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VIRTUE, PRACTICAL GUIDANCE, AND PRACTICES

by

Carrie Anne Vodehnal

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Chapter 1

Practical Guidance and Virtue Ethics

One prominent objection to neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics asserts that virtue ethics cannot provide agents guidance about what to do. Because virtue ethics is distinguished from other ethical theories by its focus on agent-level evaluation and emphasis on developed discernment and deliberation about ends, it is in tension with the aim of developing an effective system of codified action guidance.¹ Yet if we think that at root, ethical theory is a practical endeavor aimed at articulating codified act-level responses to questions like ‘what should I do?’ or ‘how should one live?’ by failing to offer substantive practical guidance accessible to ordinary agents, virtue ethics risks failing to meet standard expectations of normative ethical theory.²

I argue that this objection is vague and can support a variety of specific claims against virtue ethics. Further, these claims divide into three basic versions, only one of which poses a genuine challenge to virtue ethics. One version of the objection suggests

¹ Louden, R. “On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics” in *Virtue Ethics*, Crisp, R. and M. Slote, eds. Oxford University Press: Oxford. 1997. Pp. 201-216. Driver, J. “Virtue Theory” in *Contemporary Debates in Moral Philosophy* pp. 113-123. Driver, J. “Normative Ethics” in *Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Analytic Philosophy*. pp31-62. Hursthouse, R. “Are Virtues the Proper Starting Point for Morality?” In *Contemporary Debates in Moral Philosophy* pp. 99-112. Hursthouse, R. “Applying Virtue Ethics” in *Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory*. New York: Clarendon Press. 1995. Pp. 57-75. Hursthouse, R. “Practical Wisdom: A Mundane Account” in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 106, 285-309. pp. 285-309. 2006 Hursthouse, R. *On Virtue Ethics*. Oxford University Press, 1999. Solomon, D. “Internal Objections to Virtue Ethics” in Statman, D. *Virtue Ethics: A Critical Reader*, 1997. Pp. 165-179. Annas, J. “Being Virtuous and Doing the Right Thing,” in *Proceedings of the Pacific Division of APA*. Pp. 61-75.

²Kagan, Shelley. *Normative Ethics*. Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1998.

that in order to adequately guide, an ethical theory needs to offer codified guidance or some sort of decision-making procedure for guidance. A second version of the objection suggests that ethical theories need to provide models of guidance or heuristics for agents in order to guide. Yet this first claim proves unduly stringent as an expectation of ethical theory, and the second fails to challenge virtue ethics because it expects something any theory can readily provide.

A third version of the practical guidance objection, however, challenges virtue ethics by claiming that virtue ethics fails to provide guidance that ordinary or untrained agents can use to realize virtue. I argue that this third version poses a reasonable challenge that virtue ethics needs to answer. Without this sort of guidance, it is unclear that the view is applicable, meets the aims of an ethical theory more broadly, and offers significant advantages over Kantian or Utilitarian accounts that provide agents with readily accessible principles or action guidance rules.

*Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics*³

A primary target of the practical guidance critique, neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, aims to answer the question, “how should one live?” neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics echoes the answer sketched by Aristotle, focusing on developing good character with the

³ Here, I follow the advice of M. Nussbaum in , “Virtue Ethics: A Misleading Category?” in *The Journal of Ethics*, 3: 163-201, 1999. To distinguish the type of virtue ethics I address here from other types of virtue ethics, I use the term, “Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics” instead of “Virtue Ethics.” However, because the only type of virtue ethics I am concerned with here is Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics my use of “virtue ethics” will refer to “Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics” throughout unless otherwise specified.

aim of flourishing as a being of one's kind.⁴ In contrast to views that more directly address the question of right action and develop a small set of principles that can be used to guide action in accordance with the aims of the views, virtue ethics maintains both the explanatory primacy of virtue and require practical wisdom as a non-reducible requirement of living well.⁵ The primary aim of ethical reflection on a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics is not, "the concept of right conduct, and the nature and justification of principles of behaviour,"⁶ but instead the life one leads and the type of person one is. Actions are critical for developing good character and exhibiting virtue on a neo-Aristotelian virtue account, yet the central question of how one should *live*, "is necessarily approached *via* the notion of a virtuous person."⁷

Right action involves an agent acting consistently in the right way, for the right reasons, with the right emotional response, and from the reasons she believes are right.⁸

⁴ Hursthouse, Rosalind. 1999. *On Virtue Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press. P. 167.

⁵ Pages 451-452 from: Watson, G. "On the Primacy of Character" in *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology*. Cambridge: MIT press, 1990. Pp. 449-469. See also, Solomon, David. 1997. "Internal Objections to Virtue Ethics" in *Virtue Ethics*. Daniel Statman, editor. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Pp. 165-179. p. 166; Watson, Gary. 1990. "On the Primacy of Character" in *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology*. Edited by Flanagan, Owen J., and Amélie Rorty. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press Pp. 451.

⁶ McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," in *Virtue Ethics*. Crisp, R. and M. Slote, eds. P. 141.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 141.

In contrast to act-oriented views that provide a right-making account of action, virtue ethics provides a conceptual framework for deliberation.⁹ Even though good action is an indispensable feature of good character, the evaluative criteria on a neo-Aristotelian virtue view are worked out in agent-level terms.¹⁰

As a result, virtue ethics lacks a straightforward, simple distillation of right action that can be articulated in a small set of principles or as strict, non-defeasible act prohibitions. Instead, neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics follows Aristotle, who,

sees our lives as full of different obligations, interests, and commitments, and as requiring from us many immediate reactions to immediate circumstances. This by and large is the nature of a human life, and his idea is that we live such a life well, i.e., for him, mainly in terms of the virtues moralistically conceived.¹¹

⁸ 1144b26-28, Broadie S. p. 353 from Broadie, S. "Aristotle and Contemporary Ethics" in *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*. Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing. 2006. 342-360.

⁹Wiggins, D. "Deliberation and Practical Reason" in *Needs, Values, Truth*. pp. 221-240. Page 237.

¹⁰ In "Modern Moral Philosophy," Anscombe points out that "virtues and vices are built up by performance of the actions in which they are instanced, and an act of injustice will tend to make a man bad." P. 43 [reprinted in *Virtue Ethics*, Crisp, R. and M. Slote, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1997.]

In NE, Aristotle claims that, "states arise out of like activities. This is why the activities we exhibit must be of a certain kind; it is because the states correspond to the differences between these." 1103b21-23, (see also 1103b30-31).

¹¹ Broadie, Sarah. 2006. "Aristotle and Contemporary Ethics," in *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*. Blackwell Guides to Great Works, vol. 4. Edited by Richard Kraut. Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. Pp. 342-361. p. 352. The

The many and varied features and aims involved in one's practical reasoning precludes reducing the value of each feature to a single commensurable quality or developing a list of categorically binding duties agents can consult for a definitive answer to the question of what action to do. Even if the consequences of action and requirements of duty minimally constrain one's act choices, deliberation about action involves considering one's options in light of one's own set of commitments, proclivities, and individual circumstances.¹² The uniqueness of each persons' set of commitments, in combination with the particular combination of features a situation presents, affect decisions about what to do, and leaves neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics without a principled code to provide agents substantive practical guidance for concrete situations.

In place of a principled action guidance code, virtue ethics emphasizes the role of practical wisdom,¹³ which requires an agent have the ability to,

select from the infinite number of features of a situation those features that bear upon the notion or ideal of existence which it is his standing aim to make real. This conception of human life results in various evaluations of all kinds of things, in various sorts of cares and concerns, and in various projects.¹⁴

point Broadie makes about Aristotle as viewing human life as involving a variety of obligations and commitments is also made by B.A.O. Williams, E. Pincoffs, and others.

¹² Pincoffs, E. "Quandary Ethics" in *Mind*, v.80, n. 320. (Oct 1971), pp. 552-571.

¹³ Further, Aristotle states that, "Practical wisdom, then, must be a reasoned and true state of capacity to act with regard to human goods." [1140b1 20, 21]

Although some sorts of generalizations are undoubtedly true, the role of practical wisdom in virtue ethics emphasizes the importance of an agent's own evaluation of aims in deliberation, and precludes developing a simple hierarchy of principles.¹⁵ Although integral to neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, this resistance to codification gives the practical guidance critique purchase.

The Practical Guidance Critique of Virtue Ethics

A common critique of contemporary virtue ethics claims that virtue ethics is unable to provide agents with adequate practical guidance. In general form, this criticism of virtue ethics endorses the claim that the moral contextualism and corresponding non-codification that virtue ethics endorses, precludes it from providing adequate action guidance to agents. Roughly, the worry is that, "it is in the very nature of an EV [ethics of virtue] that it cannot provide the kind of determinate guidance for action

¹⁴ Wiggins, David. 1998. "Deliberation and Practical Reason," in *Needs, Values, Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Pp. 215-239. p. 236. Nussbaum, Martha C. 1990. "The Discernment of Perception: An Aristotelian Conception of Private and Public Rationality" in *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 54-105. p. 71.

¹⁵ In EN VI, Aristotle claims that "it is thought to be a mark of a man of practical wisdom to be able to deliberate well about what is good and expedient for himself, not in some particular respect, e.g. about what sorts of thing conduce to health or strength, but about what sorts of thing conduce to the good life in general. [1140a1 25-29]. See Nussbaum, Martha C. 1990. "The Discernment of Perception: An Aristotelian Conception of Private and Public Rationality" in *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 54-105. Watson, 453, point 1 in section 6. See also Millgram, E. "Murdoch, Practical Reasoning, and Particularism" in *Ethics Done Right* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 2005. Pp. 168-197.

that is required in an adequate normative ethics.”¹⁶ This view seems plausibly founded on two main assumptions: (1) moral theory ultimately aims to influence action, and, (2) to affect action, a theory needs to develop an adequate method of action guidance. If these two main assumptions are well-founded, and virtue ethics’ resistance to codification leaves it unable to meet these expectations, the practical guidance critique threatens to undermine the legitimacy of virtue ethics.

Although a common concern among both critics and proponents of virtue ethics, few articulations of the practical guidance critique develop clear justifications of the concern. One of the clearest and most thoroughly reasoned articulations of the challenge is voiced by Robert Louden in, “On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics.” Louden’s articulation of the practical guidance objection to virtue ethics suggests that virtue ethics fails to meet a primary aim of ethical theory because the means of guidance offered on virtue ethics accounts lack the codification and directness conducive to providing agents with action guidance.¹⁷

The basic concern articulated by the practical guidance critique claims that, by failing to provide codified or direct forms of action guidance of the appropriate sort, virtue ethics fails to meet a common and important expectation of ethics. Louden claims

¹⁶ Solomon, David. 1997. “Internal Objections to Virtue Ethics” in *Virtue Ethics*. Daniel Statman, editor. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Pp. 165-179. p. 170. Note that the version of the practical guidance critique discussed in this section is the more general version of the objection.

¹⁷ Louden, R. “Some Vices of Virtue Ethics”, in *Virtue Ethics*, edited by Crisp, R. and M. Slote. Oxford University Press, 1997. Pp. 201-216.

that, “people have always expected ethical theory to tell them something about what they ought to do[.]”¹⁸ This expectation for practical import is not only a tangential expectation that would improve a view on balance. Instead it is a core purpose for which we engage in ethical inquiry. As George Sher explains,

if the ultimate aim is to decide what to do, then ethics must at some deep level be oriented toward action.

And this is significant because there is a strong case that ethics *is* at bottom practical. Certainly many in both camps would agree that ethics originates in efforts to bring reason to bear on the primal and inescapable question of how to live.¹⁹

It is not obvious that the adequacy of any single articulation of an ethical theory requires it speak directly to the issue of action guidance.²⁰ However, if practical guidance were

¹⁸ Louden, Robert B. 1997 “On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics” in *Virtue Ethics*. Edited by Crisp, Roger and Michael A. Slote. Oxford Readings in Philosophy. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 201-216. P. 205.

¹⁹ Sher, G. “Ethics, Character, and Action” in *Virtue and Vice*, Frankel Paul, E. and P. Frankel? pp. 1-17. Quotation from p. 16. The “two camps” noted in the quotation are “virtue” and “duty” representing two different “basic evaluative concept[s]” for ethics. Sher, p. 1. See also Leibowitz, U. “Moral Advice and Moral Theory”, Smith, H. “Making Moral Decisions.”

Solomon argues in this vein as well, claiming that, “Normative ethics is undoubtedly supposed to have a practical point,” P. 169. Sher, “Ethics, Character, and Action”, p. 16 See also Louden, Robert B. 1997 “On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics” in *Virtue Ethics*. Edited by Crisp, Roger and Michael A. Slote. Oxford Readings in Philosophy. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 201-216. p. 210.

the main point of ethical inquiry, articulations of an ethical theory at least should be compatible with adequate guidance, at the risk of failing to fulfill the main purpose for which it was developed.

Although there is quite a lot of variance among the specific claims being assumed and made among different articulations of the critique, the challenges commonly share two emphases. One emphasis of the practical guidance critique is an expectation of codified guidance, some sort of principle-based theory articulating justification for actions; the other expectation often emphasized is direct guidance, guidance that can be applied with little recourse to moral judgment. Although neither implies the other, very strong articulations of the practical guidance critique appear to expect both together, yet it is important to note that it is nearly impossible that a psychologically plausible practical system could include strong forms of both at once. Yet, both expectations of codified guidance and direct guidance each seem at least *prima facie* well motivated as plausible standards of guidance.

For example, the emphasis on codification comports with what Sarah Broadie calls, “[a] deeply entrenched modern assumption that a major, if not the central, task of philosophical ethics is to systematize the principles of ordinary personal conduct.”²¹

²⁰ Bales, R. E. “Act-Utilitarianisms: Account of Right-Making Characteristics or Decision-Making Procedure?” *American Philosophical Quarterly*. Volume 8, Number 3, July 1971. Pp. 257-265. Point from p. 261.

²¹ Broadie, Sarah. 2006. “Aristotle and Contemporary Ethics,” in *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*. Blackwell Guides to Great Works, vol. 4. Edited by Richard Kraut. Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. Pp. 342-361. p. 354. McDowell characterizes the modern approach in much the same way in “Virtue and Reason,” p.141.

Although Broadie does not endorse the Modern motivation to systematize generalizations, she does posit a plausible motivation for codification that might be used to justify the emphasis on codified guidance on the practical guidance critique. The socio-historical context from when virtue ethics was first developed until now, has changed in ways that make codification much more important as a means of “equipping practical agents with what they now need for ethical intercommunication,” in what now are much more heterogeneous societies culturally than they were in Ancient Greece.²² Further, if ethical theory is to have practical import, then it is plausible to expect it impose not only the same constraints on action universally, but also be accessible to a broad range of agents, suggesting that, as a means of communicating standards to a broad audience of agents, codification is a *prima facie* plausible expectation for theory.²³

Lance and Little define what they call the “Enlightenment Model of Morality” in a similar way. From Lance and Little, “Particularism and Antitheory”, p. 573.

²² Broadie, Sarah. 2006. “Aristotle and Contemporary Ethics,” in *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*. Blackwell Guides to Great Works, vol. 4. Edited by Richard Kraut. Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. Pp. 342-361. p. 355.
Louden, Robert B. 1997 “On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics” in *Virtue Ethics*. Edited by Crisp, Roger and Michael A. Slote. Oxford Readings in Philosophy. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 201-216. On page 213 Louden makes a parallel point regarding the difference in socio-cultural context of contemporary virtue ethics and ancient ethics.

²³ Louden’s primary concern is that, due to the focus on character-level assessment and “intention[al] down-playing [of] atomic acts and particular choice situations in the process,” virtue ethics are unable to offer a decision-making procedure, something at least tacitly considered a long-standing expectation of ethical theory. Louden, 210. Quotation from Louden, Robert B. 1997 “On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics” in *Virtue Ethics*. Edited by Crisp, Roger and Michael A. Slote. Oxford Readings in Philosophy. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 201-216. P. 204.

The directness challenge issued by the practical guidance critique cites the worry that, even if there is a sense in which virtue ethics could guide agents' actions, the structure of virtue ethics conveys action guidance only indirectly. As Louden claims, virtue ethics is unable to offer agents direct, concrete action guidance because it, "speaks of rules and principles of action only in a derivative manner." Because its evaluative terms are set at the character level instead of at the level of action, the guidance it can provide is too far removed from the question of guiding action that, "its derivative oughts are frequently too vague and unhelpful for persons who have not yet acquired the requisite moral insight and sensitivity."²⁴ Without a direct assessment of actions, as actions, and not as a subsidiary of character or flourishing, the reasoning goes, virtue ethics is not of practical use to anyone but the person already brought up to be sensitive to the right sorts of considerations including the right ends. As a theory that relies heavily on one's faculties of judgment to discern the relevant features of a situation to consider in deliberation, virtue ethics cannot offer agents the sort of situation-specific practical guidance that seems to be an important way to meeting the main aim of ethical inquiry.²⁵

The main claim of the practical guidance critique, that virtue ethics lacks good practical guidance, is based in the expectations that theory have practical import, and

²⁴ Ibid, p. 206. Both this and quote in previous sentence.

²⁵ For example, variability among actual actions that might count as virtuous in a particular situation that may, in some cases, conflict with the sorts of rules that typically are assumed to hold, such as Kantian perfect duties.

either codified and direct action-level guidance is indicative of adequate practical guidance. Ultimately, if codified or direct practical guidance is required for adequacy as an ethical theory, and virtue ethics, by its nature, cannot provide it, then it does seem the practical guidance critique has purchase against virtue ethics and picks out a significant problem with the theory. On the face of it, the concern is substantiated by the moral contextualism Neo Aristotelian virtue ethics requires and its incompatibility at least with priority of codified guidance in deliberation about action.²⁶

Contextualism and Uncodifiability

Virtue ethics' commitments to character-level evaluative aims and assessments lead to the common emphasis on the particular as justificatory in discerning relevant considerations and deliberating about action. Regardless of the metaphysical underpinning, the moral contextualism required for applying the broader moral commitments of virtue ethics precludes developing a set of non-defeasible principles by which one could evaluate and plausibly also prescribe actions.²⁷ Instead, the variety of

²⁶ E.g. Kagan, Chapter 1. Further, Solomon argues that each of the main objections against virtue ethics that are articulated from within ethics are equally problematic for consequentialist and deontological views if we consider the accounts in more than their most rudimentary forms. Solomon, David. 1997. "Internal Objections to Virtue Ethics" in *Virtue Ethics*. Daniel Statman, editor. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Pp. 165-179.

²⁷ They distinguish between both 'narrow' and 'broad', and 'deep' and 'surface' contextualisms, committing to a broad and deep contextualism. Broad contextualism holds that "many or all important principles turn out to be exception filled, and that valence-switching applies at the level of thick moral concepts." Deep moral contextualism holds that "exceptions go down to the explanatory ground: there is no need to vindicate variation on the basis of exceptionless principles." Both quotations

ethical considerations involved in discernment and deliberation render rules inadequate for action guidance.²⁸

In its strongest forms, moral contextualism is thoroughly antitheoretic, maintaining the notion that moral considerations have a certain fixed value, independent of context, misrepresents all but the most abstract claims.²⁹ Particularism, a radical contextualism grounded metaphysically in holism of reasons, is often cited as the underlying source of the tension between virtue ethics and the practical guidance critique.³⁰ However, moral contextualism embedded in an atomistic view of reasons is sufficient for rejecting the notion that a systematic theory of general, act-level guidance principles could be developed in an applicable way.

More specifically, particularism expresses the view that, “there is reason to doubt the existence of *any* codifiable generalities linking moral and nonmoral properties,”³¹ and maintains much of the tension between the standard practical guidance critique and virtue ethics. Like contextualists, particularists are often motivated by the notion that, because

from Lance, M.N. and M. Little “From particularism to defeasibility in ethics” in *Challenging Moral Particularism*. Edited by Lance, M.N., M. Potrc, and V. Strahovnik. Routledge: New York. pp 53-74. 2008 Both quotations from p. 57.

²⁸ 1141b4-16, 1142a 12-16, 23-b14.

²⁹ Lance, M. and M. Little. “Particularism and Antitheory” in *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*. Pp. 567-594. Pp. 580-581.

³⁰ Lance and Little distinguish the sort of contextualism they endorse from Particularism by contextualism’s acceptance of some role of explanatory generalizations (v. Particularism’s rejection of generalizations as explanatory). Lance and Little, “From Particularism to Defeasibility in Ethics,” p. 53.

³¹ Little, M.O. “Moral Generalities Revisited” in *Moral Particularism*, Little M.O. and B. Hooker, eds. Oxford University Press, NY (276-304) p. 288.

situations frequently present, “unique combinations of morally salient features; no principles, however subtle or complicated, provide an adequate guide or model of how we should navigate through them.”³² This claim is not incompatible with the possibility of true moral generalizations, but particularists reject the notion that these generalizations could be codified in a way such that a theory could be used to justify or guide actions.

For particularists, the tension is rooted in the holism of reasons, which is incompatible both with the assumption that theory-building is adequate to the job of guiding action, and the view that the actual valence of a reason is fixed independently of the context. On a standard holist view, the valence of a moral consideration can switch because its role in justification of action is, “irreducibly dependent on the background context,” which, in combination with holism of reasons, implies that,

[w]hile a given consideration may count as a moral reason on one occasion, say for doing such and such, the very same consideration is on another occasion is no reason for doing such and such, or even a reason precisely for *not* doing such and such.³³

³² Little, M.O. “Moral Generalities Revisited” in *Moral Particularism*, Little, M.O. and B. Hooker, eds. Pp. 276. Little also points out that this complexity and rejection of principles suggests that even complex principles cannot adequately codify the “moral landscape”. P. 277.

³³ Millgram, Elijah. 2005. “Murdoch, Practical Reasoning, and Particularism” in *Ethics Done Right: Practical Reasoning as a Foundation for Moral Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 168-197. p. 169.

Jonathan Dancy gives a similar definition in *Moral Reasons*, claiming that the “leading thought behind particularism is the thought that behaviour of a reason (or a consideration

As a result, principled action guidance cannot be generalized in a meaningful way because, if the valence of a reason is irreducibly dependent on the situational context, the reliable connection on which the justificatory force of the statement depends, is disrupted. Without this connection, the system of generalizations lacks the “explanatory leverage” required to justify action in the situation.³⁴

However, metaphysical holism is not the only adequate grounds on which one could reject the effectiveness of a code that develops rules for action guidance. Based on the reasoning that general principles provide insufficient justification for particular actions, moral contextualists also argue that action guidance cannot be usefully codified.³⁵ For example, the moral contextualism Mark Lance and Margaret Little endorse holds that theory-building is problematic not because the reasons themselves change value based on the whole, but because the moral landscape is too varied for generalizations to have their assumed explanatory leverage.³⁶ Although the debate

that serves as a reason) in a new case cannot be predicted from its behaviour elsewhere...[s]o there is no ground for the hope that we can find out here how that consideration functions *in general*, somehow, nor for the hope that we can move in any smooth way to how it will function in a different case.” Dancy, Jonathan. 1993. *Moral Reasons*. Oxford, U.K.; Cambridge, U.S.A: Blackwell Publishing. Pp, 60.

³⁴ Little, M.O. “Moral Generalities Revisited” Pp. 280. Millgram, Elijah. 2005. “Murdoch, Practical Reasoning, and Particularism” in *Ethics Done Right: Practical Reasoning as a Foundation for Moral Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 168-197. P. 169.

³⁵ Lance and Little, “From Particularism to Defeasibility in Ethics,” p. 55.

³⁶ Lance and Little discuss this need for judgment, claiming that although it is accepted by generalists such as Ross and Kant, “much of particularism’s energy has been devoted

regarding codification focuses on holism as grounding claims of non-codifiability, atomistic versions of contextualism can challenge the extent to which guidance could be usefully codified as well.³⁷

Theoretically, there is nothing about endorsing moral contextualism, or even particularism, that precludes codification *per se*.³⁸ In principle, one could develop an action-guiding rule for every situation, eliminating the problem that rules are not precise enough to guide action. Yet, the nature of deliberation, especially with respect to the variability of relevant features among concrete situations, leads to virtue ethics' rejection of codification as an inadequate form of applicable guidance based on a tension between developing precise guidance and producing guidance systematic enough to be useful to agents.³⁹ Because codification of substantive action guidance would require systematicity to be applicable, endorsing deep and broad moral contextualist views is incompatible with developing complete and succinct sets of non-defeasible action-level rules.⁴⁰ This

to [these claims'] fortification." P. 574, 575 in "Particularism and Anti-Theory." The term "explanatory leverage" is Lance and Little's.

³⁷ Little, M.O. "Moral Generalities Revisited", Pp. 285. If the point is to identify factors and foundations, develop an interconnected set of explanation and justification, then the system is incompatible with the particularist view because if we cannot rely on reasons having the same valence, cannot develop a system that functions in this way.

³⁸ Watson, Gary. 1990. "On the Primacy of Character" in *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology*. Edited by Flanagan, Owen J., and Amélie Rorty. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. P. 453, point 2, and the section conclusion.

³⁹ Nussbaum, Martha C. 1990. "The Discernment of Perception: An Aristotelian Conception of Private and Public Rationality" in *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 54-105. p. 67.

resistance to codifiability that neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics maintains because of its moral contextualism stands at the crux of the debate over whether the theory can provide agents substantive practical guidance, particularly codified and direct guidance.

The Range of Practical Guidance Claims

Assuming expectations that virtue ethics provide agents with codified and direct guidance, virtue ethics fails to provide adequate practical guidance because the moral contextualism it entails is in tension with providing an extensively codified set of direct action-guidance prescriptions. If effecting good action is a primary purpose for which we develop ethical theory and, by its nature, virtue ethics cannot provide guidance that does this, it seems we have reason to suspect virtue ethics is inadequate as an ethical theory. However, the specific expectations voiced among the various articulations of the practical guidance critique are vague and vary from suggesting that a theory provide a decision-making procedure for action, to the general suggestion that ethical theory is aimed toward affecting action.⁴¹

This leaves an extensive range of possible claims that virtue ethics is expected to, but purportedly fails to meet. The spectrum of possible claims that the practical guidance critique could be making against virtue ethics includes an extensive and wide-ranging set of expectations one have of an ethical theory. I propose a list of claims along that

⁴⁰ Lance and Little, “From particularism to defeasibility in ethics.”

⁴¹ “When we inquire about how to live, our aim is obviously *to* live that way; and living, in this sense, is unavoidably something we *do*. Moreover, although our lives are spread over many years, we live them one moment—and (roughly) one action—at a time.” Sher, George. 1998. “Ethics, Character, and Action,” in *Virtue and Vice*, Frankel Paul, E., Miller, D.F., and J. Paul. Cambridge; New York : Cambridge University Press p. 16.

spectrum that could plausibly underpin a practical guidance critique against virtue ethics.

Among the more specific claims that the practical guidance critique could be making are:

- a. Virtue ethics lacks a decision procedure for actions.
- b. Virtue ethics lacks a system of explanatory or justificatory generalizations that can be used to translate situational features couched in non-moral terms into actions from moral reasons.
- c. Virtue ethics lacks a hierarchical system of prima-facie rules of thumb
- d. Virtue ethics lacks guidance for ordinary, novice, or otherwise uninitiated persons.
- e. Virtue ethics lacks a rubric/field guide of morally relevant features so agents can identify them in situations.
- f. Virtue ethics lacks theoretical guidance or standards to evaluate agents' linguistic competence in moral terms.⁴²
- g. Virtue ethics lacks suitable heuristics for action guidance.
- h. Virtue ethics lacks an adequately accessible model for action or living a life well.
- i. Virtue ethics lacks empirically effective practical guidance.⁴³

⁴² Lance and Little, "Particularism and Antitheory", pp. 576, 577. The idea motivating this claim is that, linguistic competence depends heavily upon local usage, action under a description, etc., and because virtue ethics lacks simple, straightforward evaluative criteria for linguistic competence, it fails to meet a reasonable expectation of ethical theory. Although this view does not posit the sorts of radical metaphysical claims that the holist particularists make, the claim is still at odds with the notion that one could develop a systematic decision-making procedure to guide agents' actions in quandary situations.

⁴³ This sort of expectation might be used to argue that right-making principles that can double as action guides are better on grounds of parsimony (simplicity to remember or

For example, concerns about codification of guidance range from the worry that virtue ethics lacks a decision procedure for actions,⁴⁴ to a more general concern about theory-building, that virtue ethics lacks a system of explanatory or justificatory generalizations that can be used to translate situational features couched in non-moral terms into actions from moral reasons. However, at the much less stringent end of the spectrum, the worry may be no more than that virtue ethics lacks empirically effective practical guidance.

With respect to concerns about directness of guidance, considerations both regarding context of guidance and type of agent the theory can guide figure into the challenge to virtue ethics, but again the range of these claims is extensive. For example, claims about directness of guidance such as, virtue ethics lacks guidance for ordinary, novice, or otherwise uninitiated persons, are far more stringent than challenges to virtue ethics such as, virtue ethics lacks an adequately accessible model for action or living a life well. Because the breadth of the range of more specific claims that fit within the plausible range of concerns the practical guidance critique extends to include expectations virtue ethics can readily meet, claims against virtue ethics made by reference to the

learn), especially if one of the main aims of the view is to influence practice. However, it is unclear the extent that considerations of parsimony are likely to be strong in cases where the evaluative and guidance terminology are functioning at different levels of generality and where the standards of justification vary based on the aim.

⁴⁴ In each of the possible claims ‘lack’ is ambiguous between “cannot provide x” and “does not provide x”. Although either could be a challenge to virtue ethics, for the remainder of the discussion, I focus on the “cannot provide x” version because, without adopting the additional assumption that a theory needs to do x to be adequate, the “does not provide x” version does not issue a strong challenge to virtue ethics if the view is compatible with providing x.

general practical guidance critique alone leave it unclear whether virtue ethics is truly threatened by the view.

The variety of guidance expectations that the practical guidance objection might support divides into three basic claims. First, the first three claims (a-c above) make up a strong version of the practical guidance objection that all make the basic claim that virtue ethics cannot provide codified guidance that agents can apply. The second main claim that we can glean from this spectrum of possible challenges to virtue ethics holds that virtue ethics cannot adequately guide because it fails to offer ordinary or untrained agents means by which to deploy whatever guidance the theory might offer, so the theory does not adequately influence action. The third basic claim the practical guidance objection makes, is the much weaker claim that virtue ethics does not offer models or heuristics for guiding agents. I aim to argue that the only version of the objection that gains purchase against virtue ethics is the second version, as the first is unduly stringent, and the third uninterestingly weak.

Weak Guidance Expectations

The last claim of the three main claims that the practical guidance objection makes against virtue ethics holds that virtue ethics cannot adequately guide because it fails to offer agents models of living well or heuristics for guidance. I aim to argue that this version of the objection is easily met by any of the three main ethical theories. Because virtue ethics can readily meet this version of the objection, there is little reason to think that this version of the objection presents a substantive challenge to virtue ethics.

The expectation that virtue ethics provide agents some model of living well or heuristics to guide, or that it needs to offer some form of effective guidance, is a plausible expectation of an ethical theory. However, this version of the claim does not pose a significant challenge to virtue ethics itself. Virtue ethics can offer a variety of models of living well, heuristics to guide, and effective forms of guidance, such as the ideal of the virtuous person, which is often suggested as an effective way for agents to gain immediate guidance.

Further, any ethical theory can offer these sorts of minimally guiding models of how to live well, models or heuristics that might offer suitably knowledgeable agents guidance. If these are the claims that the practical guidance critique is expecting virtue ethics meet, it seems that the critique is much less interesting as a challenge to virtue ethics because the view has the resources to meet these (i.e. there is nothing in virtue ethics that precludes developing these means of guidance, even if no articulation of virtue ethics has yet attempted to develop these specific approaches.). However, it is the stronger claims that tend to be the focus of charges that virtue ethics lacks appropriate means of providing adequate guidance. I aim to argue in the next section that this version of the practical guidance objection assumes unduly stringent expectations not only of virtue ethics, but of ethical theory more broadly.

Stringent Guidance Expectations

Among the three versions of the practical guidance objection, the one that seems to gain the most purchase against virtue ethics suggests that the non-codifiability virtue ethics endorses renders the theory incompatible with codification and direct guidance.

Because virtue ethics cannot offer agents codified guidance in such a way that it can be readily applied with little recourse to moral judgment, the theory fails to offer agents adequate practical guidance. While it is true that virtue ethics cannot offer guidance codified in a way such that it can be applied with little recourse to moral judgment, I aim to argue that this expectation is unduly stringent, and thus virtue ethics need not make developing this sort of guidance its aim.

Strictly speaking, both codification and direct guidance are compatible with virtue ethics, so for the practical guidance critique to challenge the theory, the expectation for guidance must be one that virtue ethics cannot meet. Because virtue ethics is not inconsistent with codification, it is compatible with a variety of codified and direct means of guidance.⁴⁵ For example, virtue ethics is compatible with action guidance codified through sets of rules of thumb that agents could use to evaluate act options. Further, it could support probabilistic generalizations developed as summaries of past actions, which would meet an expectation of direct guidance at the action level.⁴⁶

In addition, virtue ethics is compatible with a more systematic set of defeasible generalizations structured as a theory that, given the privileged conditions, justifies action

⁴⁵ Watson, Gary. 1990. "On the Primacy of Character" in *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology*. Edited by Flanagan, Owen J., and Amélie Rorty. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. See especially section 6. Pp. 453.

⁴⁶ Like possible troubles with defeasible generalizations, the usefulness of rules of thumb on a virtue account is limited. One concern with using generalizations for explanation is that even if they are defeasible or are used just for training agents to discern and deliberate well, adopting these rules carries a hazard of leading agents away from good judgment.

as suggested by deep moral contextualists like Lance and Little.⁴⁷ For example, some contextualists endorse the usefulness of generalizations for developing applicable theory, arguing that moral contextualists need not reject codified guidance as ineffective. Instead of rejecting the notion that theory-building is impossible because there is no set of exceptionless principles that can adequately justify action in a situation, we can endorse a theory comprised of defeasible moral generalizations, which are constrained by a set of privileging conditions that are “particularly ‘telling’ of something’s nature.”⁴⁸ Defeasible generalizations serve as a codifiable alternative to exceptionless principles because they hold true only when privileged conditions obtain. Although proponents of virtue ethics need not reject all types of codification and direct guidance, due to the deep moral contextualism that stands between the axiological claims of the theory and practical application of the view, the notion that one could develop a theory of exceptionless principles that leads from the assumptions of the theory to a determinate act prescription in a particular situation are untenable.

With respect to directness expectations, the common expectation of developing practical wisdom through experience suggests that virtue ethics has other, non-codified, means of direct guidance available to the agent as well, e.g. situational features that

⁴⁷The Lance and Little view may offer a possible way that virtue ethics could embrace a codified set of action principles. Yet, it seems that the substance of the debate about whether it could guide well relates to how useful these could be if the agent had to learn which conditions were privileged or deviation conditions, and whether these would be of any more use than rules of thumb, or just linguistic competence.

⁴⁸ Lance and Little, “From Particularism to Defeasibility in Ethics” p. 62.

constrain one's decisions, and other, more virtuous agents to consult. It is at least *prima facie* plausible to think that we should provide a broad range of agents with all sorts of guidance, including direct, situationally-specific guidance. Directness expectations can range widely on both the agent and context dimensions, seeking guidance for ordinary or novice agents, and with respect to agents in particular sorts of situations, ranging from everyday situations wherein an agent has a variety of morally-neutral or morally good choices to novel situations, morally ambiguous situations, or situations of moral dilemma wherein there is no choice available that does not somehow require the agent to do a "wrong" or "bad" action. Although one might argue that virtue ethics' focus on character-level qualities may be of little use in dilemma contexts, e.g., this focus neither precludes direct guidance, nor serves as an insurmountable obstacle to these stronger forms of direct guidance. For example, there are a variety of ways agents can ascertain guidance by observing or asking other agents who have had success in similar situations, by studying the way actions in certain situations might serve as turning points in character development. In this way, a directness expectation with respect to context or type of agent need not preclude an agent from ascertaining good action guidance

Yet, the claim that virtue ethics cannot provide the appropriate type of guidance seems to overlook the sorts of codified and direct guidance virtue ethics can provide, even if the role of this sort of guidance is limited by the contextualism it endorses. That the practical guidance critique does not focus on developing the sorts of codified guidance virtue ethics has available suggests that the practical guidance critique is assuming a more stringent form of codified guidance from virtue ethics.

The most stringent expectations for codification involve not only principled guidance that can be used to justify particular actions, but also direct guidance at the action-level that agents can use to apply the theory. For example, Rosalind Hursthouse characterizes a strong codification expectation as expecting a set of,

universal rules or principles which would...amount to a decision procedure for determining what the right action was in any particular case, [and]...would be stated in such terms that any non-virtuous person could understand and apply them correctly.⁴⁹

A theory composed of these universal, yet detailed principles is mentioned at least as a possible method for agents to use in solving novel situations, or for ordinary reasoners to use.⁵⁰

Although these expectations seem plausible as means of providing agents with substantive practical guidance, endorsing these as an expectation for virtue ethics invokes the entrenched tension between precision and systematicity. On one hand, the nature of navigating within particular situations requires the broad generality for codifying universal principles for the purposes of action guidance. On the other, the precision required to offer detailed guidance to agents in particular situations precludes a system of

⁴⁹ Hursthouse, R. *On Virtue Ethics*. Oxford University Press, 1999. Pp. 39, 40. Hursthouse refers to this as the “strong codifiability thesis” (p. 40), and credits E. Pincoffs with presenting the view that this is a standard expectation of normative ethical accounts.

⁵⁰ Lance and Little articulate a very similar expectation of ethical theory in “Particularism and Antitheory, p. 573, calling it “the Enlightenment model of morality.”

principles that fits within the limits of human psychology to navigate effectively. Without a way to systematically identify the relations between situational features and good actions (and on virtue accounts, actions and good character), virtue ethics is unlikely to develop a readily-applicable decision-making procedure for ethics. The tension between true generalizations and applying them to concrete circumstances forms a dilemma between developing accurate general principles that are too imprecise to apply when the particulars are difficult to discern, and an indefinitely large series of universal action guidance principles that, as a group, are too unwieldy to apply in practice.⁵¹ As action guidance on a virtue ethics account, it is not useful because it is unlikely that a theory develop this sort of strong codification that involves both principled and direct guidance because of its psychological implausibility.

The failure to offer this sort of guidance is not unique to virtue ethics, however. The tension between systematicity and precision is a more general phenomenon of any theory that needs to account for facts of indefinite number and diverse variety, and, in ethics, is a problem faced also by Kantian and Utilitarian moral theories in providing applicable guidance. At least, this suggests that virtue ethics cannot be singled out as inadequate, because this failure comparably affects the two other main competing theories in the contemporary context. At most, if the practical guidance critique is endorsing these strong codification expectations as conditions of adequacy of a theory, it

⁵¹ Nussbaum, Martha C. 1990. "The Discernment of Perception: An Aristotelian Conception of Private and Public Rationality" in *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 54-105. p. 67-69.

implies a sweeping skeptical claim about the very endeavor of ethical theorizing because no moral theory could systematically provide this sort of detailed guidance.

A More Reasonable Practical Guidance Objection

Because the practical guidance critique does not target ethical theory more broadly, it seems that the expectation for guidance is likely weaker than the strong forms of codification that imply skepticism. Yet, the commonly voiced concern with virtue ethics' lack of guidance for use in novel situations or by novice moral reasoners, suggests that the expectation for codification requires more direct and less plastic forms of guidance than what virtue ethics would endorse as conducive to good deliberation. The claim that virtue ethics cannot provide guidance in a way comparable to the way Utilitarian and Kantian views guide serves as a less stringent form of an expectation that combines codified and direct guidance, yet singles out virtue ethics as uniquely inadequate with respect to practical guidance among the three theories.

This comparability version of the critique suggests that even if strong codification is not possible, virtue ethics at least should provide a right-making account of action that agents can use to guide their deliberations. Kantian and Utilitarian theories provide a small set of foundational principles that function not only as a right-making account of action, but also serve as a ready act-based evaluative structure from which a decision-making procedure can be derived. Because virtue ethics develops a character-level evaluative structure and replaces principled action guidance with practical wisdom, the role it assigns moral judgment appears unmanageably extensive from a guidance standpoint. For example, virtue ethics leaves novice moral reasoners, or other agents

who find themselves in novel situations without guidance in ways that Utilitarian and Kantian views do not.

However, the role moral judgment plays in applying Utilitarian and Kantian precepts is not obviously so much less extensive that it makes the view manageable by a novice or provides adequate action guidance to an agent in a novel situation.⁵² Both Mill and Kant acknowledged an important role for moral judgment on their accounts.⁵³ Further, Rosalind Hursthouse has argued that neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics can provide comparably codified action guidance via a virtue-based right-making account of action, developing an action-guiding principle in parallel form and, she claims, comparably guiding.⁵⁴

⁵² For example, there has been a significant amount of discussion of intermediaries agents can use to apply Utilitarian and Kantian principles accurately and precisely in concrete circumstances, suggesting that the need for an intermediary method to guide deliberation and discernment is not unique to virtue ethics.

⁵³ For example, Mill addresses the issue of exceptions to the secondary rules of action he advocates as guidance, with reference to the first principle only to adjudicate among the “intermediate generalizations,” or rules of thumb that we should use to guide action. He argues that not only Utilitarianism, but all moral theories require latitude in judgment “for accommodation to peculiarities of circumstances,” noting that,

“[i]t is not the fault of any creed, but of the complicated nature of human affairs, that rules of conduct cannot be so framed as to require no exceptions, and that hardly any kind of action can safely be laid down as either always obligatory or always condemnable.” Mill, J.S. *Utilitarianism*, in *On Liberty and Other Essays*, Oxford University Press, 1991. pp. 157.

On a Kantian account, significant amounts of moral judgment are required to formulate the maxim on which an agent intends to act, and which the agent can test using the Categorical Imperative. In addition, the entire class of imperfect duties leaves agents with extensive latitude in how these duties are fulfilled, requiring significant moral judgment as well.

Yet, because Utilitarian and Kantian theories offer action level guidance that can be assessed in action level terms, the views may nonetheless remain more conducive to providing practical guidance. Where action-level guidance on virtue accounts still requires an agent to assess his or her action in character-level terms, Utilitarian and Kantian accounts more directly answer the question “what ought I do?” While Utilitarian and Kantian views may provide more direct action-level guidance, given the significant role of moral judgment required to apply these accounts, it is not clear that act-level principles guide sufficiently well to leave Utilitarianism and Kantianism invulnerable to a practical guidance expectation that ethical theory guide novice, ordinary, or otherwise untrained agents.

It is this gap between the general principles that ground a theory and the activity that the axiology of the theory identifies as valuable to realize, that the third version of the practical guidance objection challenges virtue ethics to bridge. In part, this gap remains because one assumption of ethical theory is that it is aimed toward influencing action. Add to this the common contemporary assumption that the set of agents toward which this applies is broad, including agents without special knowledge of ethical theories, and it seems that there is a practical guidance issue that virtue ethics should work to meet, namely the version of the practical guidance objection that falls between the unduly stringent and uninterestingly weak extremes commonly assumed as part of the practical guidance objection.

⁵⁴ Hursthouse argues that virtue ethics can provide comparably guiding codification in Part I of *On Virtue Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1999.

Although well-motivated by the aim to affect action for a wide-ranging group of moral agents, the most stringent codification and directness expectations are too broad to challenge virtue ethics alone. Weaker expectations, suggesting that virtue ethics cannot provide comparably substantive practical guidance to agents, are too narrow to rule out the codified guidance measures virtue ethics has at hand. Because the stringent codification standards snare the purportedly more guiding theories [Utilitarianism and Kantianism] and fail to acknowledge the various resources virtue ethics has for providing guidance, these expectations are implausibly stringent and neither practical guidance critics nor virtue theorists should expect these of an ethical theory. While act-level guidance principles may offer agents a *prima facie* simple and immediate means of action guidance, their form as act-based principles does not distinguish them as offering substantially more practical guidance to ordinary agents than comparably framed precepts of virtue ethics.

Conclusion:

The practical guidance critique presents a potentially strong challenge to virtue ethics, claiming it lacks the resources to meet a primary purpose for which we develop ethical theories: guiding action. Yet, because the specific claims the critique makes against virtue ethics are vague, the extent to which the practical guidance critique gains purchase against virtue ethics is unclear. Further, the range of possible claims the practical guidance critique may be advancing against virtue ethics is extensive, including not only implausibly stringent expectations for guidance from a theory, but also uninterestingly weak claims that fail to ensure any sort of useful guidance from a theory.

In an attempt to discern which practical guidance expectations virtue ethics might plausibly be expected to meet, I suggest that we consider the list of more specific claims the general practical guidance objection supports. Once we do this, we can see that the practical guidance objection divides into three main sorts of claims. One claim, that ethical theory offer agents models or heuristics to guide, fails as a challenge to virtue ethics because it is easily met, and thus uninterestingly weak as a challenge. A second, that suggests virtue ethics needs to provide codified guidance to adequately guide, proves unduly stringent. A third claim that the practical guidance objection supports, however, poses a more compelling challenge to virtue ethics, claiming that virtue ethics fails to solve the problem of ensuring effective practical guidance, a plausible corollary of the claim that ethical theory is ultimately aimed at affecting action.

This third claim challenges virtue ethics because, unlike the other two main claims of the practical guidance objection, it cannot be dismissed as either implausibly stringent or uninterestingly weak. Because this third option hinges on an assumption that both the practical guidance objection and ethical theories share, that ethical theory should aim, at some level, to guide agents, virtue ethics at least needs to account for the ways in which it does this. Further, if the common contemporary assumption that the relevant group of agents who need guidance is quite broad, i.e. that an ethical theory should appeal to and guide even ordinary agents, then this strengthens the challenge this third version of the practical guidance claim poses to virtue ethics. In the next chapter, I consider three ways that virtue ethics attempts to address this most reasonable version of the objection, arguing that the objection ultimately has gains purchase against

contemporary accounts of virtue ethics because a problematic gap remains between these proposed guidance schemata and virtue.

Chapter 2

Ideal Agency and Action Guidance

If we develop ethical theories primarily to influence action, a comprehensive ethical account requires some sort of guidance method or intermediary between theory and practice. In this chapter, I aim to argue that the third version of the practical guidance objection gains purchase against virtue ethics. I consider common ways neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics proposes to provide practical guidance and argue that each fails to provide adequate guidance to ordinary, novice, or untrained agents.

Of the three practical guidance proposals, Rosalind Hursthouse's shows the most promise as it delineates an action guidance principle for virtue ethics and corresponding practical precepts that can offer agents specific and numerous proscriptions and prescriptions for action. However, even this account falls short of implementing these precepts for ordinary agents. Without a method of deploying this account of action guidance, the practical guidance objection retains its force as the gap between the practical precepts Hursthouse introduces and virtue remains too great to effectively guide ordinary agents. Although an implementation method would not replace the guidance schema Hursthouse proposes, it requires an intermediary to supplement her account and offer a means by which ordinary non-virtuous agents can implement the practical precepts she proposes and become more virtuous.

Common Neo-Aristotelian Guidance Methods

A common response to the concern that virtue ethics cannot offer agents practical guidance is that it does, but not by a code of act-level principles or set of non-defeasible

rules. Instead, agents can gain guidance from the basic precept: “do what the virtuous do.”⁵⁵ This sort of response fits the standard expectations of virtue ethics, that it is resistant to principled action guidance, and so cannot set forth a set of act-level principles for agents to follow.

John McDowell articulates a paradigm account of action guidance from a neo-Aristotelian virtue view, one that preserves its corollary resistance to codification. Based on the view that an agent’s worldview is complex and varied in its valuations, it is all but impossible to encapsulate in act-level principles which particular features the agent will find salient because any of a variety of factors might strike the perceiver as morally relevant, factor into one’s deliberations about action, and serve as a reason to act.⁵⁶ Even in seemingly similar situations, ostensibly negligible features of a situation can factor into one’s deliberative processes differently.⁵⁷ The salient features of a situation and the way they figure into an agent’s deliberations and justifications for actions do not fit neatly into a concise rubric, and cannot be predicted with enough accuracy to reproduce the results of the process.

⁵⁵ See, e.g., Hursthouse, 1999. *On Virtue Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press, McDowell, John. 1997. “Virtue and Reason” in *Virtue ethics*. Edited by Crisp, Roger and Michael A. Slote. Oxford Readings in Philosophy. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. Pp 141-162; and Johnson, Robert N. 2003. “Virtue and Right.” *Ethics: An International Journal of Social, Political, and Legal Philosophy* 113 (4) (07/01): 810-34.

⁵⁷ This empirical point has been supported by a variety of studies in social psychology, beginning with Nisbett, R., and T. Wilson. “Telling more than we can know: Verbal reports on mental processes.” *Psychological Review*, 84, 231-259. 1977.

Action guidance via a set of act-level principles is not feasible on a virtue ethics account because,

If one attempted to reduce one's conception of what virtue requires to a set of rules, then, however subtle and thoughtful one was in drawing up the code, cases would inevitably turn up in which a mechanical application of the rules would strike one as wrong.⁵⁸

Without a principled code to guide action on a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, a person acts well instead because he, "has a reliable sensitivity to a certain sort of requirement

⁵⁸ McDowell, John. 1997. "Virtue and Reason" in *Virtue ethics*. Edited by Crisp, Roger and Michael A. Slote. Oxford Readings in Philosophy. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. Pp 141-162. p. 148.

Nussbaum argues that on Aristotle's account, "it is in the very nature of truly rational practical choice that it cannot be made more 'scientific' without becoming worse." Nussbaum, Martha C. 1990. "The Discernment of Perception: An Aristotelian Conception of Private and Public Rationality" in *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 54-105. p. 55. See also Broadie, p. 352. She notes that Aristotle gives no answer to "what to do" and cannot provide a decision-making theory for this purpose.

Louden, Robert B. 1997 "On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics" in *Virtue Ethics*. Edited by Crisp, Roger and Michael A. Slote. Oxford Readings in Philosophy. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 201-216. p. 206. Citing the variability of practical wisdom as particularly problematic feature with respect to offering practical guidance to agents who are not already virtuous, Louden acknowledges that, "As virtue theorists from Aristotle onward have rightly emphasized, virtues are not simply dispositions to behave in specified ways, for which rules and principles can always be cited. In addition, they involve skills of perception and articulation, situation-specific 'know-how', all of which are developed only through recognizing and acting on what is relevant in concrete moral contexts as they arise. These skills of moral perception and practical reasoning are not completely routinizeable, and so cannot be transferred from agent to agent as any sort of decision procedure 'package deal.'"

that situations impose on behavior.”⁵⁹ Good judgments are a matter of correctly perceiving moral facts that exist in the world, and virtue is a type of knowledge in which one, “gets things right.”⁶⁰

Further, if an agent relies on a rule in some case or other, it is because of one’s character that the person has selected this rule, not that one, to apply in this case.⁶¹ Yet, the primary source of action guidance on a virtue ethics view is not produced by seeking out guiding universal principles. Although rules are not excluded as acceptable means of action guidance and are likely necessary for offering agents effective action guidance, their justificatory authority is limited. Instead of seeking guidance by following Utilitarian or Kantian-style rules, “[o]ccasion by occasion, one knows what to do, if one

⁵⁹ McDowell, John. 1997. “Virtue and Reason” in *Virtue ethics*. Edited by Crisp, Roger and Michael A. Slote. Oxford Readings in Philosophy. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. Pp 141-162. p.142.

Also, Wiggins claims, “[i]n no case will there be a rule to which a man can simply appeal to tell him what to do (except in the special case where an absolute prohibition operates).” Wiggins, David. 1998. “Deliberation and Practical Reason,” in *Needs, Values, Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Pp. 215-239. P. 236. Also note that acting well itself is not inimical to comporting with a code, but is unlikely that individuals can gain good action guidance using only a code.

⁶⁰ McDowell, John. 1997. “Virtue and Reason” in *Virtue ethics*. Edited by Crisp, Roger and Michael A. Slote. Oxford Readings in Philosophy. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. Pp 141-162. p.142.

⁶¹ Watson, Gary. 1990. “On the Primacy of Character” in *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology*. Edited by Flanagan, Owen J., and Amélie Rorty. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. pp. 453, 454.

does, not by applying universal principles but by being a certain kind of person: one who sees situations in a certain distinctive way.”⁶²

According to McDowell’s account, what counts as an adequate reason need not make direct reference to a general ethical principle. On the contrary, an adequate reason in some cases may require no more than the recognition that this action is, “the thing to do.”⁶³ Although he acknowledges that rules might have a role in training one’s perceptual capacity, the role rules can play contrasts with the sort of strong codification on which direct and situation-specific action guidance is purportedly derived from justificatory generalizations. On a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics view, “generalizations will be approximate at best, and examples will need to be taken with the sort of ‘and so on’ which appeals to the cooperation of a hearer.”⁶⁴ Good discernment, deliberation, and

⁶² McDowell notes that, “[i]t is by virtue of his seeing a particular fact rather than that one as the salient fact about the situation that he is moved to act by this concern rather than that one.” According to McDowell, “this reason is apprehended, not as outweighing or overriding any reasons for acting in other ways which would otherwise be constituted by other aspects of the situation...but as silencing them.” Quotation from McDowell, John. 1997. “Virtue and Reason” in *Virtue ethics*. Edited by Crisp, Roger and Michael A. Slote. Oxford Readings in Philosophy. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. Pp 141-162, p. 146. See also, *Ibid.* Pp. 142, 157, 162.

⁶³ According to McDowell, agents need not even recognize the virtuousness in their own actions, the virtuousness of an action can be judged instead by an external observer. This is one of the points that gives rise to the concerns of the practical guidance critique, namely the worries that the agent might not be able to explain her reasoning, might not offer an obviously repeatable pattern of actions, and the reasoning process may reject rules. Plus, agent may use internalized principles, but, like grammar, need not be able to articulate them explicitly.

⁶⁴ McDowell, John. 1997. “Virtue and Reason” in *Virtue ethics*. Edited by Crisp, Roger and Michael A. Slote. Oxford Readings in Philosophy. Oxford; New York: Oxford

action depend largely on the agent, the particular contexts in which she learns, and the variety, number and sort of experiences to which she is exposed, which precludes developing a guidance method by which an agent learns how to act well solely by adhering to a single or small set of act-based principles.

McDowell's view echoes Aristotle's that agents learn to live well by good upbringing, and justification for individual actions rests irreducibly on particulars. However, this approach does not isolate a single sort of universally applicable method by which agents develop good judgment. Instead, the specific means by which agents develop practical wisdom and good habits of character may vary widely. Although there is nothing especially implausible about this sort of expectation itself, if the aim of a theory is practical guidance, the *theory* itself neither generates guidance rules, nor requires a particular method of guidance. Although different variations of guidance methods develop different ways to discern what the virtuous would do in the circumstance, agency models are a commonly suggested as a means by which agents can obtain guidance, yet which also preserve the commitment to uncodifiability.

Agency Models of Guidance

A second common approach to offering agents concrete guidance within standard virtue ethics conceptual constraints posits a more systematic version of the view McDowell delineates. The method of guidance suggests that individuals emulate

University Press. Pp 141-162. P. 156. On McDowell's view, instead of knowing how to act being a matter of following a rule, persons need to be trained on a case by case basis, learning, by proper upbringing, what the appropriate response to each situation is as it arises. For McDowell, rules cannot accommodate the project of either being or becoming a virtuous person.

virtuous agents as a way of obtaining practical action guidance that meets the evaluative criteria of a virtue account.⁶⁵ On this model, agents know what action is good to do in a particular situation because it is what the virtuous person would do. This sort of agency model takes one of two main forms, ascertaining right action from an exemplary agent or from an ideal agent, and provides two means of guidance: emulation and advice.

The exemplary agent account recommends that agents seeking guidance do what a virtuous agent (or an agent more virtuous than herself) does. This form of guidance comports with common non-codificationist commitments of virtue ethics, e.g. its agent-level evaluative focus. It also fits within the constraints of a moderate practical guidance critique by providing practical precepts that fit plausibly within the constraints human psychology imposes on their effective use.

However, one might object that the view provides agents insufficient guidance because the agent may (and perhaps frequently does) find herself in situations, e.g. moral dilemmas, that the virtuous agent would avoid in the first place and thus a standpoint from which the virtuous would never have had to deliberate and act.⁶⁶ If this is the case,

⁶⁵ See Hursthouse, Rosalind. 1999. *On Virtue Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press. P. 35. The distinction between virtuous and more virtuous is relevant to the issue of plausibility. If a neo-Aristotelian virtue view adheres to Aristotle's 6 character categories (brutish-superhumanly virtuous), the likelihood of individuals having access to virtuous individuals to emulate is so small, it would make the view implausible as a response to the practical guidance problem.

⁶⁶ Harman and Hursthouse both point this out. Harman voices this concern in "Human Flourishing, Ethics, and Liberty", p. 315. Hursthouse brings up this point in her "Virtue Theory and Abortion." Hursthouse also suggests that the agent ask an actual virtuous agent, or an agent more virtuous than oneself for guidance, in *On Virtue Ethics*, p. 35.

the view may be silent in a wide range of circumstances where it is important for an agent to discern well how to act. Further, if the virtuous agent need not articulate his reasoning with respect to a general principle, and need know only that *this* is “the thing to do” in the circumstances, the virtuous’ reasoning have may not be adequately informative to serve as guiding for another agent.⁶⁷

In response to this sort of worry, some argue that instead of modeling behavior directly, an agent could gain *advice* from someone more virtuous, leading to a “virtuous advisor” model. One concern with the advisor model is that even if a virtuous agent were available to query, the virtuous agent would not have any way to guide the less virtuous based on his or her experience.⁶⁸ For example, it is unclear that to be virtuous, a person

Millgram makes a point similar to Hursthouse and Harman’s, in *Ethics Done Right: Practical Reasoning as A Foundation for Moral Theory*. Cambridge University Press, NY, 1005. P. 173.

⁶⁷ E.g. consider this concern regarding McDowell’s view based on his views about reasons being silenced and the perceptual model on which an agent knows what the right thing to do is because they intuit or perceive the salient features of the circumstances and how they relate to the broader ethical questions involved. However, this concern could apply even to views that do not endorse a perceptual model of deliberation. It is unclear that good actions require discussion of the final ends, so the answer to “why did you do that?” might have the response from the virtuous, “because he needed my help,” which, without already understanding the weight of this sort of response in a broader discussion is not guiding at all. The reasons a virtuous person might give would likely have little purchase with others without an extensive set of shared assumptions or experiences of the world.

⁶⁸ Consider the extensive Aristotelian criteria for virtue (especially if the view endorses a strong version of the unity thesis—v. a sort of “limited unity”), as well as the evidence from social psychology regarding the fragmentation of character in contrast with the robustness required for virtue.

must be able to offer good advice to those in very different circumstances than those with which the virtuous is familiar or to one who is not already responsive to a similar set of reasons or situational features.

Another problem that plagues both views is the rarity of virtuous in the population. Virtue is difficult to achieve and thus rare, so even if the virtuous were able to advise others in different sorts of circumstances, it would be unlikely to find a virtuous person to act as an advisor. Due to the lack of virtuous agents to query and the psychological implausibility that their answer will be informative in a way such that it is substantively action guiding for the non-virtuous, the exemplary virtue guidance account can be quickly traded for accounts involving idealized agency.

The ideal agency model parallels the exemplary virtuous view of guidance, but does not require an actual agent to query. Instead, the agent gains insight into what action to perform by imagining and emulating the reasoning and actions or advice of the virtuous agent in circumstances like those in which the agent now finds herself. Once the agent simulates the various perceptual, deliberative, affective, and behavioral considerations that the virtuous would, she acts in accordance with the virtuous' behavior or advice as envisioned by the agent in the quandary.⁶⁹

See Loudon's objection regarding the perceptual model of practical reasoning forwarded by John McDowell in Loudon, Robert B. 1997 "On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics" in *Virtue Ethics*. Edited by Crisp, Roger and Michael A. Slote. Oxford Readings in Philosophy. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 201-216. p. 206.

⁶⁹ See Kawall, Jason. 2006. "On the Moral Epistemology of Ideal Observer Theories." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice: An International Forum* 9 (3) (06/01): 359-74.; Kawall, Jason. 2004. "Moral Response-Dependence, Ideal Observers, and the Motive of

With respect to action guidance, both the exemplary agency and ideal agency models provide agents some guidance because, even if the agent lacks the motivational and dispositional state required to actually perform the action she believes the virtuous would perform in those circumstances, the method at least provides the agent an answer to the “what ought I do?” by directing the inquiring agent to consider the characteristic features of virtue ethics. Further, if an agent has a sense of the range of activities the virtuous might engage in, by having a sense of the nature of virtue, she would also have some understanding of what the relevant affective and perceptual features should be as well. Over time, it is possible the agent can develop the deliberative and affective responses and habits that move her from being *akratic* or *enkratic* to virtuous. However, the vagueness with respect to which action to do on each view leaves open a question of whether the view provides the sort of guidance sought on the practical guidance critique.

Codified Virtue Guidance

A third means of guidance, is proposed by Rosalind Hursthouse in *On Virtue Ethics*. Here, Hursthouse extends this sort of view to meet the practical guidance critics’ claim that virtue accounts cannot guide because they resist codification. Speaking more directly to critics, Hursthouse claims that action guidance from virtue ethics can be codified in a way that parallels the main competing views: Utilitarianism and Kantianism. She claims that an agent can look to the principle of right action for virtue

Duty: Responding to Zangwill.” *Erkenntnis: An International Journal of Analytic Philosophy* 60 (3) (05/01): 357-69; and Doris, John M. 2002, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*. Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press. pp. 148-152.

ethics and the subsidiary v-rules to guide her deliberation about what to do. The paradigm formulation of such a universal ethical principle Hursthouse claims is, “An action is right iff it is what a virtuous agent would do in the circumstances.”⁷⁰ Not only does it parallel principles like formulations of the Categorical Imperative and the Utility Principle, but it demonstrates that, even if it is not common within the standards characterizations of virtue ethics, the theory can support a principle of right action.

This guidance method is important because not only does it fit within the contextualist constraints of virtue ethics, but it also offers a principle-based action through a guidance structure parallel to Utilitarian and Kantian forms. One might argue that it does not offer an adequate way to guide action in the situation because it still requires one derive from the agent level the right action.⁷¹ However, in addition to the general action guidance principle, Hursthouse introduces the notion of “V-Rules” a set of rules that derive from the guidance claim and which, she claims, offers more specific act prescriptions than Utilitarian and Kantian accounts, so offer at least as much guidance, comparatively. Hursthouse argues that the view provides not only codified action-guiding precepts, but that these provide at least comparable, if not better, concrete action

⁷⁰ Hursthouse contends that this basic principle yields a variety of more specific rules that are at least as guiding as those produced from the basic principles of either Utilitarian or Kantian views. This is present in various articles of Hursthouse, notably in “Virtue Theory and Abortion,” but also elsewhere, e.g. in *On Virtue Ethics*, chapters 2-3. Hursthouse, R. 1999. *On Virtue Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁷¹ Louden’s view also is concerned with the issue of the possible circularity of the expectation that one emulate the virtuous. Without criteria for picking out the virtuous [especially in the globalized context]—the individual seeking guidance will not know whom to choose to emulate.

guidance because this principle gives rise to a series of “V-Rules,” such as “do what is just” which serve as more specific guides for agents in particular situations.

Hursthouse defines V-Rules as, “rules or principles which have pretty *general* application and the *best* blend of specificity and flexibility, but which nevertheless do not hold in every conceivable case,”⁷² and she notes that V-Rules are particularly useful means of guidance as V-rules each serve to highlight both act prescriptions and proscriptions.⁷³ She argues that even though they require use of “thick” terms that require extensive experience and to understand and use properly, this does not put her view at a disadvantage compared to the competing ethical theories.⁷⁴ Because each of the views require some sort of thick term discernment, and Kantian views in particular use evaluative terms in an importantly similar way, the account cannot be rejected solely on

⁷² Hursthouse, Rosalind. 1999. *On Virtue Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 58

⁷³ Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* p. 36 Also, on p. 51 she claims that they are not only action guiding, but also act-assessing. If we distinguish among the various purposes for which we might develop an ethical account, this point is of use if there is reason to think that terms serving both purposes are somehow better than one or the other. Except for grounds of parsimony or ease of remembering, this feature seems to offer few real advantages. With respect to its adequacy as producing a codified action guidance method, Hursthouse notes that it provides adequate codification for a normative ethical theory, p. 62. Also, on p. 51, she brings in the point from later in the assessment of the theory section that it her v-rules account can accommodate even those who are not virtuous and find themselves in situations that the virtuous wouldn't.

⁷⁴ Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* pp. 59-61. On page 58, she claims that many of the virtues are well-enough defined to get act-prescriptions, but that justice is a notable exception. Given the range of terms she sees as virtue-terms, e.g. honesty, compassion, etc., it is likely that most of the five classical virtues would be “exceptional” in the same way justice is on her view, bringing back the spectre of the V-rules being of little use to all except moral experts.

the grounds that it requires thick terms.⁷⁵ For example, she notes further that, as with many terms, the “v-terms” featured in the v-rules, e.g. ‘courage’, ‘compassion’, etc., can be defined for children or others unfamiliar with the use of a moral term by reference to other, simpler, more familiar terms.⁷⁶ In this way, even the need to understand thick terms are not an insurmountable obstacle to application.

This practical guidance schema, rendered both in the form of an action guidance principle, and as more specific rules for agents to use as practical precepts, meets not only the basic aims outlined by a moderate practical guidance critique, but also more stringent codificationist expectations for practical guidance that derive from expectations that virtue ethics offer guidance accessible to a wide range of agents. However, it remains vulnerable to the concerns that challenge the agency models. Because it requires a similar process of deliberation by the agent in the sense that in order to assess whether or not the action the agent is considering is right, the worries regarding the derivativeness of the guidance resurface. Like the agency models, in a concrete situation, the agent must

⁷⁵ Hursthouse, Rosalind. 1999. *On Virtue Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press. See especially, p. 37, 60-61.

⁷⁶ Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, p.80. The comment regarding the need for an account of moral education seems likely to be an inescapable feature of a comprehensive ethical account more generally. As I aim to argue later in the chapter, a feature of action guidance that the practical guidance critics overlook/should but do not focus on in their critique of virtue ethics as not action-guiding. Because virtue ethics, as a theory, is only indirectly action guiding, I argue that articulating an account of moral development is particularly important for virtue ethics.

be able to imagine what the virtuous agent would do in those particular circumstances in order to know what to do.⁷⁷

Virtue Ethics' Guidance and Practical Guidance Expectations

Each of the three main approaches accomplishes the task of accommodating the distinctive features of Aristotelian practical reasoning endorsed on many contemporary virtue accounts. For example, all three models preserve the complexity of moral decision-making and focus on the agent as the evaluative entity. The V-rules and Ideal Agency Models respect a limited role of codification in providing agents action guidance, and do so in at least a minimally psychologically plausible way. However, even though each fits into both a standard Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics conceptual schema and within the practical guidance constraints as well, this does not provide the sort of guidance the practical guidance critique tacitly assumes an ethical theory should include.

As models for action guidance, each of these proposed methods meet the theoretical demands of an Aristotelian account of practical wisdom, which precludes the priority of principles and fosters a codification-resistant decision-making process. In addition, they meet minimal psychological realism constraints as we commonly think back to particular things others have done or told us and use them to guide our actions.

⁷⁷ Kawall, Jason. 2006. "On the Moral Epistemology of Ideal Observer Theories." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice: An International Forum* 9 (3) (06/01): 359-74. Kawall discusses Hursthouse's principle-like model at length, arguing that a better alternative is the virtuous ideal observer. In addition to a major concern regarding the psychological plausibility of such an entity, the objections used to discredit Hursthouse's formulation seem misguided. In a later essay, Kawall argues that the virtuous ideal observer is psychologically plausible.

Further, the general precepts to do as the virtuous would do or advise, and their elaboration in V-Rules are at least prima facie guiding because the agent knows at least that virtuous agent is one who does the right actions in the right circumstances, in the right way with the right affect with a unity of certain moral character traits such as justice, temperance, wisdom, courage.⁷⁸ Even if the agent knows only this much, this information offers at least a rough guide to the sorts of considerations that she should draw into her deliberation and act upon in the circumstance.⁷⁹ Yet, it is not clear that the constraints imposed by the theoretical commitments of virtue ethics combined with the moderate expectations of the practical guidance critique are sufficient to reliably produce action that comports with standards of good character.

If these standards are correct, a virtue ethics that meets these can at best offer derivative guidance, or, much worse, the guidance it can offer is all but vacuous. Because the agent's ability to discern action guidance by reflecting on the virtues depends substantially not only upon the features of the situation that the agent finds salient, but also the way the agents sees them relating to the relevant reasons, these ideal agency and V-rule guidance models offer little substantive action guidance.⁸⁰ Although

⁷⁸ Although there is a debate on whether or not unity of the virtues is required for being virtuous, it seems to me an interesting and plausible view that it is, and yet, it seems that one could still gain good guidance or advice from a person who has an unevenly developed set of virtuous character qualities, so the commitment to the unity of the virtues is of little consequence in this debate.

⁷⁹ Hursthouse, R. 1999. *On Virtue Ethics*, New York: Oxford University Press. p. 36.

psychologically plausible and compatible with the practical reasoning account of virtue ethics, applying these practical precepts in a way such that the theory influences action requires an agent's decision-making abilities to be conditioned through experience so the agent can discern which of the situational features are relevant to her deliberations and integrate them into her reasoning accordingly.⁸¹

Further, virtue ethics reserves a significant place for practical wisdom. Emulating the practically wise requires more than doing the action the practically wise would, but requires an agent have developed the appropriate sensitivities and responses that can discern salient features across a broad range of situations and distill the relevant features from situations of significant variety, complexity, and novelty, something that cannot be achieved by theoretical reflection alone. On these models, without the requisite experience the deliberative process collapses into the agent's own judgment, limited by his or her present understanding of the terms, assessment of the features of the circumstances, and ability to imagine the viewpoint of a virtuous agent or advisor. Without either a more guiding model or access to the situation-specific advice the virtuous agent might give, the exemplary and idealized agency models lack the ability to

⁸⁰ See Loudon, Robert B. 1997 "On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics" in *Virtue Ethics*. Edited by Crisp, Roger and Michael A. Slote. Oxford Readings in Philosophy. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 201-216.

⁸¹ Despite advocating a type of ideal agency model, Hursthouse also acknowledges the need for moral education, e.g. see Hursthouse, R. *On Virtue Ethics*, p. 38. She articulates this view further in "Practical Wisdom, A Mundane Account" as well.

provide agents with guidance that meets the expectations of the standard practical guidance critique.⁸²

In addition, even if an agent does not know exactly what the virtuous would do, the action guidance models virtue ethics offers, although perhaps indirect, are not entirely uninformative. Even if a gap remains between the specification of the ideal and the application in any particular situation, one might argue that this gap is no more problematic than that which the consequentialist or deontologist faces in applying their theories.⁸³ Although action guidance from a virtue account is by its nature indirect (i.e., it derives from a conception of good character or what is involved in realizing a good character trait), Hursthouse argues that the V-rules, for example, are adequately guiding because a trait offers a proliferation of guidance rules for each situation.

The V-Rule view Hursthouse advances can be distinguished from these approaches by the specificity of the rules it develops, and, because of the specificity of the rules she proposes, her account offers the most promising practical guidance proposal of the three. The promise of the proposal Hursthouse suggests derives from the more specific guidance that the variety of prescriptions for virtuous action and proscriptions

⁸² For example, Sher claims that, “the field’s practical origins can be expected to impose significant constraints on its subsequent development. Assuming that ethical inquiry does originate in questions about how to live, it would be surprising if the best overall reconstruction of its findings did not have an important action-guiding component.” Sher, George. 1998. “Ethics, Character, and Action,” in *Virtue and Vice*, Frankel Paul, E., Miller, D.F., and J. Paul. Cambridge; New York : Cambridge University Press, p. 16.

⁸³ Hursthouse maintains this view in *On Virtue Ethics*. See also D. Solomon in “Internal Objections to Virtue Ethics,” p. 171.

against vicious actions provide. In this way, not only does the view provide a general action guidance principle based on one's conception of the virtuous, but also picks out familiar sorts of activities that one should or should not do in order to become more virtuous.

Yet, although the practical guidance proposal Hursthouse outlines shows the most promise of offering ordinary agents the sort of guidance the most reasonable version of the practical guidance objection suggests, it too falls short of providing agents the sort of guidance required for virtue. For example, to use V-rules, one would need an extensive understanding of the concept of 'justice', 'courage', etc. with the other virtues to understand how to be just or courageous in a particular situation.⁸⁴ These practical precepts lack practical guidance precise enough to indicate the action an agent should perform, unless the deliberating agent already understands which situational features to pick out as relevant to her deliberation. Without knowing which sorts of general considerations a person of virtuous character might consider in processing these features, and which sorts of affective responses the virtuous would experience, *and* how these translate into action, an ordinary agent is unlikely to realize the virtuous activity these guidance schemata seem to be designed for agents to realize. If these exhaust the set of tools virtue ethics has available to both guide action and maintain the structure of the

⁸⁴ On page 58 of *On Virtue Ethics*, Hursthouse claims that many of the virtues are well-enough defined to get act-prescriptions, but that justice is a notable exception. Given the range of terms she sees as virtue-terms, e.g. honesty, compassion, etc., it is likely that most of the classic five virtues would be "exceptional" in the same way justice is on her view, bringing back the spectre of the V-rules being of little use to all except moral experts.

theory, it seems that this form of practical guidance is vulnerable to a substantive application problem.

Although this seems a plausible response in defense of virtue ethics' practical precepts and guidance suggestions, these further problems with guidance indicate a sustained gap between what the theory can plausibly offer agents and at least implicit expectations of the practical guidance critique. Yet, that ethical theory has problems reaching the ground does not imply that because the practical guidance critique does not identify virtue ethics uniquely, it lacks purchase against the view. Even if offering agents practical guidance does not require delineating an algorithm for deliberation about action, an ethical theory aimed at affecting action should offer means by which the agent can identify the salient features of the situation and show how those features connect to ethical considerations more broadly. The extent to which an agent still must interpret virtue-based action guidance precepts in order to implement them the central problem of the practical guidance critique still stands. In spite of the practical precepts a theory might generate, an ethical theory that does not address the connections between action guidance, moral judgment, discernment, and deliberation is incomplete.

Due to this gap between what the view specifies and good action, even Hursthouse's view falls short of the reasonable version of the practical guidance objection. Without a means of implementing the practical precepts and action guidance principle, an agent can at best act in accordance with virtue, but less likely be acting from virtue. Because, ultimately, the aim is for the agent to act authentically, from character traits built through their own endorsed habits, with agents finding salient relevant features

of the circumstances and deliberating well about how to act, given those features, even an extensive action-guidance schema falls short from the sort of guidance that action from virtue requires.

Despite meeting plausible theory-focused guidance constraints, these commonly cited Neo-Aristotelian guidance schemata fail to provide the sort of guidance at the heart of the practical guidance critique. Although moderate practical guidance expectations of ethical theory seem both reasonable and maximal without resorting to arbitrary or otherwise unjustified constraints on action guidance, they are insufficient for effecting the sort of action guidance for which they are designed. The practical guidance critique challenges virtue ethics because it does not provide this, suggesting either a deficiency in the theory or the constraints of the practical guidance critique that needs to be remedied.

*Guidance and Diversity of Aims*⁸⁵

The distinction among the various purposes for which we might develop ethical theory provides some evidence that even if there is a quite good guidance schema, it may not be sufficient for providing agents the sort of action guidance that would realize the

⁸⁵ Ensuring that application comports with the broader aims of the theory need not involve an articulation of the broader aims at the application level, it need only realize them. However, one might argue that Utilitarianism and Kantian accounts have a ready foothold on the action guidance issue, even if not readily applicable, it is a better approach to develop than by thinking that the axiology should be focused at the action level. Thus, even if there are questions about what counts as a good consequence or what maxim expresses the purpose for which the action is done, the debate begins at the action level. Virtue ethics' resistance to codification even at the level of developing a right-making account of action, leaves the already extensive debate about the substance of improving action far behind the other theories because the actions prescribed need to be justified at the level of particulars and, bypassing the act-based evaluative criteria, are evaluated with respect to the virtue-level qualities they express.

axiological aims of the theory. If we distinguish among the theoretical commitments, practical precepts, and methods of guidance a theory can sustain, it becomes clearer that a comprehensive ethical theory involves not only theoretical foundations and corresponding practical precepts, but a means of implementation as well.

In this section, I aim to argue that instead of rejecting the guidance proposal Hursthouse introduces, we should seek a supplemental intermediary, an implementation method of guidance. For example, R.E. Bales articulates the distinction among various purposes for which we might develop an account, stating that,

providing an account of right-making characteristics is still not *the same thing* as providing an account of the considered judgments of informed, mature persons in their disinterested, reflective moments, nor is it the same thing as providing a decision-making procedure.⁸⁶

Maintaining this distinction among various aims housed within a comprehensive ethical theory, we can evaluate the various features of a theory based on the aims they seek to meet and their compatibility with other components.

We might note that the most effective way to meet the aims set forth by the axiology of the theory or a right-making account of action, might require a theory rely on a theory-independent means of guidance. It is possible that the decision-making method

⁸⁶ Bales, 261. He further notes that, “a theory (like act-utilitarianism) could satisfy one of [those] expectations...and yet fail to satisfy others of the expectations.” Bales, R. E. “Act-Utilitarianism: Account of Right-Making Characteristics or Decision-Making Procedure?” *American Philosophical Quarterly*. Volume 8, Nubmer 3, July 1971. Pp. 257-265. Quotation from p. 261.

for realizing the axiological aims of a theory functions separately from evaluative criteria, derives from separate means, and is evaluated not based on the means by which it guides actions, but instead by whether it realizes the axiological aims of a theory.⁸⁷ If it is possible to separate the theory and the guidance in this way, then it seems to be a mistake to assume that any single articulation of an ethical theory needs to meet the full range of expectations at once.⁸⁸

Because the range of possible aims for which an articulation of a theory may be developed is extensive, the practical guidance critique cannot plausibly demand more than compatibility among articulations of the various facets of an ethical theory involved in guiding action.⁸⁹ Yet, a guidance method developed primarily for realizing the axiological aims of a theory might do so effectively by not making reference to the axiological aims or terms of the theory. This diversity of means theories might develop, and by which agents could realize the aims of the theory, suggests the viability of a pluralism of methods by which agents might be able to meet the axiological aims of a theory. That various facets of theory are assessable by different means does not rule out

⁸⁷ See Smart and Williams, pages 51, and 44 respectively. Smart, J.J. and B.A.O. Williams. *Utilitarianism: For and Against*. Cambridge University Press: New York. 1973.

⁸⁸ See Bales, R. Eugene. 1971. "Act Utilitarianism: Account of Right-Making Characteristics or Decision-Making Procedure?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 8 (07/01): 257-65.

⁸⁹ Although this may seem to be a very weak standard, given that few aim to articulate a comprehensive ethical theory and often single articulations of an account begin from diverse assumptions, developing a comprehensive ethical theory is still a significant a challenge, even with this seemingly weak standard.

a theory or sets of practical precepts that adequately guide. However, we need to assess theories based on theoretical constraints, limit standards of assessment of practical precepts to psychological plausibility and theoretical consistency, and develop appropriate means of assessing action-guidingness on its own merits, e.g. effectiveness at meeting practical guidance expectations. Even though practical precepts are plausible means of guidance and do seem at least *prima facie* weakly guiding, we need to assess effectiveness of implementation measures for action guidance schemata relative to the aims of affecting action.⁹⁰

Without actual and justified methods of guidance or comprehensive and theoretical evaluative measure, proponents of virtue ethics have little reason to develop virtue ethics in a way such that it meets the guidance standards of a practical guidance critique that heavily discount non-theory-focused practical guidance. In addition, there are reasons to think we *should not* aim to develop a particular method of guidance for a theory absent adequate empirical grounding. Yet, if these distinct aims are housed within the same theoretical structure or comprehensive ethical theory we might think that a comprehensive ethical theory need only be coherent among the various facets, rather than seek a sort of systematic guidance focused on principles or general precepts the theory generates as a form of guidance.

⁹⁰ One views that addresses this sort of issue, and which I will consider in the discussion of plausible expectations of an ethical theory, is O. Flanagan's view regarding the psychological plausibility in *Varieties of Moral Personality*. Flanagan, Owen J. 1991. *Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological Realism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Without a good reason for thinking that axiological aims of a theory are empirically effective as implementation means, expecting theory-oriented constraints to serve as adequate methodological constraints is to overextend the expectations of the theory. However, by expanding moderate practical guidance expectations to accommodate assessment of theory and practical precepts, but also implementation method, we might be able to better assess a theory for its ability to offer agents effective practical guidance.

Common expectations for both theory-focused and independent guidance methods are that they fit within the side constraints of the theory and meet minimal psychological plausibility expectations. For example, a guidance method for virtue ethics needs to meet axiological aims of the theory, but do so in a way such that the particular remains primary in justification of action. Further, any guidance method needs to fall within at least the minimal constraints of psychological plausibility, e.g., comport with Flanagan's Principle of Minimal Psychological Realism, which constrains assumptions and expectations about behavior, deliberation, and character by the nature of those for which the view is developed.⁹¹ Yet, both the side constraints of virtue ethics and the psychological plausibility expectation seem to leave open an overly-broad set of guidance methods, particularly considering the variety of practices and learning methods people often

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 32. His version of the PMPR is: "Make sure when constructing a moral theory for projecting a moral ideal that the character, decision processing, and behavior prescribed are possible, or are perceived to be possible for creatures like us." (32). Although Flanagan endorses a more substantive standard than the PMPR, it seems that to claim an ideal agency model as psychologically plausible guidance requires a fairly weak moral realism standard.

employ for moral development. Although alone they do not offer limits narrow enough to produce guidance effective for realizing the aims of the theory, they do delineate the range of methods and type of guidance means.

A corollary of affecting action derives from the basic justifications for the practical guidance critique itself, that ethical theory aim ultimately at guiding action. This, combined with an expanded definition of moral agency, suggests that an ethical theory should be applicable not only to an elite group of agents, but ordinary agents as well. Although agents who are brought up well and have the external goods needed for developing virtue will not require a widely accessible means of guidance, reaching an expansive audience suggests that a theory develop a more extensive application regimen to realize the aim of affecting action for the relevant group of agents. If we expect that ethical theories guide, and that guidance be accessible to all moral agents, then virtue ethics applies to a wider audience than previous times in history.⁹²

As the current and widespread acceptance of human rights suggests, if the theory is intended to apply to a broad set of agents in addition to those already responsive to certain reasons, then finding ways to develop good character and actions for this broad range of agents may pose an interesting and significant challenge to the view. Helping agents develop good character on this view might require providing agents with a variety of external goods, e.g., the right sorts of experiences which may in turn require a certain

⁹² This sort of expectation is plausibly grounded if we adopt the assumption that an ethical theory affect action for moral agents in combination with a common notion of moral agent that encompasses something like “all competent adults”.

measure of external goods, or skills, such as literacy of various sort, specific types of material goods, etc. Although these corollary challenges do not tell against virtue ethics *per se*, it does seem that the challenges of developing a codified decision-making procedure are replaced with a different set of challenges. In spite of this, this set of challenges is preferable to the unreasonable expectations of a stringent practical guidance critique and offers more promise of ensuring good action because it is within the purview of virtue ethics to offer a moral development schema, whereas codified action guidance fits within the scope of the theory less comfortably.⁹³ If we adopt these methods and guidance constraints, it seems plausible to an implementation method in addition to, rather than as a replacement for, Hursthouse's guidance schema. Not only does this offer more likely adequate guidance as a comprehensive ethical theory, it seems that if we allow for a pluralism of features of an ethical theory, the implementation means need

⁹³ What accessibility amounts to, however, is an interesting question in terms of evaluation. In part, the problem is that deliberation, discernment, and practical reasoning more broadly are primarily internal activities. In this sense, it is unclear what a theory or even method can do to be more accessible. In a sense, it requires a least common denominator approach. If the aim is to guide ordinary agents, it seems too stringent to require extensive exposure to moral theory or literacy at all, or even deliberation about applied ethics policies. In the case of virtue ethics, the main aim is to have agents deliberate well about what is good to do, given the circumstances, but with an eye to what is good to do overall. This does not seem to require that agents have read Aristotle's work or the work of his contemporary predecessors.

Although this may seem mundane and fails to constrain the particular type of method required (as we might think it is a reason for codification), it has non-trivial implications for developing a guidance method for a theory. Although this cannot guarantee a method that could serve as a systematic way to attain virtue, studies from social psychology concerning the nature and types of character, relations between social circumstances, actions, and character [what Mill referred to as "ethology"], experimental philosophical queries about moral deliberation and judgments people tend to make, given situations framed in a particular manner, e.g..

only be compatible with the whole and adequate itself for the purposes it is aimed to serve.

Conclusion:

Although three common approaches to practical guidance from neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics develop guidance schemata, each fall short of the standard practical guidance objection that claims a theory should effect action and guide the ordinary agent. Of the three main proposals, Rosalind Hursthouse proposes the most promising schema in *On Virtue Ethics*, providing agents with a virtue-based action guidance principle as well as v-rules that circumscribe action further by prescribing or proscribing actions as respectively virtuous or vicious. Yet, without a way to demonstrate to agents the purpose of following these v-rules, acting from them not only in accordance with them, even this schema leaves a gap between the specific prescriptions and proscriptions and ordinary agents.

Because theoretical accounts need an intermediary between theory and virtuous activity if they are to be implemented, a comprehensive ethical theory needs to provide a supplement to the guidance schema that supplies an implementation method for inculcating these precepts in ways that allow agents to make them their own. Without it, even an extensive guidance schema like the one Hursthouse proposes lacks a method for interpreting the significance of features of a situation with respect to the axiological claims of the theory. In addition to this basic expectation for method, the assumptions of the practical guidance critique that at least implicitly expect the theory to be applicable to

a wide range of agents suggests an additional corollary that the methods of guidance be widely accessible.

In the next chapter, I argue that we should explore practices, socially-situated, complex activities engaged by virtuous practitioners, as plausible implementation method for virtue ethics. I argue that because practices demonstrate to individuals how mundane activities an ordinary agent engages realize values the community shares, they enrich and develop the deliberative skills that practical wisdom requires. Further, not only are practices accessible to a wide range of agents, empirical evidence from studies of expertise and expert performance suggest that their structure makes them to some extent amenable to empirical assessment using tools of social demography social psychology, cognitive psychology, and other empirical means of evaluation relevant for empirical and experimental philosophy.

Chapter 3

Practice-Based Guidance

If we seek to provide ordinary agents with practical guidance, we need a means of implementing the ethical theories we endorse. However, this is an especially challenging task for virtue ethics because of its resistance to codified action guidance. Although we can outline practical precepts and even an action guidance principle for virtue ethics, without a means for ordinary agents to implement this guidance, the account fails to meet a reasonable expectation of the sort of guidance an ethical theory should provide.

I argue that practices offer a promising means of implementing the axiology and practical precepts of virtue ethics. As introduced and defined in the contemporary context by Alasdair MacIntyre, practices, socially-structured, complex activities, situated within a society that values virtue, implement virtuous activity for agents, and bridge the gap between the non-virtuous and the virtuous. Practices provide both an account of how the right-making account of action and practical precepts lead to virtuous activity, and offer a method for implementing them. Practices make salient the values the activity realizes and the point of the activity in ways that even extensive action guidance schemata focused on theoretical claims do not. In this way, they help agents realize virtuous activity and comport with the values of the community.

Studies of expertise and expert performance suggest that the discernment and deliberative skill required for virtuous activity parallels the sort of abilities experts develop, and that the two may be developed in much the same way through practices and domains, respectively. Because practices connect an agent's activities within the practice

with the purposes for which they are engaged, they offer novice agents a means of understanding how these activities lead to and express virtue and provide a method for implementing neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. Further, practices serve to supplement guidance schemata aimed developed for meeting the practical guidance objection by making it possible for novices to develop the rudiments of practical wisdom and virtue.

MacIntyre's Practice View

In his *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre sketches one of the few, and perhaps the most fully-articulated, contemporary accounts of ethics involving practices. Practices, on MacIntyre's account, ground a tripartite ethical structure, and are understood in the context of one's life narrative. On this account, practices are constrained by the various historical traditions that underwrite the various social roles that an individual develops a personal narrative to integrate. Although they require normative grounding, I argue that the practices MacIntyre delineates on his account can be used as a guidance method that satisfies moderate practical guidance expectations. Further, practices provide the sort of structured context through which agents can develop the deliberative expertise characteristic of practical wisdom.

MacIntyre's practice view derives from a concern about the pervasiveness of emotivist ethical views in today's society. Based on an historical argument detailing the combination of fragmented and decontextualized understanding of ancient accounts of ethics, MacIntyre argues that our endorsement of these views leaves us with inadequate grounds for deciding a good way to live our lives due to a faulty reliance on modern moral notions. By way of remedy, MacIntyre envisions a return to a virtue-oriented

account based on the assumption that we are situated within a social context that influences our understanding and use of normative terms, with the implication that contemporary liberal societies require radical change to support the sorts of practices and communities that could foster virtues in this way.

This account MacIntyre proposes is rooted in practices, activities that gain significance in one's life in the process of developing a narrative unity through which one integrates the various particularities of one's life. MacIntyre defines a practice as,

[A]ny coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.⁹⁴

On his account, practices are important because virtues are expressed most vividly, though not solely, through practices and are necessary to achieving the goods unique to any specific practice, the goods internal to that practice.

On MacIntyre's view, practices serve as the foundation on which to reconstruct a lost ethical approach, and as a place in which the expression of virtue is salient and within which one can realize its benefits.⁹⁵ It is within practices that the virtues find their

⁹⁴ MacIntyre, Alasdair C. 1984. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 2nd ed. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press. P. 187.

“point and function.”⁹⁶ Practices serve as the medium through which one embodies excellence and experiences goods internal to that particular form of activity. A practice is thus a technical outline of the sorts of activity through which virtues are most readily expressed and which, in turn, rely on virtue for the achievement of internal goods.

According to MacIntyre, practices, characterized as specifically *human* activities aimed at successful performance in a way that enables the advancement of the forms of the activity, and facilitates human abilities to understand the nature of the activity in ways that offer benefits to humans. The view is aimed particularly at humans, identifying features commonly attributed to them; their social nature, the capacity for complex activities and understanding of abstract principles such as those that ground logic and enable them to rule out inconsistencies. Although MacIntyre does not detail the level of complexity required for something to be considered a practice, he claims that, for example, practices can be distinguished from technical skills. So, while architecture is a practice, bricklaying is not. Likewise with farming and turnip-planting, chess and tic-tac-toe.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ MacIntyre points out that the virtues are not expressed and incorporated only here, but also in the processes of developing a narrative unity and contextualizing one’s view within a tradition.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 201.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 197. Although he does not detail the main feature(s) that distinguish between practices and finite skills, it seems that the aim of each distinguishes them. Practices have dynamic and evolving aims, while finite skills have a fixed aim such that the activity admits only of iterations, not evolution.

Extrapolating from MacIntyre's account, practices, in part, seem to be comprised of an integrated series of skills, which engage social conventions, roles, and rules. Conventions, e.g., function as sorts of socially agreed-upon rules of thumb (either more formal, like driving on the right side of the road, or less formal, like etiquette rules) designed to serve as an efficient solution to a coordination problem of some sort.⁹⁸ Further, practices likely include roles for practitioners to assume, set by the institution within which the activities of the practice are realized organize the activities within the practice. Although practices often employ several conventions as well as rules, these are distinct from what one might categorize as a practice proper, they help structure and organize the activity within the practice, and are neither necessarily constrained within, nor completely definitive of practices.⁹⁹ Instead, internal goods that engagement with the

⁹⁸ My view connects to Lewis' in the sense that conventions are meant to solve coordination problems, however, I think my view is both broader and narrower. It is broader in the sense that it does not constrain the coordination sphere to social circumstances, but can solve problems on an individual level as well (e.g. turn off the stove after cooking to avoid burning yourself—a hermit might set up and adhere to conventions). It is narrower in the sense that it is not completely arbitrary; there can be ways that function better or worse, but all of which could be considered a convention. Lewis, David K. 1969. *Convention: A Philosophical Study*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

⁹⁹ On this account, practices are also distinguished from the more colloquial sense of 'practice', which tends to mean something roughly like 'habit'. On my view, a practice is a much more consciously engaged, reflective, and complex endeavor. A habit, in contrast, is more like an engrained way of thinking, perceiving, or behaving, one which often leads to identifiable patterns of behavior and action. They become a sort of automatic response, triggered in a particular sort of situation, one that may be easy or difficult to override. Although habits are often produced as a result of engaging a

activity of the practice produces, further distinguishes practices from technical skills that aim toward a fixed goal.

According to MacIntyre, the goals of practices change as people engage them; they develop and are furthered as people innovate the techniques that allow for new ends to aim at. This process, he argues, requires virtue to sustain this dynamic notion of an end, which is constituted in part by its means. Standards play a dual role with respect to activity, one that parallels a feature of Aristotelian ethics in that the evaluation of an action is in part an explanation of why one should engage in it (or not, as the case may be).¹⁰⁰ By aiming to realize these standards, practices engage the virtues and produce what MacIntyre calls “internal goods.”

For MacIntyre, internal goods are goods whose ends are in some way inseparable from the means to achieving them, the activity of the practice.¹⁰¹ This notion of good contrasts with the idea of external goods, which are goods that one can attain in a number of ways, the sorts of goods which are typically counted in zero-sum terms. Internal goods, however, are particular excellences or products realized only through the activity of a particular practice, goods that cannot be gained without engaging in the activity of the practice itself. In addition, the realization of internal goods benefit the entire

practice, they are not sufficient in themselves to constitute a practice. One might be able to construe conventions as a form of practice, but it seems that they do not require the purposiveness, complexity, and historical grounding that practices do.

¹⁰⁰ MacIntyre, Alasdair, C. 1984. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 2nd ed. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press. P. 197.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, P. 184.

community, furthers the practice, and extends the tradition. In contrast to external goods, the realization of internal goods does not detract from another's experience of the activity, but instead enhances it in important ways.

Because of its connection with internal goods as well as its other roles within the normative schema MacIntyre proposes, on his view, practices can exist only in a society that values virtue in some way. A society that didn't value virtues of some sort could not sustain practices, as such, even if it had institutions that supported technical skills "mobilized for a unified purpose."¹⁰² In part, this distinction relies on the fact that a technical skill has a fixed end, whereas the aims of the disciplines involved in practices are continually evolving, better approximating excellence in the activity. As the practice advances, as the skills are mastered and subsequently extended by practitioners, the ends of the practice are furthered. On MacIntyre's account, virtues are an integral prerequisite for a practice, enabling it to prevent the corruption of the aims.

Although in *After Virtue* MacIntyre does not detail the role virtue plays in realizing internal goods, he describes virtues within the context of a practice as, "just those qualities which tend to lead to the achievement of a certain class of goods [i.e. internal goods]."¹⁰³ Even though we cannot live without some measure of external

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 192-3.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 198. Later, he argues that virtues also sustain quests and traditions. Further, the notion of virtue he holds is a fairly classical Aristotelian notion of virtue in the sense that it assumes a cross-situational expression (p. 205), and requires that we "practice them irrespective of whether in any particular set of contingent circumstances they will produce those [external] goods or not" (198).

goods, MacIntyre argues that sometimes the virtues and the achievement of internal goods can be an obstacle to acquiring some sorts or amounts of external goods. Further, because the goods internal to practices rely on virtue to produce the unique benefits internal to and expressed within a practice, internal goods cannot be achieved without a social context which embodies the virtues.¹⁰⁴

A final necessary feature and primary form of social support for practices are the institutions that a society maintains and which house practices. Institutions offer not only material support for practices, but are required as an intermediary between the values of society and practices. In his discussion of the relation between institutions and practices, MacIntyre emphasizes the role institutions play in providing the material setting for the activity of practices to occur. Further, institutions provide the social structure for practices and material continuity. Although the acquisitive aims of institutions can be at odds with the achievement of internal goods within the practices they support; they provide material goods and structural support that practices require.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, P. 193.

¹⁰⁵ One distinction between something that can be considered a practice and a finite skill is that a practice admits of expertise and innovation in a way a skill or particular technique does not. A technique or finite skill can be mastered and applied in various circumstances, but the skill alone does not admit of innovation, only multiplication. Although a variety of skills might be employed to complete a task, the activity of a skill itself does not change and grow with time. Once a skill is mastered, it can be applied and applied in combination with various skills in novel ways, but it cannot be improved upon in the sense that it can be redefined, and yet still be considered the same, continuous skill. Practices admit of expertise and innovation in a sense similar to MacIntyre's. That is, they are a sort of discipline, and have a broader set of evolving aims than a finite skill itself.

Advantages of Practice-Based Guidance

Practices serve a plausible implementation method for virtue ethics, in two main ways. One is by offering a structure through which agents can gain direct action guidance. Practitioners within the institutions that house practices can serve to guide novice agents much the way ideal agency models might suggest, but within the context of a practice serve as a more accessible, yet likely non-expert source of guidance and advice to agents. A second means by which practices guide is much less direct, but offers agents means by which they can develop the sorts of deliberative skills that are characteristic of practical wisdom. Although not an immediately accessible means of good guidance, it eventually enables agents to solve practical problems well on their own.

The promise of practice-based guidance derives from its ability to serve as an implementation method, offering even novice agents a method through which to correctly implement the precepts and principles of virtue ethics.¹⁰⁶ Instead of offering theory-focused guidance that challenges the contextualist constraints of virtue ethics, practices provide a structure integrating skills, conventions, aims and activities that can build deliberative proficiency with respect to the aims and standards specified by the practice over a broad range of situations. Yet, practices can also meet moderate practical guidance expectations, offering agents guidance that is action-oriented, while offering ordinary agents means of developing more refined deliberative abilities.

¹⁰⁶ Practices can plausibly also serve as an implementation method for Utilitarian or Kantian Ethics as well, but I leave the work of developing practice-based ethics for different accounts to others. My aim here is to develop the case for practices in conjunction with the commitments of virtue ethics.

The central challenge the practical guidance critique poses for virtue ethics is that it expects ethical theory to offer action guidance to agents, including ordinary agents.¹⁰⁷ The action guidance practical precepts like “Act as the virtuous would,” and advice to emulate or idealize the activities of more virtuous agents appears, *prima facie* psychologically plausible, the substantive guidance these precepts provide prove nearly vacuous for ordinary agents or agents deliberating in novel circumstances. Practices, however, can accommodate not only expert agents well-versed in the variety of ways to act within the circumstances in order to meet the aim, but novice agents who first need to learn the rudiments of the discipline before managing in complex or ambiguous circumstances.

With respect to a virtue view, even with the more specific guidance specified by V-Rules such as “act justly”, or, “be honest”, any guidance an agent is going to gain from rules of this form depend on her understanding of the thick terms of the rules, like justice, compassion, etc, and what they require, or deriving action guidance from character-qualities.¹⁰⁸ The virtue view requires extensive understanding of thick concepts, connections between character-level qualities and act-level qualities relating to

¹⁰⁷ By ‘ordinary agents’ here I mean agents who neither have specialized training in ethics, in the contemporary context, philosophers or theologians, nor would count as members of the elite group Aristotle took to be his audience. Instead, I am interested to at least try to meet the at least tacit expectation of the practical guidance critique that ethical theory offer guidance to the ordinary, untutored agent.

¹⁰⁸ Although the V-Rules Hursthouse puts forth make strides toward elaborating the sorts of considerations that agents seeking guidance should consider, the view itself seems to be a version of the ideal agency model, as it requires agents seeking guidance to reflect on the virtue qualities as a more ideal agent might.

discernment and deliberation to apply, leaving it weak with respect to an empirically adequate set of practical guidance expectations. Because practices structure activities with respect to a set of definitive aims, engaging a practice allows agents to learn thick terms. Further, ordinary agents can gain correction from more-experienced practitioners, and develop the rudiments of practical wisdom by refining means-ends reasoning in the service of both ultimate and more proximate aims set by the structure of the practice. This sort of structured experiential engagement allows practices to guide in ways that avoid the practical guidance difficulties faced by both theory-focused guidance and ideal agency models. Further, practices at least appear more amenable to empirical assessment than other guidance schemata, suggesting an advantage over guidance provided by codes of theory-focused guidance alone.

Practices, however, can guide novices due, in part, to the roles set up for agents to assume within the practices and the institutions that house practices. As the primary problem with the issues of providing novice or ordinary agents practical guidance highlights, the novice agent is unlikely to realize the standards of excellence that MacIntyre characterizes as partially definitive of practices. Within practices, roles corresponding to skill level could define the both complexity of the aims the agent must meet, as well as the sort of activities the agent should do to meet that aim. In this way, the structure of a practice as situated within an institution can connect the highly constrained, but prerequisite aims to the broader aims which the novice is not yet equipped to meet, making novice activities that do not otherwise obviously aim directly to meet these standards of excellence, intelligible.

For example, the practice of gift-giving offers ordinary agents insights into the particular features of when, to whom, and what gifts to give others in their community. However, more importantly, the activity demonstrates to individuals the point of gift-giving, and relevant values that it should, and if done well, realizes. The values instantiated in good gift-giving, such as reciprocity or proportionality, offer agents within the practice not only a sense of which values are shared within the community, but also make manifest what sorts of activities instantiate those values within the context of that community. Further, by instantiating those values, individuals are acting well, from the right reasons, and the right time. Although these mundane activities, even done within the context of a practice, may not be sufficient to offer an agent a robust sense of what it means to be a just person, these precursors to justice are building blocks from which agents can develop an understanding of virtues and offer a distant approximation of the excellence.

In addition to providing means of implementing the axiological commitments of a theory, practices suggest a more empirically adequate guidance approach than either theory-focused guidance or ideal agency guidance alone. Beyond meeting a sort of thin empirical adequacy of possibility, or seeking guidance contingent on a variety of specific environmental supports, such as empathetic virtuous agents, extensive understanding of virtue terms in context, practices assume adequate social support for institutions as well as virtuous practitioners. Further, proximity and connections between practices and institutions make practices particularly amenable to empirical evaluation because the structural format of offers ready tools of scientific evaluation. Not only do institutions

highlight a population that can be observed and queried about their activities, but the methods endorsed and utilized within the practice can be evaluated and compared among different groups of people engaging the practice, as well as compare different sorts of practices. Because the practitioners adhere to or at least purportedly endorse the aims of the practices, and perhaps also the institution, it picks out populations whose members seek to achieve the same types of goals.

Practices and Practical Wisdom

In addition to offering a structure within which agents can ascertain guidance, the process of engaging and progressing toward the aims of a practice inculcates in the agent the deliberative skills that practical wisdom requires. In this section, I aim to argue that the skills required to proceed toward the standards of excellence of practices requires of agents deliberative skills that are self-similar to those of the practically wise. Further, if these are self-similar abilities, then not only do practices have *prima facie* relevance as an action guidance method with respect to guiding ordinary agents, and thereby meeting the standards of the practical guidance critique, but are particularly important for developing the sorts of action guidance skills specific to virtue ethics. Although the relatively narrow purview of paradigm practices lack the breadth of aims that practical wisdom spans, the sort of deliberative abilities and methods by which they are attained, suggest practices may be a necessary component, or at least a common component, of a life well lived.

Practice-based guidance is a promising alternative to theory-based guidance and ideal agency models because it housed within a well-defined structure that supports an

implementation method for a set of aims that an institution grounds and which the practitioners attempt to realize. Even though typical practices are well-defined and span a relatively narrow scope, it seems at least possible that a practice could be used to structure activities aimed at realizing more expansive aims like those definitive of a sort of all-encompassing practice, e.g. a practice of living well. Further, in spite of lacking the sort of all-encompassing breadth that fits the sorts of aims ethical theories propound, practice-based guidance is a promising alternative to theory-based guidance and ideal agency models because the guidance it offers at least *prima facie* appears more empirically adequate with respect to meeting the standards of excellence than the other approaches offer.¹⁰⁹

Yet, with respect to virtue ethics, practices offer an additional benefit. Not only do they offer an answer to the action guidance question, “What should one do?”, but offer a structure within which agents can grapple with the deliberative process that requires them to engage both the particular features of the situation and the broader aims of the practice in choosing how to act. Because practices require agents to choose among various action options in order to meet some sort of concrete goal grounded within the broader aims of the practice, the sorts of skills agents develop as they engage and progress through a practice share the features of the sort of deliberative skill that is definitive of practical wisdom. This not only respects the role of practical wisdom in

¹⁰⁹ The characterization of practical wisdom articulated here is derived from Aristotle’s discussion of practical wisdom from EN, Book VI.

virtue ethics, but also offers a possible means by which the deliberative skill characteristic of practical wisdom might be trained.

Practical wisdom, a type of excellence in choice, requires agents to understand the relationships between the particular and universal to realize good action. Although the particulars and aims that must be accounted for are wide-ranging and numerous, by experience, agents come to understand the relations among them to consistently choose well. Unlike the theoretical knowledge of abstract concepts that define a relation that can be easily grasped, practical reasoning requires not only understanding the general relations, but also recognizing how they can be brought about both in general and in the individual case.

Thus, the sort of action guidance virtue ethics seeks to produce in agents is not only of the immediate and concrete sort that the practical guidance critique makes its focus. Instead, action guidance for agents derives also from long-developed capacities for living well, developed through extensive experience with the particulars. In part, this extensive experience is required because there are many ways to go wrong. Because a skilled practical reasoner recognizes more quickly and accurately which particulars and universals are the relevant ones in the situation, he or she can direct the agent to find more effective ways to deliberate about action. Practices appear a *prima facie* plausible way to train these deliberative capacities.

Standards of excellence definitive of the practice are not obviously met by the activities of beginners, but by those who have much experience within the practice. In addition, many practices proceed by engaging with and learning from more skilled

practitioners. The mentor need not be an expert within the practice, but only have more extensive experience and a more refined understanding of the aims of the activities and the relevant features and considerations relating to choice in action. Yet, even so, the mentors within a practice have developed enough of the relevant habits and skills to navigate among the particulars to meet the sorts of aims the less-skilled practitioner holds in that role. As the practitioner proceeds through the practice, the habits and skills enable the agent to realize more distant aims. In this way, practices offer a structure within which the novice can train to align the particulars with the universals via deliberation and realized in action by offering more-skilled practitioners who can correct the agents in their mistakes, and highlight particular techniques and strategies that help the agent.

One benefit of practices is that they make intelligible various activities involved in training agents in the prerequisite techniques, strategies—the basic skills upon which expertise in the practice is built. By organizing the various activities that are required to realize these standards of excellence, but which are far-removed from the sort of activities that are indicative of excellence, even if these are indispensable prerequisites. Thus, even if practices do not offer this sort of deliberative ability to agents immediately upon entering into a discipline as a practitioner, practices offer methods by which to train agents with the skills necessary to realize these aims and the nature of practices is such that they offer direct and tailored guidance and correction to agents so that they can learn to value the particulars and orient their actions to the aims, in successively more challenging and complex combinations of situation and aim, but beginning with highly constrained, more simple problems about which to deliberate.

A sort of deliberative excellence, wherein the practitioner is able not only to meet the standards of excellence of the discipline, but can see in the limits future directions for innovation, seems plausibly the result of extensive engagement in a practice. One who has developed this is described in much the way the practically wise are, but with more narrowly situated and better-defined aims, who can readily negotiate the particulars and aims to realize the excellent activities. Yet, even at the level of mastery, the experts within a practice often challenge and redefine the aims in the way MacIntyre's practices suggest with their dynamic notion of an end. Although narrow domains relative to the aim of living well toward which practical wisdom, the sorts of deliberative skills developed in practices share the qualities with practical wisdom, even if on a much smaller scale, and suggest that practices develop self-similar abilities in agents, and might thus be an important part of a life well lived, even if engaging practices is not sufficient for living well.

Further, virtue ethics acknowledges the roles time, experience, and effort, play in agents developing practical wisdom.¹¹⁰ Distinct from the way we learn theoretical wisdom, practical wisdom requires extensive experience and training, suggesting an advantage to adopting the practice-based view of guidance over a view that focuses primarily on adherence to a narrow code of action guidance rules. Although a theory-

¹¹⁰ This is an interesting point to note with respect to the expectation that a theory train the ordinary. If one thinks that Aristotle's view is flawed because it is directed toward an elite audience, it is interesting to note on a practices view becoming virtuous, even for the elite, is not without effort. Although a high standard of living and being brought up well may be required, attaining virtue also requires extensive concentrated effort.

focused approach might be plausible for guiding an agent who is experienced in discerning the relevant particulars and their connections to the ends, it is of little use to the ordinary agents the practical guidance critique is concerned with guiding. Practices seem to offer a means by which agents can bring the particulars into conversation with the aims and learn the relations among them, thickening concepts by finding their instances in situations and understanding the relations between the various features, the situations, the actions, and how they affect one's choice in action.

Expertise as Non-Moral Analogue

In addition to theoretical considerations relating to the potential benefits of practices as a means of guidance, studies of relative expertise provide indirect empirical support for practices as a means of action guidance that might satisfy not only expectations of a moderate practical guidance critique, but comports with the development of typically virtue ethical excellence in choice, practical wisdom. I aim to delineate some of the structural parallels between expert performance and practical wisdom, arguing that these structural parallels suggest possible developmental parallels as well. Further, the means by which expertise is developed in the narrower context parallels practices in a way that suggests indirect empirical support for practices as a means of action guidance, and the sort of deliberative skill that characterizes practical wisdom.

Studies of expertise and how it is developed provide stronger evidence that practices could be empirically adequate. Descriptions of the deliberative qualities expressed by the practically wise, as integrated and refined understanding of how the

universals bears on the particulars of the situation, bear a striking resemblance to the mastery of deliberative skills definitive of expertise as a source of deliberative mastery in various non-moral domains. Parallels between the sorts of mastery required for excellent deliberative activity and expert performance suggest not only a surface resemblance of the ways of discerning and deliberating between the two, but also extensive training as a shared means of acquisition. Descriptions of both expertise and practical wisdom, and empirical data regarding the means by which expertise is developed, suggest an integral role for the guidance methods characteristic of practices.

Expertise is a critical feature of an empirically adequate virtue ethical account, because it highlights the extent to which training is required as well as the limits of natural talent and the narrowness of reasoning skill. As evidenced in the expertise literature, expertise is developed by taking a basic set of learned skills, then learning to apply them in combination based on exposure to a vast array of situations, working to solve challenging, but attainable, problems, and by engaging in a concentrated effort to develop frameworks that make sense of the situations.¹¹¹ The situational exposure allows

¹¹¹ The deliberate practice feature that gives rise to expert performance has been studied extensively by Ericsson. Ericsson, K. A. 2006. "The Influence of Experience and Deliberate Practice on the Development of Superior Expert Performance." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, ed. Robert R. Hoffman. New York, NY US: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 683-703, Ericsson, K.A. 1996. *The Road to Excellence: The Acquisition of Expert Performance in the Arts and Sciences, Sports, and Games*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.; Ericsson, K. A., Ralf T. Krampe, and Clemens Tesch-Römer. 1993. "The Role of Deliberate Practice in the Acquisition of Expert Performance." *Psychological Review* 100 (3) (07): 363-406.; Ericsson, K. A., and A. C. Lehmann. 1996. "Expert and Exceptional Performance:

one to set up frames to categorize information in long-term memory to make sense of scenarios as they see them. For example a novice, one who has the basic skills, but has not yet applied them either in many iterations or in many different situations, can often reason through the scenario, but makes more mistakes in judgment and takes longer to make the decisions than those with expertise and more experience applying the various skills.

In the next two sections, I aim to argue that significant parallels between the structure of relative expertise and the means by which it develops corroborate the Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics account of decision-making as relating to practical wisdom. Further, the data lend support to the notion that expertise is developed within a context much like practices. If these parallels do indicate a working analogy, then we might be able to use the findings of the expertise literature to develop better, more closely tailored action guidance available to agents, by working within a training structure that is

Evidence of Maximal Adaptation to Task Constraints.” *Annual Review of Psychology* 47: 273-305.

Further, although it is unclear that the various posited frameworks are compatible, a common explanation for expert performance, shared across several domains, is that within the domain the person developing the abilities required for expert performance develop frameworks of some sort of represent domain-specific information and its relations. Studies indicate that these representations are stored in long-term memory, yet allows rapid storage and retrieval from these structures. Further, as they encounter new experiences and challenges, they alter these frameworks to more accurately represent the information. E.g. Gobet, Fernand, and Herbert A. Simon. 1996. “Templates in Chess Memory: A Mechanism for Recalling Several Boards.” *Cognitive Psychology* 31 (1) (08): 1-40.; Ericsson, K. A., Ralf T. Krampe, and Clemens Tesch-Römer. 1993. “The Role of Deliberate Practice in the Acquisition of Expert Performance.” *Psychological Review* 100 (3) (07): 363-406.; and Chi, Michelene T. H., Feltovich, Paul, and Robert Glazer. 1981. “Categorization and Representation of Physics Problems by Experts and Novices” in *Cognitive Science*, 5: 121-152.

isomorphic to that which trains expertise, deliberate practice within a domain. To the extent that these parallels indicate both an analogue between the phenomena and what seem to be isomorphic training regimens, the empirical data regarding expertise may help inform our understandings of practices and whether we should further explore practice-based guidance as a means by which agents can fulfill the expectations of the practical guidance critique.

Structure of Expertise

Descriptions of practical wisdom and characterizations of the structure of relative expertise share striking parallels. In this section I aim to delineate some of these structural parallels between relative expertise and practical wisdom. Specifically, commonalities between practical wisdom and expertise studied as a behavioral trait, the problem-solving abilities of experts demonstrate, disparities in situational awareness abilities of experts and novices, and experts as having cultivated their special abilities rather than inheriting them, suggest an analogue between the phenomena.

Early studies of expertise were based on a common assumption about stand-out performers, that expertise derives almost directly from natural talent, and those stand-out performers are merely expressing a trait or gift with which they were born. However, more recent studies have tended to converge on the notion that expertise is relative in important ways. Instead of studying the biography of talented individuals, relative expertise compares experts to novices, and assumes that expertise is a sort of ability conferred largely in the same ways, primarily through acquisition and organization of knowledge, reasoning, and ways of representing experience available to a wide range of

individuals.¹¹² Because excellent performance is not always closely correlated with factors like being recognized by peers or within a profession as an expert, cognitive psychologists aiming to isolate and evaluate expertise focus on actual, consistent, superior performance in competition or representative domain-specific tasks.¹¹³

¹¹² Further, relative expertise is not only based on social or professional reputation, amount of education, or by meeting the ten-year rule of extended experience within a domain (see Chi, Michelene T. H., Robert Glaser, and Marshall J. Farr. 1988. *The Nature of Expertise*. Hillsdale, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates.). Although relative expertise is quite variable with respect to the level of skill it involves (i.e. anyone who is not a novice at a particular skill or set of skills could count as more expert), by ‘expert’, even in the relative sense here, I mean the term ‘expert’ in the sense of mastery of the activities within a domain as opposed to someone quite proficient who is in the ‘arrested development’ stage, whereby many of their skills are automatic, yet the automaticity is not challenged or reworked, and leads the agent to routine mistakes that the expert who has not automatized those skills, is able to correct and improve their abilities beyond that high level of proficiency. (See Ericsson, K. A. 2006. “The Influence of Experience and Deliberate Practice on the Development of Superior Expert Performance.” In *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, ed. Robert R. Hoffman. New York, NY US: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 683-703). See also Chi, Michelene T. H. 2006. “Two Approaches to the Study of Experts' Characteristics.” In *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*. ed. Robert R. Hoffman, New York, NY US: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 21-30. p. 23.

However, it is worth noting that there are things to learn from the absolute approach, the sort of longevity studies that characterize the lives of experts. My point here is only that the literature that is most relevant for developing the initial parallels is that housed/most accessible in the relative expertise literature.

In addition, although I aim to constrain the parallels primarily to practical wisdom, it seems likely that practical wisdom and virtue might be analogues of expertise and expert performance, where expertise is that ability that is exercised, and expert performance is the measurable expression of it.

¹¹³ Chi claims that, "the goal of studying relative expertise is not merely to describe and identify the ways in which experts excel. Rather the goal is to understand how experts became that way so that others can learn to become more skilled and knowledgeable." (Chi, Michelene T. H. 2006. “Two Approaches to the Study of Experts' Characteristics.”

Among the striking parallels descriptions of expertise and descriptions of practical wisdom are that individuals possessing the sort of integrated understanding and organized knowledge of expertise are selected for study based on their expressed behavioral traits. A behavioral trait, described by John Horn and Hiromi Masunaga as, “a characteristic that persistently distinguishes one individual from another despite variation in the circumstances in which individuals are found,”¹¹⁴ parallels the unit of evaluation by which virtue ethics identifies and assesses good individuals, the character trait. Like character traits, they exhibit both dynamic and stable qualities, and they also exhibit the same broader pattern of expression and serve as a means by which we can distinguish among various abilities and levels of mastery an individual has attained, even though the individual actions may vary widely among individuals.¹¹⁵

Experts, as identified by their behavior traits are distinguished from novices and other non-experts by demonstrating excellent task performance within a specific domain. What distinguishes experts from novices in the context of relative expertise, as measured

In *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*. ed. Robert R. Hoffman, New York, NY US: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 21-30. p. 23.) If those concerned with practical guidance for ethical theory in fact assume that it should be accessible to ordinary agents, there seems to be further reason to consider relative expertise and what it might be able to illuminate about the process of developing behavioral traits.

¹¹⁴ Horn, John, and Hiromi Masunaga. 2006. “A Merging Theory of Expertise and Intelligence.” In *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*. ed. Robert R. Hoffman. New York, NY US: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 587-611. P. 588.

¹¹⁵ Horn and Masunaga use factor analysis to identify these features and claim that the traits they identify are probabilistic patterns of behavior, which allows for variability in actual actions performed, yet stability in traits identified. (Ibid, p. 588).

empirically, by consistently solving problems or performing representative domain-specific tasks with greater accuracy and speed than novices, or even highly-proficient subjects presented with the same tasks to perform or problems to solve. Because novices cannot perform these tasks with the same accuracy and speed, particularly with regard to complex problem-solving, or on tasks that require especially quick reflex reactions to situational factors, researchers who study expertise posit that experts develop representations to organize information gathered from past scenarios to anticipate the possible future conditions instead of reacting to the situation alone.

This ability to anticipate future states of affairs highlights a further parallel between expertise and practical wisdom--the role situational awareness plays both in deliberating well, and as an indicator of expertise. In the expertise literature, situational awareness is studied vividly in the context of aircraft piloting and sports, domains in which success depends heavily on good visual perception. However, the sorts of skills that characterize situational awareness in these visually-oriented domains resonate with the indicators of expertise in other contexts as well, such as expert decision-making.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ On page 649, Endsley makes a similar point, explaining the resonance by noting that, "SA [situational awareness] has been part of integral to many of the domains in which expertise has been historically studied, even if it has not been specifically identified as such." She finds it to be particularly important to better understanding expert performance as, "a focal point around which experts integrate the information they gather in order to perform their tasks." (quotations both from, Endsley, Mica R. 2006. "Expertise and Situation Awareness." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*. ed. Robert R. Hoffman. New York, NY US: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 633-651. P. 649). See also Chi, Michelene T. H. 2006. "Two Approaches to the Study of Experts' Characteristics." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and*

Situational awareness, although not paradigmatically associated with expertise generally, is a skill critical for both effective decision-making and effective performance.¹¹⁷ Three types of ability characterize situational awareness: perception, comprehension, and projection. Each of these is required for the next; perception is required for comprehension, and comprehension for projection. Experts exhibit high-levels of each of these, but rely most heavily on projection, anticipating the future conditions. Novices, on the other hand, tend to find a challenge with basic perception itself, and become, “considerably overloaded in seeking to gather information, understand what it means, and formulate correct responses,” and as a result miss critical cues required to accurately anticipate likely future states of affairs, which affects the quality and speed of decisions the novice makes in the situation.¹¹⁸

The common explanation among expertise researchers attributes the expert’s ability to pick out salient features of the situation, understand their significance, and project likely future scenarios to mental models that organize schemata the agent

Expert Performance. ed. Robert R. Hoffman, New York, NY US: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 21-30; and Chi, Michelene T. H., Feltovich, Paul, and Robert Glazer. 1981. “Categorization and Representation of Physics Problems by Experts and Novices” in *Cognitive Science*, 5: 121-152; for general use of perceptual language to characterize the differences between abilities demonstrated by experts.

¹¹⁷ Endsley, Mica R. 2006. “Expertise and Situation Awareness.” In *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*. ed. Robert R. Hoffman. New York, NY US: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 633-651. P. 634.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, P. 637.

develops with experience.¹¹⁹ The features of situational awareness are crucial to expert-level performance, as selecting or developing a good strategy for solving a problem require accurate perception, comprehension and projection about future states.¹²⁰ Not only do experts develop useful representations, or schemata, to organize the information they gain through experience, these schemata are nuanced and highly refined in ways that suggest their superior performance relies heavily on them.

Not only do experts deliberate and choose well, much as the practically wise do, but the evidence indicates that there are not young experts in any domains, and that in some domains mastery of skills requires decades of intensive study to achieve.¹²¹ Expertise, like practical wisdom, is not an innate quality, or an easily grasped theoretical

¹¹⁹ For example, studies of expertise in the domain of chess seem to lend support to Endsley's claim regarding the cross-over between the different sorts of expertise with respect to situational awareness.

¹²⁰ Although, as Endsley mentions, situational awareness is not often named as a crucial feature for expertise in other contexts, distinguishing experts from non-experts by their demonstrated abilities to quickly and accurately assess the difficulty of a problem, select more effective strategies to use in problem-solving, or better qualitative assessment of a situation, lend support to this claim (See Chi, Michelene T. H. 2006. "Two Approaches to the Study of Experts' Characteristics." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*. ed. Robert R. Hoffman, New York, NY US: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 21-30. P. 23-24).

¹²¹ Ericsson, K. A. 2006. "The Influence of Experience and Deliberate Practice on the Development of Superior Expert Performance." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, ed. Robert R. Hoffman. New York, NY US: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 683-703. P. 689. See also Horn, John, and Hiromi Masunaga. 2006. "A Merging Theory of Expertise and Intelligence." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*. ed. Robert R. Hoffman. New York, NY US: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 587-611. P. 602.

principle, but requires development over time and across experiences. Much like the rarity of virtue and the right reason of practical wisdom, only very rarely do individuals meet the threshold of integrated and refined deliberative ability to be considered virtuous or practically wise. Although domains house many long-standing practitioners, the vast majority attain proficiency at the set of skills within the domain, but not the sort of exceptionally refined skill that experts attain.¹²² Further, most individuals who attain an expert level of performance do not do so until at least 30 years old, suggesting that it parallels practical wisdom in the sense that extensive study and effort is required to attain it.¹²³

These parallels between the classical description of practical wisdom, which can be picked out by consistent good choice in activity and is largely adopted on Neo-Aristotelian virtue accounts, and characterizations of relative expertise in the cognitive psychology literature, lend support to the notion that the sorts of skills that underpin expert-level performance are self-similar to practical wisdom as excellence in

¹²² For example, in the ethics case, although the vast majority of agents are proficient, they know what they should do and want to do what they should, they act *akratically* or *enkratically*, only succeed in part by acting in spite of some motivation to do otherwise. Virtue and practical wisdom are rare.

¹²³ Horn, John, and Hiromi Masunaga. 2006. "A Merging Theory of Expertise and Intelligence." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*. ed. Robert R. Hoffman. New York, NY US: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 587-611. Pp. 601,2; Ericsson, K.A., 1996. *The Road to Excellence: The Acquisition of Expert Performance in the Arts and Sciences, Sports, and Games*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

deliberation about action. Further, the means by which expertise as mastery develops exhibits a strong resemblance to MacIntyrean practices. In the next section, I survey some of the parallels between the development of expertise and the skills developed within a practice, and argue that development within domains lends support to the claims that practices may be integral to developing practical wisdom.

*Development of Expertise*¹²⁴

Parallels between descriptions of practical wisdom and the structure of relative expertise suggest expertise as a non-moral analogue to practical wisdom, as excellence in choice. If the parallel indicates more than surface similarity, insights from empirical evaluation of methods by which relative expertise develops may be useful in better understanding how practical wisdom and its rudiments develop. Further, to the extent these methods of developing expertise parallel practices, these studies suggest that practices may be a promising means of both direct and indirect action guidance for virtue ethics.

In this section I aim to argue that studies of relative expertise suggest the adequacy of practices as means of developing the deliberative skill required for practical wisdom, but also supports the claim that practices can provide at least some practical guidance to ordinary agents. Not only does relative expertise share important characteristics with practical wisdom, but it is developed within domains, fairly narrowly

¹²⁴ I thank Captain Burke Edwards, OBE, for discussing the training regimens of aircraft pilots with me, offering me many relevant details of the means by which pilots gain flying expertise and maintain their flying skills throughout the course of their licensure.

circumscribed areas of study, and share paradigm examples: chess, sports, music.¹²⁵

Like development of practical wisdom, it takes years of practice involving concentrated effort and challenges tailored to individual and the situation to realize. Yet, in addition to offering a structure through which agents can develop mastery after many years of study, practices offer direct guidance to agents of all levels of accomplishment through mentors, coaches, and more-skilled practitioners.

It is commonly known that it takes about ten years of practice to achieve expert-level performance.¹²⁶ Yet, this standard is considered only a general rule of thumb, a necessary minimum time commitment to a discipline for achieving expert-level performance. Further, it is not only participation within a domain over an extended period that leads to expert performance, but ten years of deliberate practice. Deliberate practice involves structured study through which agents are faced with ability-appropriate incremental challenges which, through meeting these, individuals are able to incorporate and eventually master a new skill that allows them to engage in activities that better approximate the aims of the discipline.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ It seems that the range of domains studied in the expertise literature, and perhaps many of the “informal domains” that are studied under the heading “naturalistic decision-making”, or not the subject of empirical studies of expertise, would be fall under MacIntyre’s definition of practices.

¹²⁶ One of the earliest explorations of expertise, Bryan and Harter, 1899, demonstrated this, and it has remains a common rule of thumb in describing the development of expertise. Although ten years is somewhat vague, the common assumption is that it represents about 10,000 hours of the relevant sort of engagement within the context of the domain.

In addition to an extended and concentrated effort within a discipline, social support of at least three sort plays an integral role in the development of expertise. As MacIntyre's practices account suggests, institutional accommodations that support the domain itself with material structure, equipment, training facilities, yet also establish the social structure of the practices by delineating various roles within the institution, roles which indicate the responsibilities and aims of the individuals taking on that role. In addition to the material and structural support institutions provide practices and their practitioners, institutions indicate a broad-based social support that society expresses in developing those institutions and not others. In addition, there is an extensive amount of social support required for an individual to develop expertise, not only does the individual require excellent trainers, but studies indicate that the amount of resource investment for attaining expert-level performance is so extensive that it is rare for more than one child per family to be privy to the sort of resource investment that developing expertise requires.¹²⁸

¹²⁷In addition to the concentrated effort put forth in deliberate practice, studies of expert performance and deliberate practice have found additional domain-specific patterns of timing and duration of intense engagement with the discipline (Ericsson, 1993). Although perhaps some of the elite and professionals who had much experience, but were not picked out by the psychologists as experts or masters in sense needed for the studies to get a sort of sketch of expertise characteristics, might be sufficiently capable and practiced to be considered very good (and probably indistinguishable from experts by the ordinary person). It might seem excessive to cordon off the elite of the elite, but the parallels with practical wisdom and expertise suggest a similar ranking in the ethics context.

¹²⁸ See Ericsson, K.A. 1996. *The Road to Excellence: The Acquisition of Expert Performance in the Arts and Sciences, Sports, and Games*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, PP. 18-20.

Further, evolving standards of excellence are not only characteristic of practices, as MacIntyre defines them, but of expertise development as well. The trajectory of development involves four main stages that correspond with the level of engagement of the individual within the practice. Among the stages observed in the development of expert performance abilities, is a stage in which, “individuals go beyond the knowledge of their teachers to make a unique innovative contribution to their domain.”¹²⁹ A look across the history of many disciplines offers evidence that, because standards of excellence evolve and progress, the innovations are relayed back to other practitioners such that they are able to attain levels of achievement with less effort than the pioneering performer. Further, these improvements make it possible, over time, for even merely proficient performers to achieve well beyond the accomplishments of past innovating experts in the domain.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Ericsson, K. A., Ralf T. Krampe, and Clemens Tesch-Römer. 1993. “The Role of Deliberate Practice in the Acquisition of Expert Performance.” *Psychological Review* 100 (3) (07): 363-406. P. 369. See also Ericsson, K.A. 1996. *The Road to Excellence: The Acquisition of Expert Performance in the Arts and Sciences, Sports, and Games*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. pp. 19-20.

¹³⁰ See Ericsson, K. A. 2006. “The Influence of Experience and Deliberate Practice on the Development of Superior Expert Performance.” In *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, ed. Robert R. Hoffman. New York, NY US: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 683-703. P. 690. This is notably evident in music and sports.

Conclusion:

Practices show promise as a means of implementing the sort of guidance schema Hursthouse proposes, by offering them an opportunity to see the point and value of the activity they do within the context of a practice and how it relates to virtue. Further, this account gains *prima facie* empirical support also from studies of expertise and expert performance. Striking parallels between expertise and practical wisdom, and the isomorphism between domains in which expertise is honed and practices suggest that findings in expertise studies may have bearing on the means by which agents develop practical wisdom, or at least the prerequisites of practical wisdom. Although there may not be a single practice through which an agent can become an expert at living well, it seems at least *prima facie* plausible that the sort of deliberative skills developed in the course of engaging a practice along the developmental path to expertise, may necessary for developing practical wisdom.

If practical guidance proposals require supplementation to implement, practices offer a promising option because they demonstrate to agents within a practice how the activities align with and realize the values endorsed within the community and incorporated through action. More than offer action guidance principles or practical precepts, practices make evident to novices and ordinary agents the point and value of following these precepts. To do this allows agents to act from right reason, which is critical for good activity on a virtue ethics account.

Because of the promise practices as an implementation method that can supplement virtue ethics guidance schemata, I suggest we further explore practices as a

promising means of guidance for virtue ethics. Yet, in order to adopt practices as an implementation method we must address a variety of challenges to the account as an adequate supplement to plausible virtue ethics guidance schemata. For example, the striking parallels between the phenomena alone do not indicate common cause or identity of the phenomena. Further, it is not immediately clear how the ability to inculcate excellence in a narrow domain transfers or generalizes to the realization of virtue. In addition, various puzzles threaten to confound measurement and the use of empirical tools to further develop and improve practices. In the next chapter, I articulate some of these challenges, and argue that the ability to bridge the gap of giving point to v-rules and action guidance principles makes them worth exploring as an implementation method, despite of these obstacles.

Chapter 4

Practices: Questions and Challenges

Although the empirical evidence detailing the structure of expertise does not speak directly to MacIntyre's account of practices, expertise is honed within the context of a domain, which is at least isomorphic with a subset of the practices MacIntyre proposes. If the skills required for expert performance and practical wisdom are sufficiently similar, the empirical evidence regarding the development of expertise may bear on our understanding of how practices function, their precise role in practical guidance, and how they relate to practical wisdom. Here, I aim to bring these together to bring the parallels into sharper resolution, then address some questions and challenges that a fully-developed practice-based view of guidance and moral development would have to take into account.

As a means by which to develop virtue in agents and foster activities that reach or even exceed the standards of excellence of the activity, the practices of MacIntyre's account offer potential to serve as an implementation method for virtue ethics in ways that theory-focused guidance and ideal agency models do not. Specifically, by organizing activities that help agents attain virtue within the context of institutions, more skilled practitioners can advise and guide novices or ordinary agents, who comprise at least a subset of the group of individuals the practical guidance expectations seem poised to serve. Further, the organized structure of practices and the non-idealized guidance from more skilled practitioners suggests practices might be a more empirically adequate means of action guidance than either theory-focused guidance or ideal agency models of

action guidance. In addition, the skills and abilities that realizing and advancing the standards of excellence, seems to require that an individual engage a practice for an extended amount of time, learn by trial and error, and become practiced not only at the activities defined and evaluated using the standards of the practice,¹³¹ but also at acting well by understanding both the aim of the activity and the means by which to achieve that aim.

The activity of meeting the standards of excellence that set the aims of the practice comports with the general notion of practical wisdom, the right reason and counterpart of virtue. If practices do develop in practitioners this sort of deliberative skill, and excellence in deliberative skill is self-similar to the excellence in the deliberation definitive of practical wisdom, then it seems that practices may have an important role in developing at least the rudiments of practical wisdom. If practices have this role, it seems that practices may serve not only as an implementation method for contemporary virtue ethics, but may also plausibly be a necessary part of a life well lived.

In lieu of empirical studies designed to evaluate the connection between practices and practical wisdom or practices and virtue, studies of expertise and expert performance suggest striking parallels between expertise and practical wisdom. The qualities of expertise and expert performance not only describe the sorts of excellences that characterize practical wisdom and virtue, excellences in navigating the particulars in

¹³¹ This way of characterizing the aims of a practice are originally from MacIntyre's definition of a practice in *After Virtue*. MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1984. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 2nd ed. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press.

order to realize an aim, and the activity of doing this, respectively, but the development of expertise parallels the extensive experience and cultivation of habits that practical wisdom and virtue require. Expertise, as exhibited in expert performance, is developed over many years' experience and intensive study within a domain, and the exceptional abilities of the expert performers to discern and value the relevant particulars and act well with respect to the aim they hold, resembles the characteristic features attributed to the practically wise and virtuous.

These parallels suggest an analogue not only between expertise and practical wisdom, but these seem to derive from similar sources, domains and practices, respectively, suggesting the possibility that these also produce similar sorts of goods for agents. If this analogue highlights relevantly similar features of each, the expertise literature suggests that, because expertise develops within domains, and domains share striking parallels with practices (particularly in the narrower, more formalized domains and practices), practices may be important structures within which practical wisdom is honed. Even if they are not the only place within which one might develop practical wisdom, or expertise, it seems that, like domains, practices may have an important, although indirect action guiding role for contemporary virtue ethics, but where guidance issues from deliberative abilities developed by the individual herself within a practice. However, even if practices are worth exploring further as a means of guidance and possibly as a necessary component of a life well lived, a series of potential problems with practices need to be addressed.

I aim to advance the claim that engaging practices is likely a necessary but far from sufficient part of leading a good life. I argue that although practices are weakly normative, alone, they are insufficient for living life well, successfully, or even for developing virtue. In fact, the pervasiveness of practices allows that even the vicious could engage practices, acting within complex, socially supported structures wherein internal goods could be realized, yet when developed toward the wrong aims, the innovations within the structure could prove vicious in the activities, habits, and character realized. Further, although some practices lend themselves to empirical study due to their domain-like structure, several issues related to empirical evaluation remain, including what can be measured from practices, and the problems of what cannot be measured.

Practices demonstrate a striking parallel to domains in which expertise is developed and in the previous chapter I have attempted to argue that, because the two structures and their end-results share extensive parallels, we should further investigate how data evaluating expertise development might better inform us in the work of training practical reasoning skills. Not only do practices account for the training methods, and offer an empirically evaluable, and *prima facie* empirically adequate means of developing virtuous qualities and good lives, they are widely accessible even to ordinary agents. The benefits practice-based guidance confers relates to the frame they provide for integrating the theoretical commitments of the discipline with conventions and other means to accommodate, organize and correct for e.g., tendencies of humans to biases of perception, mistakes in reasoning, or combinations thereof.

With respect to at least more formal and narrow practices, wherein a clear structure and aims of the practice are delineated, we can at least begin, using population-level studies, to examine whether and to what extent practices can be assessed with respect to their role in leading a good life, and which sorts of practices are successful at this. Yet empirical evaluation of practices faces several challenges that need to be met, or at least identified, e.g. where methods of empirical evaluation available data obscure important, ethically relevant, distinctions, or cannot effectively access the sort of information we seek to understand fully the effects of the practice. Although practices offer a more thorough means of guiding agents, including ordinary agents, their role within ethical theory needs to be more precisely specified to ensure they are a worthwhile alternative to the theory-focused and ideal agency models of practical guidance.

Corruptions and Bad Practices

Practices seem plausible as an effective, or at least potentially effective, and empirically-responsive means of guidance. However, practices, as narrowly constrained domains that inculcate domain-specific skills seem too narrow to develop virtue, in the sense of a robust, stable character trait (and the corresponding robust and refined deliberative abilities of the practically wise). Without adequate normative grounding, it seems that practices are more likely untenable as means by which individuals can gain good guidance or develop the rudiments of practical wisdom or virtue.

Worse, practices, or what appear to be practices, seem to be at the root of many of the most severe human-caused atrocities, so it is important to understand the ways that practices fail to foster excellence. Because practices are only weakly normative, it seems

that a view that adopts practice as a central guidance method needs to offer an account of bad practices and how they can be avoided. In addition, it seems that, in parallel to expertise and expert performance, even with significant development, one may not automatically achieve expert-level performance, and may still fail to consistently reconcile the various particulars with the aims in such a way that they are consistently met.

There are at least three main ways that a practice could fail to foster the wellbeing of the individual engaging it. The first way, which I will refer to as a false practice, is a practice that endorses vicious ends instead of virtuous ones. A second way a practice might not help agents realize good ends is by corruptions from within an otherwise good practice. A third way a practice might not lead to good ends, is by engaging a set of practices that are mis-prioritized or a combination of practices that cumulatively precludes realizing the broader good aims.

The first way a practice might be considered a bad practice is by being only an efficient system of organized technical skills. Without maintaining the sorts of standards of excellence characteristic of MacIntyrean practices, a system that organizes complex human activity can run amok.¹³² Although, according to MacIntyre's view and definition of a 'practice,' this set of activities would not count as a practice at all, it seems that from outward appearances they would be very difficult to tell from the sorts of practices that seem conducive to living well. Yet, as parallel to the Aristotle's distinction between

¹³²Ibid, esp. 199-201.

cleverness and wisdom, e.g. these false practices lack an orientation toward the good, which is what makes engaging practices worthwhile and contributes to a life well-lived. Although they offer the same sorts of immediate and direct guidance to novices that practices might seek, they lack the sorts of dynamic ends that characterize the standards of excellence and help define practices, yet this might be difficult to discern until one is immersed in the false practice. Even if they are not considered practices proper, they appear as if they are practices and thus pose a danger to practices and the notion that practice-based guidance is a good alternative for virtue ethics.

Corruptions, on the other hand, occur within a practice proper, and are what MacIntyre claim is a way that practices might be bad.¹³³ Corruptions to a practice occur by having practitioners within the practice who are not virtuous, but vicious, and parallel false practices that gain practitioners by mimicking the form of practices, yet lack the excellent aim. Corruptions within practices that occur due to vicious practitioners who engage in a practice, but do not share the ends of the virtuous who maintain the integrity of the practice, gain benefits from the practices only by the parasitic relationship to the virtuous within the practice.

Corruptions of this sort within a practice, like the technical skills *sans* good aims version of a bad practice, are problematic in part because they may be difficult to distinguish from virtuous practitioners. Further, problematic changes in the activities of the practice that these practitioners may make, that is changes that are not true to the

¹³³Ibid, 199-201.

defining standards of excellence within a practice, might be difficult to detect. These sorts of changes would be difficult to distinguish from legitimate disagreements that go on among practitioners about how best to meet the aims of the practice, or of the sort of initial controversy about new methods that often accompany innovative accomplishments that further the ends of a practice. While some innovations may be obvious in their nature as furthering the ends of a practice (i.e. the first four-minute mile), legitimate disagreements about techniques or means by which to meet a challenge the limits of a practice pose may be more subtle and difficult to differentiate from spurious means corruptions introduce. Yet, if the corruptions within a practice are not uprooted, they may hinder the advancement of the standards of the practice and the ability of the practitioners to live well by engaging the practice.¹³⁴

The third possibility for a practice that, by engaging it might thwart, rather than promote living well, is not necessarily anything about a particular practice one engages that is problematic, but the combination of practices one engages that leads one to fail to live well. As the expertise literature highlights, domains and the goods that are produced within them can be quite narrow and the skills developed within them specialized in ways that they can be difficult to apply across domains.¹³⁵ Thus, it seems that to garner the

¹³⁴ As automaticity and situationist literature has demonstrated time and again, discerning one's reasoning from within can be a difficult task prone to inaccuracies and distortions of various sort.

¹³⁵ E.g., Gobet, Fernand, and Herbert A. Simon. 1996. "Templates in Chess Memory: A Mechanism for Recalling Several Boards." *Cognitive Psychology* 31 (1) (08): 1-40., Ericsson, K. A., and A. C. Lehmann. 1996. "Expert and Exceptional Performance:

breadth of goods that are required to live a life well, one may need to engage in many different practices.

Yet, if there are a variety of practices in which to engage, given resource constraints each lives with, it seems that individuals must prioritize practices and manage their involvement within their bounds. In this way, even if an agent engages in good practices, how those practices are prioritized with respect to the set of commitments the agent espouses may affect the trajectory of his or her life significantly in ways that could either conduce to or detract from living well. Although the variety of practices one might engage in leaves the view open to allowing a pluralism of ways an individual might live life well, it also allows that individuals might choose to prioritize their practices in ways that are ineffective for the purpose of developing the skills needed for living a life well.

The variety of ways a practice might become bad or corrupted suggests that practices need stronger normative grounding than the sort of weak normativity due to the natural directionality of practices set by the ends and reinforced by the institutions and virtue of the practitioners. Two sorts of ways that mitigate those conditions such that practices might reliably contribute to a life well lived involve providing normative grounding both at the individual and the societal levels. One is suggested by MacIntyre to address this issue. I suggest a second, a sort of empirical grounding, although it does

Evidence of Maximal Adaptation to Task Constraints.” *Annual Review of Psychology* 47: 273-305, and Chi, Michelene T. H. 2006. “Two Approaches to the Study of Experts' Characteristics.” In *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*. ed. Robert R. Hoffman, New York, NY US: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 21-30.

not directly ground the practice, it shows promise of facilitating normative grounding through accurate assessment of practices in relation to the standards.

Normativity and Practices

Although practices require virtue and involve standards of excellence as part of their structure, it is unclear that these prevent bad action. Although practices, in part because of their reliance on institutions, do have a sort of directionality in the sense that they are structured such that the practitioners aim to realize the excellence inherent in the activity practices are only weakly normative, and are subject to being corrupted or made bad in a variety of ways. This requires an external normative foundation to maintain the integrity of the practice and attain its characteristic excellences.

MacIntyre addresses the general issue of the normative grounding of practices by situating practices within the context of narrative and tradition, with the aim of making intelligible the diversity of aims one might have as they work within the context of various practices. He claims that,

the narrative phenomenon of embedding is crucial: the history of a practice in our time is generally and characteristically embedded in and made intelligible in terms of the larger and longer history of the tradition through which the practice in its present form was conveyed to us; the history of each of our own lives is generally and characteristically

embedded in and made intelligible in terms of the larger and longer histories of a number of traditions.¹³⁶

On MacIntyre's account, activities gain intelligibility within a narrative that connects them to an historical context. To put an activity in such a context helps explain it relative to the circumstances that an agent may not choose, but which significantly alter various features of one's life.

According to MacIntyre, the narrative form reflects the structure of one's life and thus helps us organize and prioritize our practices based on the stories our lives embody. However, even with this process, which MacIntyre likens to a Medieval quest, it seems that practices are left with arbitrary grounding, with whichever story one chooses to tell. To ground these narrative unities in a set of norms of some sort, MacIntyre embeds them in cultural-historical traditions, making it possible to evaluate the combination of activities and aims with respect to an external set of norms.

This sort of bookending approach secures the activities of the practices an individual engages and their priorities in one's life, adjudicating among the individual's aims and particularities, the society's values, and offers a way to normatively ground practices. This approach maintains both the evolutionary nature of the ends of practices and the diversity of activities that realizing those ends requires. In addition to reconciling the aims of one's activities with the encumbrances with which one was born and the

¹³⁶ MacIntyre, Alasdair C. 1984. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 2nd ed. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press. P. 222.

expectations of society, the normative foundation of practices might be bolstered by a sort of empirical bookending as well.

For example, one benefit of practice-based guidance is that it is especially amenable to population-level assessments because they are structured by institutions that make it possible to identify a relevant population to assess. Although any role in setting normative constraints on practices would be indirect, empirical assessment of practices could still contribute to developing the normative foundation of practices by assessing the trajectory of the effects of practices on their practitioners. These population-level studies make it possible to measure the trajectory of the practice at least along the sort of standard well-being markers of social demography. Yet, although demographic data can offer insights into the wellbeing of the group measured, it seems that it remains silent on the details of qualities the individuals within the practice have developed, in part because of the nature of population-level studies.

Yet, it seems that there is also a role on the individual end for trait-based evaluations or empirical assessments of the well-being of the individuals among practices. Although even these two together ensure neither good practices nor prevent corruptions of practices, they can provide an empirical supplement to the sort of value-based normative grounding of practices that MacIntyre suggests. Further, evaluating practices using both population-level and psychological measures may offer insights into

the nature and trajectory of the practices that narrative unity grounded within the traditions of one's culture and history may not.¹³⁷

Stochastic Skills

In part, practice-based guidance is important because it inculcates in practitioners the deliberative skills required to interpret situations, deliberate well, and act to realize worthwhile aims. Further, this approach to guidance is empirically adequate because various facets of performance can be measured and be evaluated. However, one concern with this purported claim to empirical adequacy is that an important class of failure in performance that empirical methods of evaluation may not be able to accommodate presents a significant obstacle to accurate empirical assessment of a practice.

Stochastic skill, a Stoic notion captures the sort of failure in performance that presents a challenge to accurate empirical assessment of a practice. As Julia Annas characterizes them, they are, “skills in which a failure, because of contingencies, to achieve the outcome is different from a failure in the exercise of the skill itself.”¹³⁸ If it is possible to gain the goods of an activity without the outward signs of success, then it is unclear to what extent we might be able to effectively measure the success of practices.

¹³⁷ Social demography assessments of practices are an example of the sort of population measures I intend here. One concern with them, particularly in their stereotypical form, is that it is unclear what only census data can tell us about the nature of a practice and its structure. Although population-level studies have characteristic benefits and drawbacks, they are not entirely unable to offer insight into the sorts of value-laden issues that might underlie a particular data set, when couched in a thorough analysis of phenomena and factors that may be causing the data distribution.

¹³⁸ Annas, Julia. 1993. *The Morality of Happiness*. New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 400, 401.

With respect to this sort of skill in rhetoric and the example of medicine, Aristotle claims that,

It is clear, further, that its function is not simply to succeed in persuading, but rather to discover the persuasive facts in each case. In this it resembles all other arts. For example, it is not the function of medicine simply to make a man healthy, but to put him as far as may be on the path to health; it is possible to give excellent treatment even to those who can never enjoy sound health.¹³⁹

While it seems possible for an individual to deliberate and act the right way within a practice and yet remain unsuccessful at it, it seems unlikely, given the nature of experts' carefully-honed abilities that no indicators of their excellence would be evident, even if conditions made it impossible to realize the aim of the activity.

For example, because expert deliberators have engaged the particulars and the ends extensively, at least within their specific domain, they may still be able to indicate their expertise, even if they cannot meet the aim and haven't yet solved the puzzle of how to meet *this* goal. Because one of the main differences between experts and non-experts is that experts have catalogued many situations and their assessment of how they relate to various aims within the domain, and organized them in their own conceptual framework in order to understand how the particulars fit with the universals, they may be better

¹³⁹ Aristotle. 1984. *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*. Translated by Jonathan Barnes. Bollingen Series. Vol. 71, 2. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 1355b9-15

equipped to make sense of the gap between the exercise of the skill and the unmet aim. Or, the individual might be able to identify what else needs to go right in order to succeed in meeting the aim, in the way the physician in Aristotle's example is able to see that, even with excellent treatment, the aim of robust health will not be met due to the condition of the patient. Or, even if the expert does not see what is going wrong clearly, expertise allows the expert to pick out several things that are going right, at least relative to the framework that he or she usually adheres to.

If the internal goods of the activity can be obtained without success in meeting an externally evident aim, it seems that the problem for empirical evaluation of practices that develop these sorts of skills may be entrenched.¹⁴⁰ In addition, it seems, that the issue of discerning skill in these situations is further complicated by whether or not the expert recognizes the conditions as precluding the realization of the aim. In one case, the exercise of a stochastic skill need not be problematic in the sense that the goal is not met, yet the expert recognizes the conditions as precluding the realization of the aim. However, if the expert does not recognize that the conditions are precluding the

¹⁴⁰ It seems likely that there are cases wherein the internal goods derived through exercising the skill prevent the agent from attempting to meet the aim toward which the skill is typically directed. Aristotle's example seems to fit this characterization. Although the aim of medicine is to foster excellent health, the physician recognizes that the condition of the patient is such that robust health will never be attained, yet the reality of the situation does not bear on the excellence in skill the physician exercises in treating a frail patient.

This seems evident when we consider expert-level competition as well. If two chess grandmasters, e.g. are playing against one another, at least one will not reach the aim of winning the game. However, because of the challenges that are involved in playing the game, it seems that even non-winners in the game can benefit from the internal goods produced.

realization of the aim, it seems that it is a failure of skill in this case.¹⁴¹ If it is unclear from the realization of the aim whether the expert is exercising their skill or just mistaken in her assessment of the situation, it seems nearly impossible to accurately assess effectiveness of practices to produce expertise.

Among the purported benefits of endorsing a practice-based guidance view is that practices provide a structure that is empirically evaluable in ways that the structure the ideal agency model, for example, is not. However, it seems possible that an agent could engage in deliberate practice for a period of time extensive enough to develop the sorts of skills indicative of expertise and expert performance, yet be immersed in circumstances wherein he would fail to realize the aim of the practice, the aims which he has trained extensively to realize. If measurability requires these effects, and it is possible for agents to have skills that are definitive of expertise or practical wisdom, yet not express them outwardly, or do so inconsistently due to variations in the circumstances, the conclusions that we can draw from the empirical studies might be relatively narrow.

¹⁴¹ E.g. Among the limits of expertise and expert performance, Chi notes that there are situations in which experts perform less well than novices in circumstances that differ significantly from those of the domain. When the differences in the circumstances go unrecognized by the expert and the expert attempts to apply their domain-specific knowledge in these contexts, it can lead to poorer performance than even the novice assessments of the scenarios and performance on these tasks. Chi, Michelene T. H. 2006. "Two Approaches to the Study of Experts' Characteristics." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*. ed. Robert R. Hoffman, New York, NY US: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 21-30.

Stochastic skills pose a significant problem for empirical assessment of expert skill and virtue both because it separates the exercise of the skill or virtue from the realization of the aim. We cannot measure the exercise of the skill in cases where the expert recognizes the confounding conditions and is exercising the skill knowing that he will not realize the aim. Yet, this may be virtually indistinguishable from the situation where the aim is confounded and the expert does not realize this, resulting in a failure of skill. However, that we cannot assess empirically skill under these conditions does not tell against practice-based guidance as empirically adequate. Instead, it highlights a weakness in the tools we have available to assess these skills.

Pitfalls and Promise of Practice-Based Guidance

As a guidance method for virtue ethics, practices seem to be a *prima facie* empirically adequate implementation means of developing in agents the skills needed for practical wisdom and virtue. However, because practices are only weakly normative, they are vulnerable to corruptions both internally and externally, from corrupted aims and agents to poor combinations of practices, respectively. Further, if there are stochastic skills that can be exercised without successfully realizing their aims, the ability to assess the skill of the practitioners may be threatened.

These problems require that corruptions that may plague practices need to be mitigated by normative and empirical grounding. Further, the inability to distinguish among practitioners whose skill is not outwardly evident may confound some empirical assessment of the effectiveness of the means by which a practice guides or inculcates the skills necessary for good deliberation. Yet, the benefits of practices outweigh these

drawbacks, offering agents not only direct guidance, but indirect forms that allow individuals to realize goods that derive from the activity itself.

Even though practices lack the normative grounding to stand alone as a means to living well, to developing practical wisdom, and virtue, it seems that there are still good reasons for contemporary virtue ethics to adopt practice-based guidance in lieu of the sorts of theory-focused alternatives, as a means of addressing the problems identified by practical guidance objections. Where ideal agency models and theory-focused guidance leave ordinary agents without a means of making sense of the particulars in light of their aims, practices are able to order subsidiary aims such that this is possible for agents of all skill level within the broader pursuit. Plus, it seems that if we are to consider the benefits of practices again as a guidance method, it seems that there is a sense in which not only are they more effective and empirically adequate than the competing views, it seems that there are goods to be gained by engaging the practice itself, making it an important, if not necessary component of a life well lived.

Conclusion

Practices appear sufficiently analogous to expertise that they offer a structure for integrating both general and far-reaching aims, and also procure a parallel end result, expertise or expert deliberative abilities. Because of these parallels and common foundation, we have *prima facie* reason to adopt a practice-based ethics in lieu of developing guidance for virtue ethics built around adhering to principled codes or ideal agency models alone. However, the account must address a substantial series of challenges to prove the view viable because the precise nature of practices and how they

function requires a more detailed description of their role in developing virtues and a life well lived. To justify developing practices as a supplement to other guidance schemata as standard means by which virtue ethics meet practical guidance expectations, we must first address the challenges to the view.

The main critiques of practices imply both that practices require further grounding, both socially and individually, and that our understanding of the limits and interactions among practices will require both more empirical and theoretical work to bring the precise role of practices into sharper relief. Two features of practice-based guidance suggest that practices are especially worth exploring further, in spite of these challenges. One is the striking parallels between practical wisdom and practices with expertise and its development respectively. The other is that the gap that remains between proposals for guidance, such as Hursthouse's, and the legitimate concern of the practical guidance objection that ethical theory should aim to influence action, suggest it is worthwhile to consider practices as a promising way contemporary virtue ethics can provide adequate guidance that is both empirically adequate and falls within the bounds of the theory's traditional constraints.

As a promising means of guiding even ordinary agents, I have aimed to develop a case to support the claim that we should explore the role of practices as a means of implementing action guidance for agents on a character-based account. Although they are incomplete in the sense of providing a comprehensive picture of the good life, practices make manifest the point of the activity and demonstrate the way the activity realizes the value. An account of practices shows the promise of providing us a structure

through which we can better approximate excellence by incorporating the point and purpose of mundane activities that are the building blocks of virtue. In their parallels with expertise and the environments in which it is developed, practices appear to be not only a plausible alternative to the sort of standards approaches to action guidance and meet the moderate practical guidance expectations, but are plausibly a necessary part of a life well lived. Although developing an account of practices is not without obstacles, they address the version of the practical guidance objection that gets purchase against virtue ethics, and are worth exploring further as a means of practical guidance.

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