p. 9)

What Foot is saying is that virtues such as generosity correct for a general tendency that humans have to self-interest. She is not claiming that generosity corrects, necessarily, for an individual's tendency to be extremely self-interested and act accordingly, since there will, of course, be some individuals who, because they are spontaneously altruistic, for example, may not be very self-interested at all. The intuition that Foot appeals to with this model of the virtues is attractive because we tend to think that humans are prudent creatures, and this prudence interferes with their behaving morally. Thus, "virtue" tendencies – the moral ones – correct for the presence of prudence in human motivation.

One problem with this view of virtue is that it does not seem general enough. There will be occasions when virtues may – and quite appropriately – be used to correct even for an insufficient amount of prudence or selfishness. For example, some individuals may have a very well developed moral sense. They realize that when they find themselves in certain situations they will feel compelled, because they are generous, let's say, to give their money away. That would be harmful to them as individuals. Cases like this will be quite common: a woman may realize that she should exercise in order to stay fit and prolong her life, yet may also know that unless she makes a commitment to meet someone at the gym at a certain time, she will become distracted by projects that involve helping others. If she has *promised* to meet Sue at the gym at 3:00, however, it will be her duty to do that. She will feel that conscientiousness demands of her that she keep her promises. Thus, the virtue serves her legitimate interests – but her interests nevertheless. She is using her concern to be moral as a means of making sure that she exercises. Foot's analysis could be modified to deal with this in the following way: virtues correct only for illegitimate tendencies. The problem here is spelling out legitimate and illegitimate – because even though in this case we see her self-interest as legitimate, when does the desire to benefit oneself become illegitimate? When it harms others? Those she fails to help may feel harmed. When it becomes an unjust harm? There are many vices, however, that fall short of being unjust.

This phenomenon also poses problems for a popular way of distinguishing types of virtue. In earlier chapters I alluded to this problem: how does one distinguish moral virtues from prudential virtues? A natural way to do this is to say that moral virtues generally are directed to the good of others, whereas prudential ones are primarily directed to the agent's good. However, it seems that moral virtues like conscientiousness and honesty can be used to promote the agent's good. One knows that, given one's strong moral sense, one will keep one's promises. Thus, one makes promises that benefit the self – such as the promise to meet someone for an exercise class.

A psychological egoist could argue that this fits part and parcel with her theory – that the moral virtues are disguised prudence. That conscientiousness serves the ends of the agent, therefore, is not so surprising. But this really misses the main point of the case: what is particularly odd about this case is that the normal assumption is the egoistic one that people do not have a moral sense; rather, they have a strong prudential sense. That is, they are self-interested, primarily, and morality has to correct for this and have people act in ways to benefit others. In the preceding case, however, the person is using morality to correct for a weak prudential sense. Thus, prudence is correcting for the flaws of the moral sense, and not the other way around.

How does one distinguish the prudential from the moral virtues? One intuitively plausible way is to say that the prudential virtues aim at the good of the agent, whereas the moral virtues aim at the good of others. "Aim at" can be spelled out in a variety of ways. One way is to appeal to the motives of the agent and say that a prudential virtue, like industriousness, is typified by the motive to improve one's lot. Thus, the motive is self-interest. The virtue of generosity, on the other hand, is typified by the motive of concern for others because the generous person aims at helping others. Thus, the motives are quite different. Yet the preceding case illustrates that a moral virtue can be used in a self-interested way. However, one could claim that *making the promise* to meet Sue at the gym is selfish, though *keeping the promise* is not. Thus, the conscientiousness is moral, but making the promise itself is not. This, however, doesn't cut against the claim that keeping the promise serves my self-interest, yet it is still moral, and the reason I made the promise in the first place was to promote my self-interest (so it's not a coincidence that self-interest and morality coincide). Thus, an appeal to motives does not provide a natural way of demarcating the virtues.

A response to this concern is the following: it's true that in a few odd

cases, the motive behind the conscientiousness is self-interest. Nevertheless, conscientiousness is still a moral virtue because, *generally speaking*, the motive is *not* self-interest; generally speaking, the motive is other-directed (e.g., a concern not to disappoint someone). However, now my question is, why pick *motives* as a way of demarcating in the first place? Initially, it seemed that we could pick other-directed motives as a necessary condition for moral virtue and the self-directed as a necessary condition for prudential virtue. But the conscientiousness previously discussed lacks the other-directed motive. Now the move is to deny that these motives are necessary conditions and instead to claim that they generally characterize the virtues. This may well be true. Indeed, I suspect it is for reasons outlined in earlier chapters. But now we need another way of defining the different types of virtues.<sup>1</sup> Let me suggest one way.

What causally sustains the prudential virtues is that they benefit the agents possessing them. What causally sustains the moral ones is that they benefit the group or individuals within the group. So, the idea is that when we ask “Why is intelligence a virtue?” the answer will be something like “Because intelligence is a good quality for an individual to have: the intelligent individual copes with problems better.” The prudential virtues are those exemplifying a tendency to bring about benefits for the self; this means that any explanation for why the trait is a virtue *per se* will appeal to this fact. Moral virtues, on the other hand, are sustained differently. An explanation for why they are virtues appeals to the fact that these traits promote the good of others. “Why is honesty a virtue?” Because honesty facilitates transactions within a group by helping to create trust among agents. When people interact, at least in small groups, there tends to be a presumption of honesty. Without that, there would be constant suspicion between agents, and this would greatly reduce the efficiency of interactions in society. Conscientiousness can be treated the same way. It is a moral virtue *because* it has similar social benefits. That it may be used to further the agent’s well-being is beside the point.

## II. ARISTOTLE AND KANT: CULTIVATED INCLINATION OR DUTY?

Foot’s account of virtue makes certain assumptions about facts of human psychology for which virtue traits are supposed to correct. In the history of the debate on how to define true virtue qualities, other features of

human psychology have been picked out as crucial to virtue. The recent debate has centered on differences between Aristotelian and Kantian conceptions of virtue. For Aristotle, a feeling of pleasure was necessary in the exercise of virtue; for Kant, a sense of duty was necessary. Who is right? It will be my contention that neither is right.<sup>2</sup> Any theory of virtue that defines virtue in terms of some particular kind of psychological state is doomed. I am not denying that *some* psychology is necessary. The agent must have a mental life in order to have a psychology and thus have character traits. I merely argue that no specific psychological state that has been historically identified with virtue is *necessary* for virtue. But a unified theory of virtue is still possible. At this point we can start with the following claim: a moral virtue is a character trait that produces good consequences for others. Psychological states are important only insofar as they facilitate the production of those consequences. For Aristotle, virtue consisted in cultivated inclination. Thus, pleasure was the proper accompaniment to virtuous activity, since satisfying an inclination will usually lead to pleasure: “Actions which conform to virtue are naturally pleasant, and, as a result, such actions are not only pleasant for those who love the noble, but also pleasant in themselves . . .” (1958, 1099a).<sup>3</sup> Kant, on the other hand, believed that any inclination without the support of principle is bound to falter:

. . . virtue cannot be defined and valued as a mere *aptitude* or . . . a long-standing *habit* of morally good actions, acquired by practice. For unless this aptitude results from considered, firm . . . principles, then, like any other mechanism of technically-practical reason, it is neither armed for all situations nor adequately insured against the changes that new temptations could bring about. (Kant, 1996, p. 158)

Virtue cannot be grounded in inclination *unless* the inclination is backed by something nonchanging – a sense of moral duty or ‘fortitude.’ When he discusses the teaching of ethics, Kant writes, for example: “For man’s moral capacity would not be virtue were it not produced by the *strength* of his resolution in conflict with powerful opposing inclinations” (Kant 1969, p. 266). There are notorious difficulties involved in spelling out Kant’s position in this regard. Kant does believe that inclination can be involved. Moral worth is certainly entirely compatible with good inclination. The point is simply that a sense of duty must be present as the primary motivation.<sup>4</sup> The agent in possession of a good will does not act on mere inclination. Even though having a good will is not identical to being virtuous, having a good will is a necessary condition for being

virtuous; virtue simply demands that the agent have a settled disposition to act out of respect for the moral law. This means that a crucial element in being virtuous is self-mastery, moral courage, or fortitude.<sup>5</sup> This is the core of the difference between the two perspectives on virtue. Thus, Onora O'Neill has characterized Kant's virtue theory as one based on courage or fortitude; Aristotle's is one based on temperance (O'Neill 1996). Whether or not the view sketched previously is an accurate representation of Kant, it has influenced other writers on virtue (see Baier 1970), as has Aristotle's theory. The reason some writers focus on something like fortitude as necessary to virtue lies in the belief that when someone decides to act well in spite of her inclinations, she will act well no matter what. Her actions are judged better than the actions of the person whose motives may be clouded by pleasure. Even though a person *may* get pleasure from acting well, the motive is still a motive of duty – and thus virtue does not *require* pleasure.<sup>6</sup>

*The Doctrine of Virtue* also points to similarities between Aristotle and Kant. Both sought to present accounts of virtue as *reliable*, that is, as traits of character that are equipped for unusual situations. Aristotle viewed practical wisdom as the regulator of virtue; Kant viewed the sense of duty as the regulator. However, within this framework there are differences. Aristotle believed that the best person has his inclinations in line with what he knows is correct because such a person will get pleasure from doing good things. Kant, however, left open the possibility that the virtuous agent receive no pleasure from virtuous activity. Yet, as Rosalind Hursthouse points out, perhaps this isn't the crucial difference between the two so much as the fact that for Kant, the cold and unsympathetic agent can nevertheless still be virtuous or admirable. Kant's theory of virtue is certainly much richer than this. I am simply trying to focus here on a point of disagreement between his theory and Aristotle's. Kant, in *The Doctrine of Virtue* and elsewhere, develops a theory of virtue in which duties of virtue are imperfect duties to adopt various ends. As an aid to this enterprise, Kant encourages agents to develop various emotions in support of duty, such as cheerfulness:

The rules for practicing virtue . . . aim at a frame of mind that is both valiant and cheerful . . . what is not done with pleasure but merely as compulsory service has no inner worth for one who attends to his duty in this way and such service is not loved by him; instead, he shirks as much as possible occasions for practicing virtue. (Kant 1969, p. 273)

Nevertheless, even though there is certainly a place for the emotions in Kant's ethics, their role seems to be instrumental.

Modern writers, such as Georg von Wright, pick up on the Kantian theme by developing a view of virtue in which self-control is necessary for being a virtuous person, because virtues consist in the ability to control appetites and emotions (von Wright 1963). Martha Nussbaum and Gregory Trianosky, on the other hand, lean more toward an Aristotelian view in which emotional responses – properly cultivated, of course – form a crucial element in the virtuous agent's life (Trianosky 1988, Nussbaum 1990).

One problem for virtue theory has been to decide between conceiving of a virtue as a trait the exercise of which is accompanied by pleasure and conceiving of it as a trait the exercise of which may not be. A good deal can be said to support both Aristotle and Kant. If one conceives of virtue as an excellence of character, then it seems plausible that the virtuous agent would enjoy doing the activity associated with the virtue. Julia Annas points out in *The Morality of Happiness* that later writers regarded the Aristotelian perspective on virtue to be a matter of common sense – a Kantian perspective would look quite alien. She quotes Plutarch: "People do not consider self-control a complete virtue, but rather less than virtue. For it has not yet become a mean state as a result of harmony of the worse part in relation to the better, nor has the excess of feeling been removed, nor is the desiring part of the soul obedient to and in agreement with the intelligent part; rather . . . it lives alongside [the intelligent part] like a hostile enemy element in a civil war."<sup>7</sup> If I have to put a lot of effort into acting sympathetically to people, that does seem to be an indication that I have little sympathy. On the other hand, we have an inclination to value achievements more highly when they are difficult (see Foot 1978, p. 10):

. . . assume that the mind of that friend to mankind was clouded by a sorrow of his own which extinguished all sympathy with the lot of others and . . . now suppose him to tear himself, unsolicited by inclination, out of this dead insensibility and to perform this action only from duty and without any inclination – then for the first time his action has genuine moral worth. (Kant 1969, p. 17)

Because it is not clear that the person is so *disposed* to act with a good will (though he is acting with a good will on that particular occasion), it is left open as to whether the person has *virtue*, though such a view is consistent with the passage. This view has influenced a great deal of thinking on virtue outside of philosophy. Helen Burns, in Charlotte

Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, seems to adopt a Kantian view of virtue, and thus denigrates her own good qualities as *simply* being a matter of inclination: ". . . I make no effort; I follow as inclination guides me. There is no merit in such goodness" (Brontë 1982, p. 59). Charlotte Brontë is, of course, inviting us to view the Kantian perspective with disfavor here. The benevolence of the unhappy agent is a clear case of virtue, since it is not accompanied by pleasure (thus there is no pleasure to complicate a determination of the motive). The uneasy virtue of the unhappy agent is diagnostic of both temptation (insofar as it is uneasy) and self-control (insofar as the temptation is overcome). On the other hand, the easy virtue of the Aristotelian character is diagnostic of good basic desires. There is some ambivalence in ascribing moral virtue.<sup>8</sup> The impulse has been to resolve the tension by jumping to one side or the other. But the ambivalence exists only because the cases are underdescribed. Our judgment depends on how we develop the story and what consequences we cite in the story. If a person has good desires, then self-control does not matter much because the agent is not disposed to do evil. If the person has bad desires or inclinations, self-control matters a great deal. In the more realistic mixed cases, everything turns on the details of the description.

The mistake that is made by both Aristotle and Kant is that each focuses on one clear case of virtue. Psychological features of this case are then taken to be paradigmatic of virtue. The consequentialist can diagnose this confusion. Each writer has been impressed with either the importance of good desires or the importance of self-control and has employed it to the neglect of the other. They are mistaken in holding *one* type of virtue as paradigmatic and as representing the correct analysis of virtue. What is actually relevant is external states of affairs or the consequences produced by the character traits.

Rosalind Hursthouse would disagree with this approach, since I try to reconcile the views by pointing to a different underlying theory that could accommodate both sets of intuitions. Hursthouse's own view involves a sophisticated attempt at rapprochement. She argues that Aristotle and Kant should be read as similarly viewing emotion *itself* as an inadequate guide. So, the persons who on Kant's view are happy philanthropists motivated solely by inclination or feeling would also not be regarded as virtuous on Aristotle's view. Further, the merely unhappy agent is not excluded from Aristotle's account, since his lack of joy in helping others is no more problematic than Aristotle's own cases of persons who, for example, in displaying courage need to deal with pain.

No one is inclined, for example, to be tortured. Yet Aristotle felt that courage could be displayed under these circumstances, and that it is a full virtue, so the inclinations in harmony with moral belief have to be understood in some attenuated sense that would also be able to accommodate the Kantian case. The one possible problem Hursthouse still sees is the Kantian agent who is cold and uncaring.<sup>9</sup> Such an agent does point up a genuine contrast with Aristotle having to do with the significance of emotion in the possession of full virtue.

Some other writers have tried to do justice to good desires and self-control by maintaining that there are two types of virtue that are essentially different.<sup>10</sup> Henry Sidgwick tried to resolve the tension by claiming that our idea of virtue contains two features that are distinct, “. . . the one being the most perfect ideal of moral excellence that we are able to conceive for human beings, while the other is manifested in the effort of imperfect men to attain this ideal.”<sup>11</sup> Aristotle’s conception, then, reflects the ideal; Kant’s conception accommodates the reality of the human condition. Whatever the justice of this comparison, the contrast contained in the traditional interpretation of Aristotle and Kant has affected how later writers view virtue – that is, as offering two distinct accounts of how we are to conceive full moral virtue and the most excellent human being. What these two conceptions of virtue have in common is that they both advocate a view of virtue as *necessary for successful social interaction*. Indeed, almost all theories of virtue share this feature. Virtue, if not absolutely necessary to human flourishing, is generally believed to enhance society. Kant would agree that it can enhance society (though he would not think this the foundation of its value or worth). The acknowledgment that virtue serves this function suggests a strategy for developing a unified theory of virtue along consequentialist lines.

### III. GOOD INTENTIONS

Still, regardless of one’s views on whether or not pleasure, or self-control as distinct from pleasure, is crucial to virtue, it does seem plausible to maintain that, at the very *least*, the virtuous agent possesses some conception of what is good, and that he acts in accordance with this conception (i.e., he acts with ‘good intentions’). Plausible though this seems, it is false.

First of all, what is a conception of what is good? This issue is itself complex, but for the purposes of this chapter, I would like to try to

come up with a working hypothesis about conceptions of what is good. An agent has a conception of what is good when she has adopted or accepted a particular morality – that is, when she has adopted a set of rules governing moral action and perhaps also moral attitudes. In so adopting this morality, the agent accepts the prescriptions imposed by that morality. She thinks that if she acts in accordance with it, she will be doing good or right things. She may not be able to articulate what exactly these rules are. A person who speaks perfect English (and has an interest in speaking perfect English) may not be able to articulate what the rules of English grammar are, but this person is not precluded from speaking English well.

Second, given that we do know what a conception of the good is, is it really the case that we must act in accordance with what we believe to be good in order to be virtuous? Michael Stocker seems to take it as a given that acting with a good intention is necessary for virtue (Stocker 1979). Stocker tries to show that this requirement does not mark a crucial difference between modern conceptions of virtue and the ancient Greek conception: “. . . if I am correct about morally good intentions, the Greek moral virtues will count as moral virtues even if we hold that all morally virtuous acts are done with morally good intentions. . . . I shall argue that actions manifesting the Greek moral virtues must be done with morally good intentions and conversely” (ibid., p. 221). As he notes, many would accept this point without much argument. Various passages in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* can be interpreted as requiring good intentions for virtue, since they suggest that virtuous actions must be performed for the sake of the good or noble.

Yet, some agents who strike one as sympathetic seem to defy such analysis. If good intentions are understood subjectively, that is, agents lacking such intentions nevertheless seem quite capable of good action and capable of possessing the corresponding good states of character. Such is the case of Huckleberry Finn.

Jonathan Bennett introduced this case because it represents a conflict between sympathy and bad morality (Bennett 1974). I see it as a problem for any account of virtue that requires the agent to have good intentions. For Huckleberry, out of sympathy, acts in a way he fully believes to be immoral.

Huckleberry Finn, the protagonist of Mark Twain’s famous novel of life on the Mississippi, has adopted a bad morality – a false conception of the good. Huckleberry, growing up in pre-Civil War Missouri, does not believe that the institution of slavery is immoral. One of his best

friends, however, is a slave named Jim, and when Jim runs away from his owner, Huckleberry fails to turn him in, though he has many opportunities to do so. Yet, Huckleberry also believes that this failure on his part is a moral failure – that he is, in effect, a party to theft. He believes that what he is doing is dishonest and ungrateful. As quoted by Bennett, he expresses himself in the following way:

It hadn't ever come home to me, before, what this thing was that I was doing. But now it did, and it stayed with me, and scorched me more and more. I tried to make out to myself that *I* warn't to blame, because *I* didn't run Jim off from his rightful owner; but it warn't no use, conscience up an say every time: "But you knowed he was running for his freedom, and you could a paddled ashore and told somebody." (Ibid., p. 125)

These are Huck's beliefs about what it is that he is doing, yet *we* know that, in fact, Huckleberry acted well in not turning Jim in. Huckleberry wants to help his friend and see his friend happy. Yet, Jim's happiness depends on what Huck perceives to be an evil. And this is what Huckleberry balks at.

Huckleberry, though lacking a correct conception of the good, was still *acting in accordance with* the correct conception of the good. This was what made him, in fact, a good person (though, later in the novel, it is clear that Huckleberry is basically immature and in many ways nasty; still, we can consider the present case on its own and, if the actual Huckleberry fails to conform to this characterization, we can imagine another character who does). In order to be virtuous, in other words, one need not know that what one is doing is good or right. One need not have good intentions where this is understood to mean that one believes the actions one has chosen are, all things considered, good or right. If one were to define 'good intention' as 'intention to do something that is in fact good,' Huckleberry is acting with good intentions and the case is not a problem for the requirement. But this move fails to capture the subjective element important to ordinary ascriptions of good intentions. For example, a mother may be too lenient with her child, mistakenly thinking that leniency is good for the child. She can still be described as acting with good intentions even though what she is intending is objectively bad. To have the good quality, or virtue, one simply has to have a disposition such that one does what is good or right. If one has this disposition, then accidents are ruled out. Huckleberry's actions toward Jim are not accidental because he would defy his conscience and do the same thing over again.

It is Huckleberry's *sympathy* with Jim that constitutes the virtue and conflicts with what he believes to be right. Huckleberry may be interpreting the sympathy he feels for Jim as some sort of unwarranted favoritism. It would be the sort of favoritism condemned by morality as being incompatible with justice. Jim is his friend, but it is not morally permissible to aid one's friends in crime, in stealing property from a little old lady.

Consider the analogy with language. Huckleberry is analogous to someone who speaks a Southern dialect of English and mistakenly disavows it as "real" English. This is perhaps because he views the only real English as standard English. So, while he may view himself as speaking badly, others view his speech as a charmingly rustic variation. This in no way affects his ability to speak English well, though he may make a poor instructor. Likewise, mistaken evaluations of one's behavior may not affect it, as in the Huckleberry Finn case. What is crucial is whether or not the person is *disposed* to act well (objectively).

Many writers on virtue, particularly those concerned with defending the Aristotelian position, will argue that Huck Finn is *not* a virtuous person. This is because there is a psychological failure present: his feelings and his moral understanding are not in harmony. Such a flawed person cannot be a moral exemplar.

This kind of response points to a deeper debate in virtue ethics, or virtue theory, that has only recently begun to surface. This has to do with whether or not virtue ethics represents a sort of moral elitism. The greater the requirements placed on virtue, the more open it is to this charge. My theory is thus about as nonelitist as one could hope for. Aristotle's theory requires a great deal of intellectual development and moral sophistication for an agent to possess any virtue. Only the *phronomoi*, the wise, are virtuous, and these people are few and far between. Clearly, Huckleberry lacks virtue on this view. To respond to this, we need to look closely at why Aristotle thought *phronesis* so important to virtue. The major reason given was that someone who possessed *phronesis* was more reliable – that is, his goodness could be relied upon. It was not so dependent on certain "environmental" conditions being met. The well-brought-up individual will, in any context, perform the appropriate action. This concern with reliability is likewise a consideration behind Kant's requirement of a good will for a virtue. If a person is disposed to act on his sense of duty, against base inclinations, he can be relied upon to act well in a way that those who simply have good inclinations cannot, since those with a good will act well no matter what they are inclined to do.

But reliability seems to be a red herring here. *Overall*, it is probably better to have wisdom than not. However, there are other ways to be reliable. After all, Old Faithful is perfectly reliable without either a sense of duty or *phronesis*. If the agent, like any object, has a disposition to behave in a certain way (or, in the case of sentient beings, have certain feelings), then she is reliable with respect to that behavior or those feelings. The true usefulness of wisdom is *flexibility* and *responsiveness* to the unusual. This is why, I believe, writers on Aristotle such as Martha Nussbaum have articulated a view of Aristotle in which responsiveness to the concrete features of a given situation is an absolutely crucial element of virtue (Nussbaum 1990). I agree that sensitivity to the morally relevant features of a situation is important. For the agent to be virtuous, some such sensitivity is necessary. My problem has to do with making this sensitivity highly intellectual. Huckleberry Finn is sensitive to Jim's plight – it moves him in the way that it should. Thus, he possesses a virtue. The trait is reliable – he would do the same for Jim over and over again in a variety of contexts. What is left open is the flexibility of the trait. Would Huck do the same for others? We don't know from the text. But if he would, it would still be the case that his moral understanding is lacking. This does not seem sufficient to disqualify him. Those who argue that virtue is and should be understood as an ideal for most, and limited to the *phronomoi*, paradoxically move virtue out of the normative plane. Virtue must be accessible – to those who are not wise but kind; to those who had the misfortune to grow up in repressive environments that warped their understanding, yet who are capable of showing the appropriate compassionate responses to human suffering; to those who, like most of us, possess some intellectual or moral flaw.

So far, my aim has been to refute the claim that good intentions are necessary for virtue. I have claimed that when an agent acts with good intentions, he is acting according to what he thinks is the right or good thing to do (all things considered). One objection to this strategy is that I have construed "acting with good intentions" too narrowly by requiring that the agent be concerned with *moral* good. Perhaps nonmoral goods are relevant. In the case of Huckleberry Finn, the objection goes, Huckleberry actually does have good intentions in helping Jim out because he sees that freedom is a good for Jim; it is what Jim wants very badly (N.B.: on Huck's view, freedom is not a *moral* good for Jim).<sup>12</sup> So Huckleberry is concerned with helping Jim obtain *this* good; therefore,

he is acting with some good intention. Given this, the Huckleberry Finn case cannot be used to show that good intentions are not necessary for virtuous action.

However, my use of ‘good intention’ captures what is normally thought of as a good intention. That is, when we use this expression, we normally do mean ‘morally good intention.’ It would be odd to say of someone “He did something he thought was wrong, but he acted with good intentions” (N.B.: this is not the same as the more usual utterance “He did something wrong, but he acted with good intentions”). After all, Huck did think that he was unjustifiably harming Miss Watson, Jim’s owner. Indeed, the traditional conception of ‘morally good intention’ has been characterized by Michael Stocker in the following way:

A’s intention to do act b is morally good just in case A believes b to be overall good to do and A intends to do b for the sake of goodness. (Stocker 1970, p. 124)

Clearly, Huckleberry’s intentions fail to be good ones on this plausible analysis.<sup>13</sup>

But perhaps there is a very weak sense in which good intention is necessary for virtue. That is, the intention to perform some good for someone is necessary, even if the agent himself doesn’t think of the good as a moral good. Because the thesis is so weak, it is difficult to think of intuitively appealing counterexamples to it. This is because, even if it turns out to be false, there will have to be an extremely close correlation between these good intentions and success – given human nature. Is it the case, however, that the agent cannot have *bad* intentions?

Imagine a society that has evolved differently from human society. These creatures, Mutors, have evolved in an extremely harsh environment and have developed unusual strategies for survival. It happens to be the case that for them, beating one’s child severely when it is exactly 5.57 years old actually increases the life expectancy of the child by 50 percent. The child is upset by the beating, but this feeling goes away in time. It is also the case that the only way a Mutor could ever bring himself to so treat a child is to develop an intense pleasure in doing so. So some Mutors have a special trait – they intensely desire to beat children who are exactly 5.57 years old. That it is good for the child is irrelevant to them. This trait is valued by others, who must bring their children to the beaters when they are the right age, since they themselves

possess too much delicacy of feeling to be able to do it themselves. It is very important to note that the desire of these Mutors is extremely specific. They only desire to beat children at exactly the point that does the children good (though doing something good *for the children* is not their intention). Otherwise, the trait would obviously do more harm than good and could not be considered a virtue. What they are doing can be described as good, but they are not doing it because it is good. On my view this trait would be a virtue. It is an 'excellence of character' because it is valuable in that it actually does produce good and a significant social benefit, and the trait is specific enough so as *not* to produce overwhelming bad consequences. This is why this trait could not be fairly called 'viciousness.' Viciousness is not so specific. It is our intuitions about unspecific traits (such as viciousness) that infect our intuitions about the Mutors' trait.

This is why, on the weak reading of the term, good intentions do seem necessary for human beings to possess virtue. That is because bad intentions or bad desires in human beings just are not that specific. Consider our suspicions of a merry executioner. He enjoys his job tremendously. He looks forward to work every morning, and spends many a happy hour devising new and improved forms of execution. Yet, even those who believe in capital punishment will be repelled by the possibility that this person's pleasures are not restricted to the punishment of vicious criminals. Uneasiness is caused by this realization. Thus it is with bad intentions. However, to say that human beings are so constructed as to be unable to be virtuous while acting with bad intentions is to state something contingent, something about human nature; it is not to state something definitive about virtue unless one can argue for a chauvinistic thesis that moral virtue can obtain only for human beings, and not for any intelligent social creature. A theory of virtue should be broader than this. It must be conceptually possible to speak of the moral virtues of Mr. Spock. But it seems generally true that, for human beings anyway, good intentions are crucial, or important, for virtue insofar as they are important to the agent's regular success.

There are many situations in our ordinary lives that mirror considerations similar to those of the Mutor case. When parents take their child to the doctor to be vaccinated, they know that the shots will terrify the child and even cause the child pain. But they nevertheless are acting in the child's interest by getting her vaccinated as efficiently and competently as possible. The doctor's state of mind is irrelevant to them as long as it does not impact on the well-being of the child. The doctor who

vaccinates the child may not have good intentions, in that the welfare of the child is not what is motivating him. He may only be motivated by his income, or the esteem of his colleagues, or the fact that the service is necessary for his certification. Yet, if he does a good job, he is the one parents will seek out.

One might be willing, then, to give up good intentions as necessary for moral virtue, and instead hold that either good intentions or good motives are necessary. For example, Philippa Foot does not seem to believe good intentions are necessary to virtue when she writes, “. . . it seems right to attribute a kind of moral failing to some deeply discouraging and debilitating people who say, without lying, that they mean to be helpful; and on the other side to see virtue *par excellence* in one who is prompt and resourceful in doing good . . . what this suggests is that a man’s virtue may be judged by his innermost desires as well as by his intentions . . .” (Foot 1978, pp. 4–5). It’s not that good intentions are not important. Foot simply seems to be saying that either good intentions or good basic desires are necessary to virtue.

Other writers, such as Hume and Pincoffs, have pushed the psychological requirement back further, to the level of motives.<sup>14</sup> However, as is the case with good intentions, good motives – where good motives are understood to be ones having good objects – will not be necessary either. I will return to a discussion of the role motives have in an account of the virtues in the next chapter, when I distinguish my account from motive utilitarianism. For now, however, my claim is that one can develop arguments that show that good motives are not necessary, arguments that parallel the arguments showing that good intentions are not necessary.

The claim that virtue does not require good intentions, or even good motives, isn’t that shocking. Some particular virtues may have such requirements, but others will not. Though it is difficult to see how one could be benevolent without being well intentioned, justice does not make similar demands. A person can be just, or fair in his dealings with others, without having kind thoughts toward them or without being motivated to aid them. Rather, the motive could be self-interest, the intention one of avoiding unpleasant interactions with others.

Likewise, my doctor may have the virtue of sensitivity in administering treatment to children; she can do so with the minimum of fuss and with great consideration, though what motivates her may simply be a desire to be paid well and to attract the maximum number of patients.

Michael Stocker has suggested to me that we may, then, want to

make a distinction between technical virtues and moral virtues. It is true that some persons may have good-producing traits that are prized and valued by members of the community, yet these traits are not moral virtues since they lack the requisite motivational and intentional structure. A trait does not count as a moral virtue without the agent's possessing good intentions and/or good motives, though the trait may well be a virtue of some lesser sort. Thus, both sorts of traits are virtues but one type is better than the other, and only the best type is true moral virtue. There are two responses here. First of all, I am willing to concede that having good intentions or motives may make a trait better since it makes the good effect more likely – but this isn't necessarily the case. I may prefer the doctor who efficiently administers aid to the well-intentioned doctor who, because he hesitates to cause suffering, prolongs the experience. This will depend on facts of human psychology. Secondly, however, even if it turns out that the good intentions ensure better consequences with respect to all human characteristics, this would not be sufficient to show that the traits that will still produce good without the good intentions and motives are not moral virtues. People who regard only the best traits as moral virtues are maximizers, and subject to all the problems that a maximizing requirement places on a theory. Thus, if one wants to avoid a commitment to maximization – which many virtue theorists want – then any distinction along these lines would be purely semantic. That is, it doesn't seem to do any work; it's a distinction without a function.

What morals do I want to draw from the discussion so far? First, it is not clear at all that any unified account of virtue can be given when that account requires some particular type of mental state to be common to all virtues.

Secondly, and possibly more radically, when a person possesses a virtue, this does not mean that in acting in accordance with that virtue, he is doing something he thinks to be morally good. This means that he is not necessarily following a conception of the good, even though his actions conform to 'good morality.' As Bennett would put it, his sympathies are in the right place, but he doesn't know this.

In the vast majority of instances of virtue, acting according to a conception of what is good is required for the benefit to be realized. But, as certain aberrant cases show us, this is not required of virtue across the board. It is not required in cases where the person experiences an emotional alienation from his conception of what is good and where this alienation is called for. Huckleberry is just one case, but I suspect

that these cases are all around us. Perhaps people who, in spite of the fact that they believe killing to be morally wrong, kill loved ones who are terminally ill and in agony experience this sort of alienation.

If one takes seriously my doubts about characterizing moral virtue as necessarily involving good motivation, then this also has implications for virtue *ethics*. One common feature of virtue ethics is the insistence that virtue is primary (Crisp with Slote 1997). The basic idea is that if one makes use of other moral notions such as ‘right,’ those notions are themselves understood in terms of virtue, not vice versa. Thus, virtue has theoretical or explanatory primacy. As such, persons developing a virtue ethics need to give some account of the virtues in order to fully develop their theory; in the same way, a consequentialist would need to give an account of the good to fully develop her theory.

Most literature in the virtue ethics tradition recently has been negative, that is, it has focused on presenting virtue-based problems for the traditional theories. However, Michael Slote and Rosalind Hursthouse are among a new set of writers who are trying to work out systematically what such a theory would look like. Slote argues that a possible “agent-based” account would hold that good motives (which characterize virtue) are both necessary and sufficient for right action (Slote 1997). This approach is what I have characterized as ‘internalist,’ since it locates value within the agent. One general problem with this account has to do with characterizing motives as good without appealing to their characteristic consequences (which are external factors). Such an account is reducible to a form of motive consequentialism (Adams 1976). Another problem has to do with the fact that some actions seem to be virtuous or vicious even though prompted by or explained in terms of the same motive. For example, the soldier who risks his life to save his friends in a battle – and keeps his head down out of fear of being shot – is still courageous, and keeping his head down is prudent and certainly not base, even though motivated by fear. On the other hand, the person who runs without offering help could be thought of as cowardly even though his action is also motivated by fear – the same fear that prompted the courageous soldier to keep his head down. So, fear motivates one agent to keep his head down, and that’s okay; but fear motivates another to flee, and that may well not be (depending on the context). Given the difference in evaluation yet the sameness of motive, something else has to be responsible for our moral assessment of the actions (see Driver 1995).

Rosalind Hursthouse also attempts to derive a notion of right action within virtue ethics by offering the following definition:

P.I. An action is right iff it is what a virtuous agent would characteristically (i.e. acting in character) do in the circumstances. (Hursthouse 1999, p. 28)

This definition in turn, needs to be fleshed out with an account of the virtuous agent, which in turn requires us to develop some understanding of virtue. The preceding account would be completely compatible with a form of virtue consequentialism, depending on how ‘virtuous agent’ is understood. However, for Hursthouse, virtue is characterized as a state of the agent that necessarily involves an appeal to certain internal states of the agent, though it also involves an appeal to human flourishing or *eudaimonia* – and here Hursthouse is reviving an Aristotelian mixed view. Certain internal states are necessary but not sufficient. Hursthouse’s account differs from that of Slote, who seems to be offering a purely internalist view according to which the internal state is also sufficient. My disagreements with Hursthouse’s approach are similar to my disagreements with Aristotle’s – the knowledge condition seems too strong. Hursthouse tries to deal with this sort of objection by toning down what is required; that is, the virtuous agent must have some conception of the good, though perhaps she may not be able to articulate it. However, as noted earlier, the account would still not tolerate actual epistemic error, which, my earlier arguments have tried to show, should be tolerated by a plausible account of moral virtue.

Even accepting that internalist conceptions of virtue (or mixed accounts with an internalist component) fail, it does not follow that virtue theory is necessarily fragmented. Since virtue psychology has failed, the most promising way to develop this theory is as an externalist theory, that is, as a theory that does not make an appeal to special internal states as definitive of virtue. The psychological states of the agent matter, but only in terms of the states of affairs they either generate or stand in relation to. The question of who is correctly describing virtue, Aristotle or Kant, is moot. Having one’s inclinations in harmony with the good certainly helps virtue, as does having a strong sense of duty and acting from good intentions. But none of these is definitive of virtue. What is definitive is this: a virtue is a character trait (a disposition or cluster of dispositions) that, generally speaking, produces good consequences for others.<sup>61</sup> Further, the consequences must be of a certain sort. I would allow a good deal of flexibility in articulating the value theory portion of the account, an issue I return to later in this book.

The view is externalist because an internalist account would hold that virtue depends completely upon the agent's psychology being of a certain sort; that is, it depends upon the mental states of the agent that give rise to the good action. An externalist view, however, makes the attribution of virtue depend in part on factors external to the agent's psychology with respect to agency; in my case, the factors will be the systematic consequences of that psychology. Further, on my view, there need not be a "match" between psychology and the world. As long as one's psychological states systematically lead to the good, that is sufficient for virtue. This view minimizes the impact of luck – and luck is a particular problem for external accounts. An external account is susceptible to luck, since it makes the moral quality of a person's character depend upon external factors, many of which are beyond her control. By keeping the focus of evaluation internal, one can minimize luck, though not eradicate it. It can't be completely eradicated, since constitutive luck, for example, affects the agent's mental states. But my external account will not suffer from luck to the extent that many would, since I claim that the virtues are character traits that *systematically* lead to the good, but they don't infallibly lead to the good. There is room for accident in this account, which makes the account more plausible. In the later chapters, this distinction between internalist and externalist accounts will be spelled out more fully; it turns out to be helpful in understanding some of the underlying differences between alternative theories of evaluation.

The virtues of ignorance, such as modesty and blind charity, are virtues because the effects of the traits are beneficial; *not* because the possessors of those traits necessarily had good intentions or good inclinations or good motives, and certainly not because they possessed fortitude. On a consequentialist theory, these psychological states will be very important features of virtue because good intentions, good inclinations, and so on are conducive to good action. They are reliable directors of good action. So, in looking at specific disposition clusters that make up a virtue, being disposed to have 'good' states of mind is helpful. It's just not necessary.

Also, particular virtues such as generosity can be analyzed in terms of specific psychological states that characterize them. For generosity the typical motive may be something like a desire to benefit others and the typical intention one of aiding them. While this is true of the virtue of generosity, it is not true of virtue across the board. The account of virtue I will be presenting in the next two chapters leaves room for the analysis

of particular virtues in terms of the characteristic psychological states that underlie them.

I stress the importance of these states of mind here to avoid misinterpretation. My intention is not to argue that ignorance is better than knowledge or that good intentions are useless. Rather, I intend only to argue that while knowledge is often desirable, lack of knowledge may also be desirable. Likewise with good intentions. Huckleberry has subjectively bad intentions and fails to know what the right thing to do is, yet his sympathetic heart warrants our commendation. The purpose of the next two chapters is to provide some explanation or theory of virtue that will accommodate both the virtues of ignorance and Huckleberry Finn-type cases.

I first examine what a consequentialist theory of the virtues would look like. There are two forms such a theory could take. Since my aim is to articulate an externalist option, I will not be considering subjective consequentialism. Objective consequentialism – the view that a trait's goodness is determined by the actual rather than, for example, the expected consequences – is the externalist version of consequentialism. The next chapter will more thoroughly explore the theoretical basis for the distinction between objective and subjective consequentialism, showing them to be dramatically different types of theories of morality, but the main project will be a more thorough articulation of the objective version.