"feel the effects of their resentment"[34]—such as the poor and the oppressed in far-away countries of which we know little, or the future generations who will have to deal with the environmental degradation that we have left behind us. It is hard to see how this sort of vice deprives us of many pleasures, but easy to see how it will spare us the anxiety that more virtuous people will feel.

In short, Butler's claims about the harmony of virtue and self-interest seem implausible to me. Nonetheless, his claims about our "obligation to the practice of virtue" seem to me essentially correct. We must, I think, face the hard fact that a virtuous life is the right or proper life for us to lead—even though by living such a life we expose ourselves to various sources of pain and anxiety that the vice of callousness would spare us from.[35]

10

Virtue Ethics and the Charge of Egoism

JULIA ANNAS

We care about being generous, courageous, and fair. This looks as though we care about other people, since what we care about is having a disposition to help others, respect their rights, and intervene when they are threatened. But is it correct for concern for others to come in by way of my own dispositions? Is caring about virtue focusing too much on myself? This worry has been the basis of objections that virtue ethics, as a theory, is selfish or egoistic. In recent years defenders of virtue ethics have provided many responses, but the objection keeps coming up in revised forms. The objection can be met, and discussion of the issue is also useful in helping us to see what virtue ethics is, not just what it is not.

The egoism in question here is ethical egoism, the theory that holds that my own good is the ethical standard for what it is right for me to do, the dispositions I should have, and so on. The theory comes in several versions, depending on the many different possible interpretations of what my own good is. My own good might be held to consist in my having the maximum pleasure, or it might be given other content, such as my satisfying my desires, or achieving what is in my own interests. (And different versions will result from distinguishing what is actually in my interests from what I merely think to be in my interests.) Some versions of egoism are interested in my own good merely as a standard for "the rightness of action", while others think of it also as what justifies my having some dispositions rather than others. But for present purposes I don't think that it matters to distinguish these versions. The basic idea of ethical egoism is that what ethically justifies what I do, and the way I am, is my own good, where that is distinct from, and potentially in conflict with, the good of others. And we find at once a problem in the idea that this could be an *ethical* position, because of the very basic thought that ethics is fundamentally about the good of *others*, not my good.[1]

1. There are other problems with egoism as a theory, but what matters here is the point that intuitively ethics is thought to be about the good of others, so that focusing on your own good seems wrong from the start.

Why would anyone think that virtue ethics is egoistic?

What is a virtue? A minimal conception is that of a disposition or character trait. Virtues are not just character traits, however, since forgetfulness or stubbornness are not virtues. Virtues are character traits which are in some way desirable. But neither are they just desirable character traits; tidiness and punctuality are nice traits to have, but not yet virtues. A virtue is, at least, a character trait which is admirable, embodying a commitment to some ethical value. If we deny this, we are losing contact with everyday discourse about virtue and virtuous people, as we can see if we look at a typical list of virtues. Courage, fairness and patience are all virtues. They are not just character traits that are desirable to have—in fact, notoriously not everyone *desires* to be courageous, even when they think they ought to be. They are character traits which embody a commitment to some value, in a way which may benefit the agent, but equally may benefit others. The courageous person stands up for what is worthwhile against temptations to give in or compromise. This is a useful trait for the person to have in that it enables her to achieve her own goals without being sidetracked in various ways. But obviously this trait is also useful for others, in that it enables her to stand up for what is worthwhile when the interests of others are at stake.

Some accounts of virtue, stemming from Hume and the utilitarians, have thought that a virtue is just a trait which it is useful for me to have in that it promotes a value which might benefit me or equally well might benefit others. This does at least capture the thought that there is something worthwhile about the virtues, something explaining why we think it important, and not just nice, to have them. But reduced virtue theories of this kind leave the virtues as merely plastic dispositions whose shape is determined by what happens to benefit people; and this is wildly revisionary as an account of virtue.[2] Moreover, a virtue is not just a disposition which happens to have certain effects. It is a disposition which works through the agent's practical reasoning, built up from decisions and manifesting and expressing itself in decisions and choices which reflect the agent's deliberations.

The virtues, then, are dispositions which do not just happen to have the effect of achieving what is valuable for others as well as the agent; they are dispositions *to do* this—dispositions to choose actions that give others their fair share, treat others in considerate ways, stand up for the rights of others, and so on. These dispositions may also, of course, sometimes achieve what is valuable for the agent also, but that is not their point: they are dispositions to do what has value.

Where, then, does a charge of selfishness or egoism take hold?

One kind of virtue ethics holds that I should cultivate the virtues because they are valuable, in a number of different ways, and that these cannot be reduced or simplified down to one. (This might be the way we begin to teach the virtues.) There is nothing egoistic about such a position; but it is obviously unsatisfactory from a theoretical point of view. Why are just these dispositions virtues? Can we really say nothing about what the values of the different virtues have in common?

Any theory of virtue will have something to say about the way the different virtues are valuable by contributing in a unified way to a further end. Since they are

2. The problem is not just that it is revisionary, but that the revisions forced by the theory will be completely indifferent to any normal expectations about the virtues.

dispositions, they are ways that I am, traits of my character; they contribute to my living my life as a whole in a certain way. The reason it is worthwhile for me to cultivate the virtues is that they will make up or constitute my living my life as a whole in a way which it is valuable to live. The notion of "my life as a whole" is crucial here; the virtues make sense within a conception of living, which takes the life I live to be a unity.

Thus the virtues will contribute to the overall final end I have in living my life as a whole; this is variously called *eudaimonia*, following Aristotle, or flourishing, or happiness, though the latter is always risky because of potential confusion with modern feel-good notions of happiness.

It is at this point that charges of egoism begin to get a grip. The virtues are valuable because they contribute to my final end—but this is *my* final end, not yours, and so it looks as though it is my good, or interests, or whatever, which is justifying my acquisition of the virtues, and so they owe their ethical justification to their contribution to my good. So we have egoism?

No. This goes too fast. For the virtues are not just any old dispositions making up my life; they are courage, generosity, fairness, and so on. How does fairness, for example, contribute to my final end? The fair person will give others what is their due, sometimes to his own disadvantage. In what sense is this contributing to *his* good, interests, or whatever?

One answer is that it need not. Exercising the virtues is part of my living my life as a whole; they are dispositions whose exercise makes up the way I live my life, my life overall. But the exercise of the virtues need not *benefit* me, or contribute to my living a life we would call flourishing. Exercising the virtues is admirable, and we do admire people whose lives are lived in admirable and valuable ways. But these need not lead to flourishing, and in the case of some virtues, those which primarily benefit others, they characteristically will not. The virtues, then, will be pursued as part of my whole life, but they need not benefit me or lead to my flourishing.[3] This type of theory faces questions as to what does justify the distinct virtues, and why we think that the dispositions on our list are the virtues.

Many virtue ethicists have followed Aristotle and the rest of the classical virtue ethics tradition in holding that the virtues benefit their possessor. Not only are they dispositions whose exercise constitutes the living of a certain kind of life, they are (in the weak versions) necessary and (in the strong versions) sufficient for the living of that life to be good, for the life to be a good, flourishing one. Here we find a unified justification for the virtues, and do not have to rely on finding them valuable in a piecemeal way. However, accusations of egoism do begin to find a footing at this point. For it looks as though my flourishing is my good in a way which contrasts with the good of others, and if the virtues benefit me by leading to my flourishing, then my reason for acquiring and exercising them would seem to be my seeking my own flourishing. And how can this be a decently *ethical* reason for becoming virtuous? Shouldn't an *ethical* reason for becoming virtuous be that the virtues contribute to the flourishing of other people, not to my flourishing?

3. See Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics, a Pluralistic View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Two versions of this objection are frequently made, but can be rapidly met. The first goes: if my reason for having the virtues is that they benefit me, contribute to my flourishing, then virtue ethics will come up with wrong recommendations as to what I should do. I should be brave, for example, in aid of my own flourishing, and thus only in the interests of what will benefit me. Courageous behavior in standing up for the interests of others would seem not to be virtuous, on this account, or at least not required by virtue. However, it is clear what is wrong with this. Courage is a *virtue*, that is, a disposition to stand up for what is worthwhile even against temptation to avoid danger, difficulty, and so on. I have not so far specified how we are to identify what is worthwhile, but it is clear that, however we do this, courage is not a disposition which can be switched off when my own interests are not at stake. The virtues are dispositions embodying a commitment to values, not to my self-interest. Thus the thesis that the virtues benefit their possessor cannot be interpreted in such a way that the virtuous person acts in an egoistic way. Rather, we have to take the virtues as they are, taking into account the point that virtuous action may often lead to loss of various kinds on the agent's part, and so is not egoistic. We need to find an account of what it is for the virtues to benefit their possessor which does justice to this.

A second objection holds that, even if someone is virtuous in the sense of acting virtuously, still, if their reason for so acting is that being virtuous benefits them and is in his interests, he cannot have the right ethical *motivation*. If I stand up for someone else's rights, act generously to a stranger, and so on, then I may have acted virtuously, but if my reason for so doing is that doing the virtuous thing leads to my flourishing, then it is my own good which is my reason for acting in the relevant way. Is this not egoistic? The obvious answer to this is that if my motivation is egoistic then I am not acting virtuously. I could, of course, do an action which is such that a virtuous person would do it, but do it only because I have an eye on my own flourishing. But then I would not be virtuous, because a virtue is not a disposition that can be exercised in the absence of the right kind of motivation. If I have my eye on my own flourishing, then I am not acting from courage, or generosity, or whatever. The thesis that the virtues benefit their possessor cannot show that the virtues themselves lead to deliberations with egoistic content, or egoistic motivation. In either case, all that would be shown would be that it was not a virtue that was in question.

However, these objections, particularly the second, can take a more sophisticated form. The objection that virtue ethics is at bottom egoistic has recently been reformulated by Thomas Hurka in a general attack on virtue ethics, and meeting this objection turns out to be revealing about virtue ethics and particularly the relation of being virtuous to flourishing.[4]

Hurka claims that a virtue ethics (at least of the kind we are considering here) is what he calls "foundationally egoistic."[5] The claim that the virtues are necessary for flourishing,[6] together with the claim that an ethics of virtue will give an account of what it is right to do in terms of virtue,[7] leads, he asserts, to the thesis that for virtue ethics a person's reasons to act and be motivated in virtuous ways "derive ultimately from their own flourishing", and this will, he claims, show virtue ethics to be egoistic.

According to Hurka, two dilemmas for virtue ethics can be constructed. One goes as follows. Hurka tries to show that *either* virtue ethics is committed to accepting that it has an egoistic end, in which case it is not a satisfactory ethical theory, *or*, if not, it is committed to being a "two-level" theory, something that is problematic for virtue ethicists to accept.

This alleged dilemma starts from the assumption that a theory which holds that the virtues benefit their possessor is committed to egoism. "A flourishing-based theory . . . says that a person has reason to act rightly only or ultimately because doing so will contribute to her own flourishing. If she believes this theory and is motivated by its claims about the source of her reasons, her primary impetus for acting rightly will be a desire for her own flourishing. But this egoistic motivation is inconsistent with genuine virtue, which is not focused primarily on the self. . . . Someone motivated by the theory's claims about reasons will therefore be motivated not virtuously but in an unattractively self-indulgent way".[8]

Hurka here lays out lucidly the claim that to act so as to achieve my own flourishing is to act from egoistic motivation, and the further claim that this is self-indulgence. The problem is that there is no argument for either of these claims.[9] The first claim in particular is obviously denied by a virtue ethicist who thinks that the virtues are necessary (or sufficient) for flourishing. For if this is true, then aiming at my flourishing is aiming at *acting and living virtuously*, living as a person who is fair, just, brave, generous, and so on. How is this egoistic? The claim that an agent's motivation is egoistic *merely* because she is aiming at her flourishing is not a claim from neutral ground between Hurka and the rest of us, including the virtue theorist. It assumes the truth of Hurka's own claim, that aiming at flourishing is egoistic. So it is not an independently powerful objection to the virtue theorist, who can reasonably deny it.

The same is even more clearly true of the second claim, namely that pursuing my flourishing in being virtuous is "focusing on the self" and thus being "self-indulgent". Again, this is hardly neutral ground between Hurka and the rest of us, including the virtue theorist. If I aim at living a good life, I am aiming at being just and generous, and thus "focusing" on others rather than myself. And it is particularly strange to hold that somebody living in a brave, generous, and just way is self-indulgent! The self-indulgent person is typically the person who cares too little for others.

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4. Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Vice and Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 219–55.

5. Ibid., 232.

6. Actually, Hurka on 232 of *Virtue, Vice and Value* introduces the claim as the claim that the virtues are "defined" as traits a person needs to flourish, and this is too strong; farther down the page we find the corrected claim that "the virtues are *needed for*. . .flourishing".

7. I have stated this, deliberately, in a rather general way. Hurka, like many modern theorists, demands, without argument or considering alternatives, a "theory of right action." That is, he demands that an ethical theory come up with a universally applicable procedure for specifying the right thing to do, which in the case of virtue ethics produces this via "what the virtuous person would do." I have argued against this way of construing a virtue ethics account of right action, and suggested an alternative, in "Being Virtuous and Doing the Right Thing," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association* (November 2004).

8. Hurka, *Virtue, Vice and Value*, 246.

9. However, by the time we have worked through both dilemmas we shall have more insight into Hurka's assumptions, which lead him to see no need for argument here.

So Hurka has failed to show that the virtue theorist is forced onto the second horn of his alleged dilemma. This is so because, far from isolating a particular position of the virtue theorist, he has so far simply made theoretical assumptions with no argument for them.

However, even though the first horn of the dilemma lacks force, let us look at this second horn, for it turns out to be instructive. The thought here is that there is a problem in being required by the theory to be motivated by what, according to the theory, is one's aim. So, the theory has to tell you not to be motivated by what, according to the theory, is your aim, but by something else instead. In the present case, to avoid the alleged problems of being motivated by my own flourishing, the theory tells me to be motivated by the virtues themselves—to act, that is, from the motivation to be fair or generous, to give others their due, or to make them better off than they would otherwise be. For if I were to be virtuous with one eye always on my own good, I would not be properly *virtuous*. Hurka claims that "this requires the theories to be what Parfit calls *self-effacing*, telling agents not to be motivated by or even to think of their claims about the source of their reasons".[10]

A swift response by the virtue theorist here is that of course, if the virtues lead to flourishing, the agent would seek to have virtuous motivation—*how else* is she to flourish as a virtuous person? So there is no need for the theory to be self-effacing. Being virtuous is just what the theory tells you to do, not what it tells you to avoid—how could you flourish otherwise? This answer is correct, since the first horn of the dilemma has no force. But it does not get to the bottom of the issue of virtue and flourishing, so more needs to be said.

Self-effacingness is an issue which arises for consequentialism, one first clearly recognized in Sidgwick's *Methods of Ethics*. If our end should be to maximize some good consequence (happiness, pleasure, welfare, the good, or whatever) then it will soon become clear that if everyone tries to employ a method so remote from our everyday practical thinking, the result will not be much good—it will, in fact, be worse, from the theory's point of view, than if they do not.[11] It looks, then, as though in order for the aim of the theory to be achieved, this is best done by its not being aimed for directly. This at once forces the issue: *by whom* is the aim of the theory to be achieved? The answers uniformly have to divide into two the source from which the theory's inventors hope its achievement is to come.

One scenario is that some people have a clear view of the theory's aim, and they manipulate others (either by withholding information or by misleading them) into having motivations which have no reference to the theory's aim, but whose presence helps to bring it about. This is the version that Bernard Williams has aptly called "Government House" consequentialism; the colonials, rather than vainly trying to enlighten the natives, manipulate the natives into furthering the aims which the colonials consider enlightened.

This is an obviously unattractive scenario, and consequentialists have tended to prefer a less objectionable picture of most people's ability to be enlightened about

10. Hurka, *Virtue, Vice and Value*, 246.

11. Given the remoteness of consequentialist reasoning from the way we ordinarily think, it is independently reasonable to think that most people are not going to find it easy or acceptable to impose this form of thinking on themselves.

the consequentialists' aim. In this alternative, then, each individual is supposed to be capable, in principle, of understanding the consequentialists' aim, and also of understanding that ordinary practical reasoning will not bring this about. Assuming that they fail to regard this position as a reason to reject consequentialism, they are supposed to understand that most of the time they should forget about consequentialism and be moved by motivations whose effect, though not their content, is consequentialist. Thus the person's practical reasoning is fundamentally split: part is manipulating the other part into acting in a way with consequentialist effects, while the other part either is too stupid to notice, or dumbs itself down into forgetting, or not minding, that it is being thus manipulated. R. M. Hare is the frankest consequentialist in admitting that the individual on this view replicates inside himself the colonialist view of the native: he calls the manipulating part of the person the "archangel" and the manipulatee the "prole".

This problematic split in the agent's practical deliberation is not, it should be noted, at all like a situation to which it is sometimes compared, namely when we from time to time step back "in a cool hour" and reflect about the way we have been reasoning in the hurried course of everyday life. For that presupposes that reflection is prompted by felt difficulties at the everyday level. And this is very different from the situation where the everyday level is judged defective by an external authority precisely on the grounds that it is not aware of difficulties and feels that it is doing fine.

Consequentialists have been much criticized for the objectionable aspects of their view, which I will not rehearse here. I am merely concerned here with the problem which virtue ethicists have pressed in particular, namely that the split within the self (which mirrors the split between the two classes in consequentialist society) renders impossible an acceptable account of practical reasoning. For the archangel and the prole can, *ex hypothesi*, not share the same practical reasoning. A large advantage of virtue ethics over consequentialism has frequently been taken to be the point that the former is not driven to split the source of practical reasoning in such a way that two levels of reasoning are going on which, by definition, cannot unite to come to a practical conclusion, the conclusions of either having to be hidden from the other. Virtue ethics, by contrast, insists on the unity of the agent's practical reasoning.

Hurka is aware of these criticisms; interestingly, he actually tries to make them rebound on the virtue ethicist.[12] Allowing that the split in the self is a disadvantage, he claims that it also afflicts the virtue ethicist, and in a more "disturbing" way. For the consequentialist is put into the problematic position by a "contingent psychological fact", namely that if people try to achieve the consequentialist aim they will not succeed.[13] But

12. Hurka, *Virtue, Vice and Value*, 247.

13. Even if contingent, it is surely a rather important fact, since it implies that consequentialism has a mistaken moral psychology. Most people would surely accept that if an ethical theory is not livable—that is, it is impossible to put it into practice—then the theory is ruled out. It continues to surprise me that consequentialists fail to recognize this as an important point about their theory, instead resorting to "two-level" approaches, or distinguishing the truth of a theory from its applicability (as though the two were unconnected for a theory the point of which is to be put into practice).

virtue ethics, allegedly, *must* deflect attention from its own aim in order to avoid "self-indulgence".[14]

Fortunately, the way in which virtue ethics requires self-effacingness is perfectly harmless. First, there is a way in which virtue comes to efface itself from the virtuous person's motivation. A beginner in virtue will have to try explicitly to become a virtuous person, and to do so by doing virtuous actions; his deliberations will include such thoughts as that so and so is what a virtuous person would do, or what virtue requires. This is, indeed, how he guides his own deliberations. The truly virtuous person, however, will not explicitly think about, for example, being brave or performing a brave action. Rather, he will, as a result of experience, reflection, and habituation, simply respond to the situation, thinking that these people in danger need help, without explicit thoughts of bravery entering his deliberations. Thoughts about bravery, or the virtuous person, are no longer needed.[15] This does not, however, produce a problematic split in the self, for the reasonings about virtue and virtuous action could still be recovered if needed, and are thus still transparent to the agent. In fact, they are recovered when the brave person explains his action, as he does, for example, to a learner. The self-effacingness here is as harmless as it is with a practical skill. A skilled plumber or pianist will simply respond to a challenge, without explicit thoughts about good plumbing or playing; the occurrence of such thoughts notably marks the learner and it is a sign of expertise that they are no longer on the scene. Yet the expert can recover such thoughts to convey the expertise to a learner; no problematic split in the self, or in the agent's practical reasoning, has been introduced.[16]

What, however, of the virtuous person's thoughts about flourishing? On some theories of virtue the virtuous person would not need to have these. But we are considering theories in which the virtues are held to benefit the agent by leading to his flourishing, and it is hard to see how on this conception of virtue someone could be virtuous while having no, or the wrong, thoughts about flourishing. If bravery does benefit the agent and lead to his flourishing, then thoughts about flourishing have to play some role in the agent's becoming virtuous. Let us try to imagine someone who is brave, but has no thoughts about what it is to flourish, or who thinks that you flourish only by having a good time. We find a tension. If he really has no thoughts about his life as a whole, then what we called bravery looks more like a localized routine habit, and so not a virtue at all. If he really thinks that you flourish only by having a good time, then again what we called bravery looks shaky; if it really is the disposition to stand firm against danger only in the service of having a good time, then again we do not actually have a virtue.

14. The *tu quoque* form of the objection suggests that Hurka thinks that the schizophrenia objection actually is an important one against consequentialism; it is not clear how he proposes to meet it.

15. See Bernard Williams, "Acting as the Virtuous Person Acts," and Rosalind Hursthouse, "The Virtuous Agent's Reasons: A response to Williams," both in *Aristotle and Moral Realism*, ed. R. Heinaman (London: University College London Press, 1995), 24–33.

16. This very brief account presupposes that the development of virtue is like that of a practical skill, a point not argued here but in any case familiar from the mainstream virtue ethics tradition.

The virtuous person will, then, have thoughts about flourishing. These will be like the explicit thoughts about virtue and virtuous action; they will be explicit in the beginner, who needs to be taught the point of being brave, generous, or whatever. As he becomes more virtuous, he will no longer need reminders about the point of being virtuous; these thoughts will gradually, as they are no longer needed, become effaced from his deliberations, and he will simply act, think, and feel virtuously without explicitly thinking about the point of it. Still, this progressive effacement from his explicit thoughts does not mean that thoughts about flourishing evaporate and leave a blank. For, as with virtue itself, the thoughts can be recovered, when they need to be conveyed to a learner, and so they remain transparent to the agent. But, as with virtue itself, the progression is like that in a skill from a learner to an expert: explicit thoughts gradually become effaced from explicit deliberations, but can be reactivated if required without creating any split in the self, or problem for unified deliberation.

There is a complication, however, since eudaimonism, the kind of theory in which the agent's flourishing is basic, is not itself a theory; it is a family or cluster of theories, of diverse types. They have in common, of course, that the agent has a final end to which all her actions are, in one or another way, directed. Different theories of this type, however, have different positions as to what is the best way to achieve *eudaimonia* or flourishing. Aristotle says that being virtuous is necessary; the Stoics, that it is necessary and sufficient; and the Epicureans claim that flourishing is being in a state of pleasure.

We can agree, then, that our final end is flourishing while disagreeing as to what it is that constitutes flourishing, whether virtue, pleasure, or whatever. Whether this produces a problem depends on how flourishing is specified. It is arguable, though I shan't be arguing it here, that Epicurus, who is a hedonist, and thinks that we achieve our final end by seeking pleasure, does become liable to a problem of the same type as those that afflict consequentialism. For he tells us that we shall achieve flourishing by seeking pleasure, and, although he also tells us that this is strongly circumscribed in ways that thoughtless pleasure-seekers get wrong, it is still *my* pleasure that I seek as a way to my flourishing. And this does look egoistic—it looks like a claim that I will flourish only if I put my own interests first as against those of others. Epicurus tells us that as a matter of fact I will not get this pleasure unless I live according to the virtues, but it was pointed out already by ancient critics that this is not very plausible unless we reinterpret what the virtues are. Thus it does seem that an Epicurean's theory tells her to achieve her end in an indirect way. This way requires her to pursue virtue, if she is to do so properly, in a way which hides from herself the fact that she is trying to achieve her aim of flourishing by getting herself into the right state of pleasure; and, if she is clear about her pursuit of pleasure, it requires her to redefine the virtues and what they require. Obviously, there will be problems in producing a unified account of the Epicurean's deliberations.[17]

But this problem does not afflict versions of eudaimonism which claim that my flourishing is to be achieved through my being virtuous. For this is the claim that

17. I discuss the problem with Epicureanism in detail in *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

being virtuous is the right way to achieve flourishing, and on this view flourishing is not a state of myself, as it is for hedonists, nor is it a matter of *my* good as opposed to yours, as it arguably has to be for Epicurus. For, if I achieve flourishing through being virtuous, my flourishing will be constituted by my virtuous activity, which is focused on others as much as on myself. In this it is unlike a pleasant state of myself, which I might well aim to produce in a way which focuses on me at the expense of others.

Thus those versions of virtue ethics which are forms of eudaimonism do not split the self or produce problems for deliberation, even though there is a sense in which a virtuous person's thoughts about flourishing are self-effacing; they disappear from explicit deliberation as the person becomes more virtuous and no longer needs them. Unlike the perpetually conflicting perspectives of the consequentialist, which can never be brought together in unified deliberation, the virtuous person's thoughts about virtue and flourishing can be recovered if needed, to convey to learners the nature and point of virtue, in a way which imports no conflict and creates no problem for the theory. This alleged dilemma, then, is no threat to the virtue ethicist.

There is, however, a second alleged dilemma in store, on the basis of Hurka's assertion that all virtue ethics is "foundationally egoistic" in aiming at flourishing. So we need to look further at the relation of virtue to flourishing.

According to Hurka, either flourishing is defined in a *substantive* way, in which case virtue ethics is committed to implausible claims, or it is defined in a *formal* way, in which case virtue ethics will give an unsatisfactory account of the virtues.[18] Either way, virtue ethics is supposed to be in trouble.

"A *substantive* conception equates flourishing with some determinate state F of people or their lives, where both the nature and the goodness of F are defined independently of the virtues".[19] This is a common way of stating the issue. The major objection to this, also common, is that we have to find such a state F (call it success) and a plausible list of the virtues (properly conceived), and show that having these will lead to achieving F, that is, success. And it is unlikely that we will succeed in this.

How much does this matter? *Of course* it is unlikely that being just, fair, and so on is a good bet for achieving success, *if* this success is defined independently of the virtues. A fairly common conception of success might be financial prosperity and security. A flashier definition might be, for example, being very rich and having a trophy spouse. These definitions are certainly "independent of the virtues". But whoever thought for a moment that being fair, generous, and so on was a good way to achieve *that*? Where success is defined independently of the virtues, it will always be hopeless to try to show that the virtues are a good way of achieving *that*.

This does show something about the virtues. It shows that problems are likely to lurk in any theory which as Aristotle's does, comes up with an account of flourishing which allows it to contain even some elements whose value for flourishing is defined independently of the virtues. But as far as concerns the general relation of virtue and flourishing, it shows only that no sensible virtue ethics works with a conception of flourishing which is substantive in this sense.

18. Hurka, *Virtue, Vice and Value*, 234–43.
19. Ibid., 235.

This is not to claim that the virtues are not useful in achieving some kinds of success defined independently of the virtues.[20] Brave people will achieve their ends more reliably, and can be trusted more, than the cowardly; people who are cruel and mean have difficulty sustaining the relationships needed for social cooperation; and so on. But it is a fact about the world that the virtuous are not guaranteed to succeed in worldly terms, and that virtue may even prevent it: brave people, for example, will protest against injustice rather than go along with it; honest people will refrain from taking advantage of a corrupt system plundered by the greedy; and so on. While it would be wrong to think of the virtuous person as always at a disadvantage in worldly terms, it is still true that no sensible virtue ethics works with a conception of flourishing which is substantive in the above sense. A virtue ethicist who defended such a substantive conception of flourishing would be committed to holding an unrealistic view of the extent to which the world will work in favor of the virtuous.

So we turn to the other option, which is that in virtue ethics, flourishing is defined formally (or, as Hurka puts it, "merely formally"). This "does not equate flourishing with any independent good F but only with the general idea of the human good, whatever its content".[21] Hurka's objection to this is odd. He claims that it abandons the "explanatory ambitions" which "we" have of a theory of virtue. Allegedly, "we" give an account of virtue a "task", which is that of using "one fundamental good F to explain simultaneously what unifies the virtues, what makes them good, and what distinguishes them from other goods that are not virtues".[22] The formal account of flourishing fails in this "task", he claims. Why? A virtue ethics theory can perfectly well explain all these things, and thus fulfill its Hurkan "task" of fulfilling explanatory ambitions for virtue. The oddity is in the demand that they all be explained in terms of one fundamental good F, which is defined independently of virtue.[23]

But why should the virtue ethicist accept this constraint? No reason is ever offered. A plausible conjecture is that it comes from the demand that an ethical theory have a form such that there is a basic concept, defined in a way which is both substantive and independent, from which other concepts in the theory are "derived", as is presumably thought to be the case in whatever theories are the favored model.[24] But there is no reason why a virtue ethicist should accept this, and plenty of reason to be suspicious, since the "task" has been set up in such a way that virtue ethics is bound to fail it. Nor should the virtue ethicist be bullied by claims that this is a demand which "we" make of virtue ethics. The achievements of the whole classical tradition of virtue ethics serves rather to strengthen doubts that the "derivation" model for ethical theories is at all appropriate. We may reasonably ask, Which theories in fact have this structure? (It does not fit scientific theories, certainly.) And why are they

20. I am grateful to Dave Schmidtz for helpful discussion on this point.
21. Hurka, *Virtue, Vice and Value*, 235.
22. Ibid.
23. There might of course be something about *virtue* that explained the unity of the virtues, their goodness, and so on, but this is clearly not what Hurka has in mind.
24. Hurka, in *Virtue, Vice and Value*, uses the language of "derivation" elsewhere, for example, 239, and on 246 talks of virtue ethicists "complet[ing] their derivations" (another "task"?) but never gives any reason why an ethical theory should be thought of in this way.

supposed to be a good model for ethics? Until we have convincing answers to these questions, we have no reason to let the "derivation" model be foisted on us.

Still, even if we reject the demand that flourishing be an independent concept from which we can "derive" the unity and value of virtue, we might reasonably wonder what role a formal account of flourishing can play in an ethics of virtue. Here we have the advantage of having, in the classical tradition, a large body of material consisting of theories which do develop accounts of virtue within a formally defined account of flourishing, so we can see what some of the possibilities are.

The basic assumption which needs to be made at the start of such a theory is that each of us has a final end or *telos*—some overarching aim in whatever we do. This is not a philosophers' theoretical demand; it is a very ordinary and everyday way of thinking of our lives. We get to it simply by reflecting on the fact that our actions can be thought of not only chronologically, in a linear way, as we perform one action after another. They can also be thought of, and frequently are, in a "nested" way, as happens whenever we ask *why* we are doing something. The answer to why I am doing a particular action will typically make reference to some broader concern, and this in turn to some even broader concern. Given that I have only one life, I will eventually come up with some very broad conception of my life as a whole, as that to which my actions are at any given point tending. This is my final end. A few points need to be stressed here. This is a very ordinary way of thinking, one in which everyone engages except people who are severely conflicted about their aims, or in denial about the way their actions fit into broader patterns in their lives.[25] We do not typically, when we think in this way, come up with a very *specific* characterization of such a "final end". We just think of it as "my life going well" or the like, where we are thinking of the life as a whole and not just the way it is now.

Although so far it is specified without reference to content, the conception of my final end has significant formal constraints. Most important, it is *complete*—all my actions are done for the sake of it, in a way that I do not seek it for the sake of anything further. My final end includes all my purposeful endeavors. All the classical ethical theories assume, with Aristotle, that everybody thinks of their life going well, in this way, as happiness, *eudaimonia*. Nowadays it is controversial to make this claim about happiness (at least in English). I think that reflection shows that we do have this conception of happiness,[26] but it is entangled with other thoughts about happiness that have come in from other quarters, such as the thought that it is pleasure or feeling good. Moreover, we are used to the idea that happiness might be a local aim in my life, so that I can do my duty and neglect my happiness, whereas the conception of happiness as my final end demands that it be complete, not just one local aim among others for my deliberations. It is, then, problematic for us to use the notion of happiness at this point, and many modern virtue ethicists avoid confusion by talking of flourishing instead. But in any case Aristotle at once remarks that people disagree as to what *eudaimonia* is, some calling it virtue, others pleasure, and

25. Also, perhaps, existentialists who deny that their life has any meaning or final end.
26. In "Happiness as Achievement," *Daedalus* (Spring 2004): 44–51, I argue that we do in fact have the notion of happiness as an achievement as well as the more familiar "subjective" notion of feeling good.

so on; it is not a concept which could be supposed to give a substantive conception of our final end.

The kind of theory which begins in this place, from *eudaimonia*, is unsurprisingly called eudaimonism, which is, as already remarked, a family or cluster of theories, not a theory itself. This is because different theories develop at this point, analyzing and giving a theoretical account of what *eudaimonia* is. It is perfectly possible for a eudaimonist theory to be egoistic. Above, I pointed out that a hedonist theory like that of Epicurus does risk becoming egoistic. Also, many people think of achieving *eudaimonia* as a matter of what I earlier called success—having a good job, a big house and car, and so on. (These versions are very liable to breakdown, and for reasons for which eudaimonist theories can give a good explanation.) But other versions are available, in particular versions which give a role to virtue.

The whole eudaimonist approach to ethics has been queried, for a reason which is worth a brief mention here. The objection is that thinking of ethics in terms of a final end, however specified, "has outrageously paternalistic implications: they see looming the specter of people's imposing 'the good life' on others".[27] However, this response rests on three misconceptions.

First, no theory imposes anything on anyone; people respond to theories by using their minds to think about them and then to accept or reject them. People can misuse theories to impose their own priorities on others, but this is an abuse that can happen with any theory, so it is irrelevant to mention this possibility with respect to virtue ethics.

Second, this objection forgets that theory does not find us blank slates. By the time we think about ethical theory at all, or even ethical alternatives, we *already* have views about our lives and how they are going, namely, the views we have acquired from our parents, schools, TV and general culture. Ethical theory helps us to reflect about the views of our lives that we already have: consequentialism urges us to throw them out (and then take them back); other theories urge us to rethink them for ourselves. So we have another sense in which eudaimonism doesn't, because it can't, impose anything on us. By the time eudaimonism comes into the picture, nobody fails to have views about their life except people who are pathological or seriously in denial about important aspects of themselves. Eudaimonism does not impose those views, but helps us to think about them for ourselves.

Third, many of the views people have about their lives prior to encountering ethical theory are themselves repressive and contain paternalistic elements imposed on them by parents or society. Thinking about their lives for themselves in terms of eudaimonist theory is empowering, not repressive. This will be especially true of forms of virtue ethics which stress, as the classical account does, the importance of the agent's practical reasoning in living her life.

This general objection to eudaimonism is, then, without force. We still, however, face the issue of showing how virtue has a role in my achieving *eudaimonia*, living well. But is this really puzzling? As Rosalind Hursthouse has recently stressed,[28]

27. Brad Hooker, "Is Moral Virtue a Benefit to the Agent?" in *How Should One Live? Essays on the Virtues*, ed. Roger Crisp, 141–55 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
28. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

when we bring up children, we teach them to be brave, generous, and so on, and we do so in their own interests, not just ours: we take it that to have a character of a certain kind is a good way for them to live. Few people in fact doubt that the virtues are goods which a person has reason to want.

Virtue ethics wants more than this, of course; it claims that virtue is, more weakly, necessary, or, more strongly, necessary and sufficient for flourishing. It must, as Hurka puts it, "give these virtues priority over other goods, by stating that they are uniquely necessary for flourishing".[29] Many critics have tried to show that this is not going to succeed, because it depends on showing that virtue is important and central to a person's good, a view which is, it is asserted, "not plausible". This kind of objection is very familiar; virtue ethics is held to flout common sense when it holds that virtue is at least necessary for leading a life which is a flourishing, good one.[30] For if this claim is true, then the wicked are not leading flourishing lives, however wealthy and glamorous they are. And is this not completely counterintuitive?

Surprisingly many critics have thought that defenders of virtue ethics hold *both* that virtue is at least necessary for flourishing *and* that wealth, glamour, and other indications of success are acceptable as indications of a flourishing life. Of course, this combination of positions is doomed to be hopelessly implausible. In fact, defenders of virtue ethics strongly reject the second position. Wealth and the like are quite unreliable as indications of flourishing. What matters for flourishing are a range of concerns, engagements, and commitments which are available to people with a virtuous character and unavailable to the vicious.

Criticism is generally renewed at this point on the grounds that claims about flourishing are now including claims about virtue, and are thus no longer common ground to the defender and the critic of virtue ethics. But virtue ethics has never held that they are, so this is not a problem. It is only to be expected that the virtuous will differ from the nonvirtuous in their assessments of flourishing, because we are dealing here with virtue in the context of a formally characterized conception of flourishing. Virtue ethics is not telling us that virtues are a good bet to achieve an independently defined flourishing, but rather telling us that the virtuous life is the *best specification* of flourishing. This is *already* a claim which the nonvirtuous dispute, since they think that wealth (etc.) matters more. How could we expect that such competing specifications of flourishing would agree as to how to achieve it? They are not disputing about means to an agreed end. Many critics have failed to see this point, because they have assumed that virtue ethics must have a substantive account of flourishing which is common to their opponents, defining flourishing in a way that is independent of the virtues. So they have cast the virtue ethicist in the

29. Hurka, *Virtue, Vice and Value*, 240.

30. I have very often seen and heard cited Bernard Williams's claim that there are horrible people who are "not miserable at all but, by any ethological standard of the bright eye and the gleaming coat, dangerously flourishing" (Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985], 46). However, these citations generally fail to note that Williams immediately adds that it is unclear whether there really are such people, or whether they are just our own projection, generally as figures in the past, where they are more plausible than in the present.

thankless and clueless role of arguing that the virtues are the best means to an end agreed on by virtuous and nonvirtuous alike.

It is often thought to be a fault in virtue ethics that it rejects the idea that virtue can be assessed as a means to an agreed-on substantive final end. But what would such an assessment actually look like? Another consequentialist critic of virtue ethics, Brad Hooker, sets up what he calls the "sympathy test". Take two people, Upright who has led a virtuous life and Unscrupulous who has not. Both have unsuccessful, wretched lives. Would we be sorrier for Unscrupulous — that is, would we think that Unscrupulous missed out on something worth having in not being virtuous?[31] Astonishingly, Hooker thinks that it is obvious that "we would *not* feel *sorrier* for Unscrupulous". Who, however, are "we"? Are we ourselves upright, or unscrupulous? (Assuming that we cannot be both, or neither.) Obviously, which we are, and the degree to which we are, makes all the difference in what our judgment is.[32]

Moreover, there is no need for virtue ethics to be concessive about this point. For it is a positive theoretical advantage, in that it answers to the way we actually think about our lives, and thus shows the theory to be well grounded empirically. Suppose that there is a disagreement as to whether someone ruined his life by acting virtuously, or rather should be admired for the way he did the right thing. We do not expect that people who disagree radically as to what ways of life are worth living will nevertheless agree, in this dispute, on a neutral list of indicators that a life is ruined or worth living. This is because such a dispute is recognized as not being a simple dispute about means to an agreed-on end, and not reducible to one. It is a more complex kind of dispute, in which a wider range of issues are in debate.

This point about virtue ethics has been argued convincingly in depth by Rosalind Hursthouse in her recent book, and I cannot do justice to it here. It is relevant to the present argument, however, in that a prominent reason why critics underestimate the resources of a formal conception of flourishing is that they tend to think of disputes about flourishing as having the form only of debates about means to an agreed-on end, while they can see that this is not what happens when a formally constrained conception of flourishing gets its content specified by a theory claiming that virtue is at least necessary for one to flourish.[33]

31. Hooker, "Is Moral Virtue a Benefit to the Agent?" 149 (emphasis in original).

32. Who *could*, in fact, make the judgment from a neutral point of view? Hooker goes on to admit that the argument "is addressed only to those of us who (a) do not know what we think about whether moral virtue is a fundamental category of prudential value and (b) do not feel sorry for the immoralist". This appears to imply that the judgment already embodies a commitment to the conclusion Hooker wants. It is indeed hard to think of someone making the judgment from a viewpoint that was completely neutral as to virtue's having any kind of value at all. And why should such a person's judgment have any authority, in any case?

33. We can see, though I cannot go into the issue further here, that the move to claiming the necessity of virtue for flourishing is fairly intuitive; Hursthouse carries this out elegantly. The move to claiming that virtue is also sufficient for flourishing is more complex, and relies on more theoretical grounds, including theoretical difficulties that the necessity view falls into.

Virtue, then, relates to flourishing in that living a virtuous life is claimed to be either necessary (in weaker forms of virtue ethics) or necessary and sufficient (in stronger forms) for flourishing; virtue ethics is one way of specifying our final end of flourishing. So there is no conflict latent in living a virtuous life as a way of achieving flourishing. If virtue ethics is correct, it is the only way to go. Holding the virtues to be a way of achieving flourishing, and thus benefiting their possessor, is in no way egoistic.

What becomes of the claim that virtue theories are "foundationally egoistic" in taking our reasons for acting to relate, ultimately, to our flourishing? Now that we have looked at the substantive and formal accounts of flourishing, we are in a position to see what this charge comes to. We have seen that Hurka is right in holding that a virtue ethics will have problems if it accepts what he calls a substantive account of flourishing. (Some versions of virtue ethics may have done this, but it is clearly an unpromising way to go.) In fact, a long tradition of virtue ethics has taken the form of a version of eudaimonism which characterizes our final end formally, and specifies it as being a life in which virtue is necessary (in weaker versions) or necessary and sufficient (in stronger versions). This is not an attempt to produce an account of flourishing whose characterization is independent of the virtues and thus acceptable to virtuous and nonvirtuous alike. Nor is it a point about "foundations" in the modern sense. Finally, we have seen that egoism is in no way involved.

We can appreciate, by the time we have seen even sketchily how a eudaimonistic virtue ethics actually works, that the point that I am aiming at my flourishing does not make the theory egoistic in any sense. If I am aiming at flourishing by living virtuously, I am aiming at being a just, generous (etc.) person. The formal point, that I am aiming at my flourishing, just comes down to the point that I am trying to live my life virtuously. If you point out that I am doing this as *my* way of flourishing not yours, the retort is that I am trying to be virtuous in living *my* life, not yours, because my life is the only life I can live. It would be objectionable, as well as ill advised, for me to try to live your life, but this is not egoistic of me.

There is one final misunderstanding that needs to be mentioned. Hurka claims at one point that even virtue ethics within a formal framework of flourishing is egoistic because he "assum[es that the agent's] flourishing is a state of him".[34] But my flourishing is obviously not a state of me, as we have already seen. It is the way I live my life, my activity as a (hopefully) virtuous person. We misunderstand eudaimonist conceptions of happiness and flourishing if we construe them as states or static conditions. To flourish, to be happy in the ancient understanding of that, is to live your life actively, not to be in a state as a result of what you (or possibly even someone else) does. This is a peculiarly modern misunderstanding, which perhaps derives from thinking of happiness or flourishing as a state of pleasant feeling.

We can see that the issue of whether or not virtue ethics is egoistic cannot even be properly discussed until we clarify the way in which being virtuous relates to our final end, *eudaimonia* or flourishing. Getting this clear removes the misunderstandings which have led to thinking of virtue ethics, at least in its classical version, as egoistic. We are brought back to our original thoughts: when I care about being generous, courageous, and fair, I am caring, quite straightforwardly, about other people.[35]