

RECENT WORK IN APPLIED VIRTUE ETHICS

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I. INTRODUCTION

The use of the term “applied ethics” to denote a particular field of moral inquiry (distinct from but related to both normative ethics and meta-ethics) is a relatively new phenomenon. The individuation of applied ethics as a special division of moral investigation gathered momentum in the 1970s and 1980s, largely as a response to early-twentieth-century moral philosophy’s overwhelming concentration on moral semantics and its apparent inattention to practical moral problems that arose in the wake of significant social and technological transformations. The field of applied ethics is now a well established, professional domain sustained by institutional research centers, professional academic appointments, and devoted journals. As the field of applied ethics grew and developed, its contributors predominantly advocated consequentialist and deontological approaches to the problems they address; but lately a significant number of moral philosophers have begun to bring the resources of virtue ethics to bear upon the ever-evolving subject matters of applied ethics.

Virtue ethics is an approach emphasizing the centrality of the role of character traits (virtues), the possession of which is needed for persons to be good and to live well. As a distinctive approach within normative

ethics, it contrasts especially with theories emphasizing acting in accord with universal rules or duties, or acting in order to bring about good consequences, and so on. Virtue ethicists highlight the moral importance of cultivating habits or dispositions such as generosity, courage, humility, friendship, love, and honesty, along with their associated moral sensitivities. From increasing coverage in textbooks in one or another area of applied ethics to a growing number of essays, edited collections, and monographs, applied virtue theory has clearly become a vibrant area of philosophical research. Some would find this a surprising development because they have been antecedently convinced by its detractors that virtue ethics stands conceptually ill equipped to offer practicable moral guidance. (For direct discussion, see Loudon 1984, Hursthouse 1995, Tiberius 2002, and Zyl 2009.)

Sheer numbers of researchers and publications, of course, do not make the case against virtue ethics’ detractors for the importance of virtue ethicists’ contributions to the methods and results of applied ethical inquiry. It is therefore timely, we think, to make a more comprehensive review of the state of research in applied virtue ethics today. The present essay tries to take an inclusive view of virtue ethics, and therefore of applied virtue ethics, admitting almost all methods and models

that highlight the importance of personal, social, and/or civic virtues for addressing the problems that applied ethicists study. But some of the more exemplary recent works we will address include those in high-profile collections as *Virtue Ethics and Professional Roles* (Oakley and Cocking 2001), *Virtue Ethics and Moral Education* (Carr and Steutel 1999), *Working Virtue* (Walker and Ivanhoe 2007), *Virtue Jurisprudence* (Farrelly and Solum 2007), *Environmental Virtue Ethics* (Sandler and Cafaro 2005), and *Sex and Ethics* (Halwani 2007).

Walker and Ivanhoe's *Working Virtue* (2007) brings together thirteen essays by many of the foremost moral philosophers of our time, covering a wide range of professions; bioethics; environmental ethics; animal, legal, racial, and sexual ethics; global citizenship; and the role of civic and deliberative virtues in democratic societies. In Farrelly and Solum's *Virtue Jurisprudence* (2007), eight prominent authors working in the areas of legal theory and moral philosophy contribute essays that campaign for an Aristotelian (or neo-Aristotelian) alternative to preference-based (consequentialist) and rights-based (deontological) normative legal theories. Guided by Aristotle's idea that "a state exists for the sake of a good life" (*Politics* III.9: 1280a, 32), the contributors to *Virtue Jurisprudence* argue that the law should have human flourishing as its ultimate end. The rapidly growing field of environmental virtue ethicists has recently seen a number of significant contributions. Sandler and Cafaro's *Environmental Virtue Ethics* (2005) offers thirteen essays by some prominent environmental ethicists with the explicit aim of determining "the norms [of character] that should govern our interactions with [nature]" (p. 1) and providing "guidance on what attitudes and dispositions we ought and ought not to have regarding the environment" (p. 2). Sandler has since published a manuscript titled *Character and Environment: A Virtue*

Oriented Approach to Environmental Ethics (2007), in which he defends a virtue-theoretic approach to environmental ethics, providing an account of the nature of environmental virtue and applying the resulting ethic to practical moral concerns (e.g., the genetic modification of crops). Most recently, the *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* published a special edition, edited by Cafaro, devoted to environmental virtue ethics (Cafaro 2010).¹

Before reviewing the research more closely, it should be noted that the relatively recent revival of virtue ethics, beginning a half-century ago, poses some special problems, for our understanding of the goals and methodology of applied ethics have arguably been largely formulated independently of the contributions that virtue ethics make. Sensitivity to the possible contributions of virtue ethics need not require a radical rethinking of the aims of applied ethics, which remain centered on the use of moral norms or theories as resources for addressing practical moral problems that individuals and communities face (or may be expected to face) in their daily lives. But applied virtue ethicists do call into question certain fundamental suppositions that have guided earlier work in applied ethics, assumptions about what is applied in applied ethics (only general rules or principles?) and about the subject matters to which moral norms and theories are to be applied (always overt actions and states of affairs external to moral agents themselves?). Applied virtue ethicists provide normative resources that can in some instances be applied to actions but in other instances are better seen as addressing features internal to moral agents (e.g., affective states, deliberative processes, and perceptual sensitivities). If the suppositions about applied ethics that virtue ethics would challenge (suppositions we will return to clarify further in our concluding section) were allowed to define what applied ethics is and must be, then virtue ethics would certainly

be at a disadvantage in comparison with act-based approaches. But the point at present is only that if we acknowledge that taking virtue ethics seriously may call upon us to transform or expand our understanding of what it means for ethical norms or theories to be applied, and of the range of subject matters to which those norms or theories are appropriately applied, then the value of its contributions to the field may be easier to recognize.

The following sections survey recent work in multiple subfields of applied ethics. The survey will begin with recent work in professional ethics and in education before proceeding on to environmental ethics and other issues of public concern that focus less around specific professions. The final section attempts to draw a number of methodological concerns out of this review of literature and to suggest some new directions for applied virtue ethics going forward.

II. PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

As moral education and the study of problems of practice became more explicit parts of the curriculum in medical and business schools in recent decades, practitioner-academics have increasingly come to value educational and training strategies that include aspects of character education—even in the absence of any robust commitments to virtue ethics as a normative theory (see also Horner 2000, Clark 2006, Radden 2007, and Swanton 2007). Indeed, in many core areas of applied ethics, the strongest impetus for a focus on character traits appears not to have come top-down from virtue theory, but rather bottom-up, from the concerns of practitioner-academics confronting difficulties that arise within practices or within a setting of training for new professions.

In *Virtue Ethics and Professional Roles* (2001), Oakley and Cocking explain that “the rise of systematic approaches to professional ethics in the 1970s saw traditional practices in various professions subjected to critical

scrutiny by broad-based ethical theories such as utilitarianism and Kantianism,” which led to the neglect of some practice-based professional ethical norms in favor of judging professional behavior directly in terms of a standard provided by one or another ethical theory (pp. 2–3; cf. Banks and Gallagher 2008, p. 41). Virtue theory’s development has gained some strength by the impression that it offers a more contextually sensitive and detailed treatment of professional roles and practices than do other leading ethical theories, better supporting the bottom-up approach of practitioners.² This need not render virtue ethics conservative. Virtue theory also has the means to criticize practices and to prescribe new virtues. But the bottom-up approach does not overlook normatively significant differences between various professional contexts; instead, it begins with practice-relative values, which may or may not coincide with practice-neutral values.³ This last point will be taken up more fully in the final section of this essay.

The top-down and bottom-up approaches here described are complementary, and although their closer integration remains a difficult task, it is aided both by thorough acquaintance with professional roles and by practice-centered accounts of virtue like that of MacIntyre (1984). According to Oakley (2009), virtue ethics offers a “regulative ideal,” a way for the agent to internalize the relation between a favored ethical tradition or theory’s criterion of rightness and its account of how agents are to be guided by this criterion (p. 1). But virtue ethics emphasizes that the regulative ideal of an ethical theory—*eudaimonia* in some versions of virtue ethics, for instance—need not take the form of codifiable principles or rules in order to play a motivating role in moral deliberation and judgment.⁴ Still, certain ends and principles that govern practices such as medicine or law often can, in fact, be codified, rendering them more readily communicable and assessable

among members of a professional community. Such is the case with the “statement of values” in many businesses and codes of ethics for various professions, which often directly incorporate virtue language in articulating service ideals and expectations for best professional practices. The choice of such language perhaps reflects a view in which “the ‘living morality’ of the ‘virtuous community of practitioners’ must be the starting point to elaborate any code of [professional] conduct that stands a chance of being internalized by its members and, therefore, truly achieving its purpose” (Consoli 2008, pp. 241–242).⁵

Pellegrino’s discussion of medicine in “Professing Medicine, Virtue-Based Ethics, and the Retrieval of Professionalism” (2007) attempts to contain any worry about uncodifiability of virtue-ethical norms by employing an end-based “schema.” This schema has been especially influential in professional ethics (see also Oakley and Cocking 2001). Though Pellegrino argues that virtue theories in ethics cannot stand entirely on their own, independent of principles and duties, he still supports a fairly robust virtue ethics in which virtue theory has more to offer professional ethics than do other moral theories. Pellegrino anchors his position in the idea that professions are distinct human activities that link virtues to the “defining ends” of professional practice.⁶ With the medical profession, the “act of profession” which initiates the physician-patient relationship entails certain virtues that foster a moral medical community. This conceptual schema, Pellegrino thinks, has applicability to helping professions beyond medicine:

With proper definition of the ends, peculiar to each profession, this schema also defines the good of the lawyer’s client, the teacher’s student, and the minister’s penitent or parishioner. As with medicine, the ends of these other helping professions are linked to a particular

activity specific to each profession. Each profession has its own “act” of promise which invites trust and entails certain virtue as a result. Each has a morality internal to its end and the kind of activity it is. (2007, p. 78)

Some other authors see this appeal to each profession’s *telos* as problematic on the grounds that teleology itself “has become harder and harder to defend” as a source of moral justification (Bertland 2009, p. 25). Although Bertland does not himself explain what is problematic about teleology, other authors have identified increased sensitivity to apparently irreconcilable conflicts among *teloi* as the root of the problem (e.g., Loudon 1984; Zagzebski 1996, p. 200). Yet Pellegrino’s passage helps explain the appeal that a practice-oriented approach to the virtues has had for recent authors who emphasize the goods internal to practices such as doctoring and nursing (Armstrong 2007, Barilan 2009, Holland 2010a, Holland 2010b, Walker 2005), psychiatry (Radden and Sadler 2008, Robertson and Walter 2007), counseling (Stewart-Sicking 2008), public health care (Horner 2000; Larkin, Iserson, Kassutto et. al. 2009), public administration (Lynch 2004), and social work (Adams 2009, McBeath and Webb 2002, Pellegrino 2007, Pullen-Sansfacon 2010).

Conceiving virtues as goods internal to practices heightens the contrast between the external moral guidance provided by “thin” institutional norms instantiated in master principles or strict decision procedures, on the one hand, and on the other, those resources for moral deliberation that we find in culturally “thick” conceptions of character traits that provide psychologically internalized moral motivations. These partly descriptive, partly evaluative character traits may be conceived as general traits or as those more specific or local traits that we expect of good or bad lawyers, physicians, patients, nurses, parents, accountants, public servants, eco-citizens, and so on.

We have now seen how practitioner-academics have availed themselves of the resources of virtue theory by regarding many or most professions as moral communities containing notions of the good that derive from their core purpose or service ideal, and which can serve as reference points for identifying the virtues within particular professional contexts (Banks and Gallagher 2008, p. 40). Business and management is another place where we find an abundance of work underlining this turn away from “ideal theory” (Sandler’s term) in favor of conceiving virtues as ways to realize goods intrinsic to practices. Gregg and Stoner’s collection, *Profit, Prudence and Virtue* (2009), on the financial crisis of 2009 illustrates that virtue theory need not take practices as givens, but may be used to sharply critique practices as well as to prescribe reformed practices and new attendant virtues. Dobson (2007), Moore (2008), Oakley and White (2005), Solomon (2003), and Vogel (2005) are among the most prolific virtue ethicists focusing on business ethics. IT, advertising, media ethics, and journalism have received recent treatments by Volkman (2010); Steiner and Okrusch (2006); Murphy (1999); Wyatt (2008); and Adams, Craft, and Cohen (2004).

The turn toward practice-centered virtues can also be found within engineering ethics in the essays of Crawford-Brown (1997), Harris (2008), and Frey (2010). Viewing engineering practices as inseparable from the personal life of the engineer, Crawford-Brown argues that the cultivation of virtue simultaneously enriches the life of the engineer and improves the norms governing engineering practices by helping engineers to negotiate potentially competing loyalties to clients, colleagues, family, self, and the public. The virtuous engineer is aware of the wider value-context within which the norms of engineering operate and is motivated to sustain an engineering culture that deeply values six kinds of virtue:

virtue of ends, virtue of service, virtue of belief, virtue of dialogue, virtue of action, and virtue of will. Athanassoulis and Ross (2009) offer a sophisticated virtue ethical account of making decisions about risk that bears especially on engineering.

III. EDUCATION

AND DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

Perhaps the most appropriate work on which to focus first is the earliest of the area-focused collections here reviewed: namely, Carr and Steutel’s *Virtue Ethics and Moral Education* (1999). This edited collection was pioneering in updating and applying virtue-theoretic ideas and analyses to the practical problems and concerns of contemporary educators. Most of the contributors share the view that a virtue ethical conception of moral education best accounts for the ways in which motivational factors must enter into any truly effective appreciation for the value of moral principles. The claim is not that a virtues-focused approach to moral education is original, but rather that it reflects a basically correct view of the nature of human moral psychology and moral development, allowing educators to trade less in deduction from general intellectual principles and more in the cultivation of sensitivity to the particularities of experience.

While reflex psychological and character education approaches focus mainly on behavior shaping or training, the ethics of care concentrates on emotional development, and liberal education and cognitive developmental approaches dwell primarily on the rational intellectual aspects of moral understanding, virtue ethics regards moral development as a matter of crucial interplay between all these dimensions of human being and [attempts to] give a coherent account of this interplay. (Carr and Steutel 1999, p. 252)

The importance of exemplars and narratives for the formation of personal and cultural

moral identity is accorded strong importance by several contributors to the collection, while others draw special attention to the interdependencies between the intellectual and moral virtues in Aristotelian thought and their significance for moral education (see esp. Curren 1999; see also Chappell 2006). Empirical work in developmental psychology is of course a crucial consideration, and virtue ethicists have themselves disagreed about how to understand some of the connections between psychology and moral education, including the relation between virtue, emotion, and attention (see also Brady 2010, Goldie 2004, and Sherman 2010).

Another excellent collection dealing with many of these issues is *Character Psychology and Character Education* (2005), edited by Lapsley and Power. This collection primarily takes up the question of character education in schools, families/parenting, and sports (see also McDougall 2007 and Austin 2009). The selections by thirteen contributing authors aptly demonstrate the editors' abiding theme of the need for a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary focus on moral character, one that explores several different psychological literatures for insights about moral character. This volume includes perspectives from a number of disciplines, including philosophy, personality and development research, and educational theory. According to the editors,

we are clearly at a point where important work in moral psychology and ethical theory is reaching a common juncture. Indeed, increased attention devoted to moral selfhood, character, and identity is the result of movement from two directions. It results from the desire both to expand the explanatory reach of moral psychology beyond structures-of-justice reasoning and to ground ethical theory in a defensible account of moral psychology. Both trends, then, from within moral psychology and philosophical ethics, point toward greater interest in virtues, character, and moral identity. Moreover, it is

now evident that important new insights about character and character education will only be possible when there is sustained exploration at the interface of these disciplines. (p. 3)

Grasp of the history of character education is important, too. Reflection on strategies that failed in the past may reveal "how not to educate character" (Kupperman 2005, p. 201); but the collection also takes positive steps to uncover the art and science of effective character education. This includes attention to the role of self-identity in the formation of character and how it helps us to understand moral motivation, commitment, and self-worth. Kupperman states that "what is required is historical (and perhaps sociological and anthropological) analysis to remind us of how situated is our notion of character . . . and its relational functions" (p. 337; see, in addition, McKinnon's essays, also in Lapsley and Power 2005). Additional education-related research includes a focus on multicultural understanding (Katayama 2003), military virtues (Sandin 2007, Sherman 2007), and leadership virtues (Wilson 2008).

Welchman, herself the editor of *The Practice of Virtue* (2006), argues in "Virtue Ethics and Human Development: A Pragmatist Approach" that contemporary virtue theorists to their own detriment often focus only on the same group of agents that principle-based theories do. There is "near universal tendency to treat moral agents as if they spring into being as full adults. . . . By contrast, dispositions closely associated with periods of dependency . . . however serviceable they may be to ourselves or others, are either ignored outright or grudgingly allowed an inferior status" (Lapsley and Power 2005, p. 142). In order to bring philosophy of education into closer proximity with our best theories of moral development and aging, as well as to allay this methodological bias in favor of only the most independent and autonomous of moral

reasoners, Welchman focuses on virtues that are properly included among what MacIntyre (1999) termed “the virtues of acknowledged dependence” (p. 119). Practical concerns related to the earliest and latest phases of dependent life frequently overlap with some of the central concerns of bioethicists (e.g., abortion, health care, senescence, death, and dying). These intersections generate opportunities yet to be fully seized upon for building dialogue between educational theorists and practitioners, social and developmental psychologists, and bioethicists.

IV. BIOETHICS AND ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

Walker and Ivanhoe rightly note in the introduction to *Working Virtue* that “an understanding of bioethics as incorporating the ethics of how we treat non-human animals as well as aspects of environmental ethics is much closer to the original meaning of the term . . . than is the narrow focus on medical ethics that is currently fashionable” (2007, p. 24). A broader conception of bioethics may increase and deepen conversations among virtue ethicists across the subfields of medical ethics, environmental ethics, and animal ethics—as some utilitarian and Kantian moral philosophers have done (e.g., Singer and Regan). For applied virtue-ethical approaches to our relationship with nonhuman animals, see Hursthouse 2006a and Bryant 2009. Virtue ethics has recently been applied to further bioethical topics, including pragmatism and virtue ethics in clinical research (Goldberg 2008); genetic modification of crops (Sandler 2005, Farrelly 2007b), Confucian bioethics (Fan 2006); euthanasia (Zyl 2004); abortion (Rovie 2002); hunting (Lovering 2006); divergent views of genetic selection and enhancement (Farrelly 2007b, Oakley 2009, Saenz 2010); and post- or transhuman challenges to virtue ethics’ emphasis on “human” flourishing (Cherry 2009).

Applied virtue ethics has made an especially large impact in books and journals on environmental philosophy. Many of the authors that Holly (2006) and Hull (2005) identify in their review articles as founders of this branch—EVE (environmental virtue ethics)—of applied virtue ethics have also contributed newly commissioned essays in either Sandler and Cafaro’s *Environmental Virtue Ethics* (2005) or in the recent special edition of *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* (Cafaro 2010). These notable proponents of EVE include Frasz (2005) and Wensveen (2000, 2005), Hill (2005), Shaw (2005), Welchman (2008), Westra (2005), and Welchman (2008), along with Cafaro and Sandler themselves. New voices such as Kawall (2010), Throop (2011), Treanor (2010), and numerous others are also contributing to the conversation over EVE.

In the introduction to Sandler and Cafaro’s *Environmental Virtue Ethics*, Sandler (2005) writes that “once the need for environmental virtue ethics is recognized two questions immediately present themselves. First, what are the attitudes and dispositions that constitute environmental virtue? Second, what is the proper role of an ethic of character in an environmental ethic? These two issues . . . are central to environmental virtue ethics and largely orient the philosophical work that appears in this collection” (p. 3).

The two questions are distinct but also closely connected in Sandler’s thought. He outlines four distinct strategies sometimes used to identify environmental virtue: “extensionism, considerations of benefit to the agent, considerations of human excellence, and the study of role models” (pp. 5–6). Sandler views these strategies as delineating a range of complementary roles, from instrumental to foundational, that environmental virtue might play within a complete environmental ethic.

Proponents of environmental virtue ethics develop the concept of eco-citizenship,

arguing that environmental virtues such as gratitude, respect, solidarity, and caring potentially play an important role in our responses to both local and global environmental problems. EVE's advocates uniformly agree that moral development and education are crucial for a sustainable future (Cafaro 2010, p. 4) and that character education plays an important role here. A good deal of work has also gone into developing the connection between human flourishing and that of other animals and into the rationale for preserving wild nature (Jamal 2004). While these connections may well be fruitful, several critics of EVE share Ralston's concern that a eudaimonic virtue ethics, as Sandler puts it, could be "dangerous to the extent that its focus on human flourishing distracts us from the intrinsic value of natural entities that makes environmental virtue possible" (Sandler and Cafaro 2005, p. 8; see also Hursthouse 2006b, Walker and Ivanhoe 2007, and Wenz 2005). In recognition of this challenge, some defenders of strong, agent-based accounts of ethics, such as Sandler, take EVE in a nonanthropocentric direction, sometimes looking to virtue theorists other than Aristotle in order to redefine virtue with reference both to the agent's and the patient's good (compare Zyl 2002). Others, like Walker and Ivanhoe (2007), stay closer to traditional eudaimonism but argue for similarities between human and nonhuman animal flourishing that make nonhuman animal flourishing normative for humans.

V. PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE AND SEX

One area in which virtue theorists have highlighted the study of certain animal aspects of specifically human nature is the philosophy of love and sex. Halwani's two authored books, *Philosophy of Love, Sex, and Marriage* (2010) and *Virtuous Liaisons: Care, Love, Sex, and Virtue Ethics* (2003), as well as his edited collection *Sex and Ethics: Essays on Sexuality,*

Virtue, and the Good Life (2007), are notable examples. In his introduction to *Sex and Ethics*, Halwani tries to show that a more open discussion of sexuality may challenge the conservative outlook found in some virtue ethicists' treatments of particular virtues (2007, p. 3). In his own books and articles, Halwani argues that a virtue ethics may allow for certain sexual lifestyles that are often deemed wrong by traditional mores: for example, promiscuity, open relationships, and even sex work. Nevertheless, a number of sexually conservative perspectives are also represented.

It is hard to imagine how our erotic and sexual nature could be quarantined or exorcized from the workplace, school, civil society, or more private association. Thus, it is not surprising to find that dialogue across subfields of applied ethics is very lively in the philosophy of love and sex, which embraces topics in education, bioethics, political and legal ethics, and feminist ethics.

VI. VIRTUE JURISPRUDENCE

Aretaic approaches have made inroads in theories of law and jurisprudence, with the approach called "virtue jurisprudence" (hereafter VJ). In the introduction to their collection of that title, Farrelly and Solum (2007) present VJ as an alternative to both realist and neoformalist theories of law. "In moral theory," they say, "virtue ethics offers a third way—an alternative to the deontological and consequentialist approaches that dominated modern moral theory until very recently. What would happen if we transplanted virtue ethics into normative legal theory?" (p. 1; see also Koller 2007).

The virtue ethics tradition is cited by the authors as offering insights into the legal profession, criminal liability, judging, and issues such as the legitimacy of judicial review. VJ offers distinctive answers to certain basic questions of law: What is the aim of law? How are we to understand the relationship

between law and morality? How can legal institutions do their job of resolving disputes? The aretaic turn, according to the authors, moves toward the reintegration of legal theory and practice and away from efforts to disconnect the academy from the bench and bar (by Posner, for example). VJ does not accept that the central function of law is to prevent actions that harm others or that the purpose of the law is to protect property. Rather, according to Farrelly and Solum (2007), VJ “is naturally inclined to the view that the law should enable and sustain the material and social conditions that would enable each and every individual to achieve the highest level of human function that is consistent with a similar level of functioning for all” (p. 2). At its strongest, VJ challenges preference-based and rights-based normative legal theories that identify welfare efficiency, autonomy, or equality as the fundamental concepts of legal philosophy, urging that the central notions of legal theory should be virtue, excellence, and the promotion of human flourishing.

Legal scholars disagree on the criteria for good legal decision. Furthermore, the role political ideology plays in the appointment of judges makes it likely that people will disagree about which judges are excellent. Nonetheless, Farrelly and Solum (2007) attempt to identify and articulate a set of uncontested judicial virtues over which there is likely to be widespread consensus: “By ‘virtue,’ we mean a dispositional quality of mind or will that is constitutive of human excellence, and the ‘judicial virtues’ include both the human virtues that are relevant to judging and particular virtues that are associated with the social role of judge” (p. 7). Solum has argued that VJ provides the best contemporary expression of the natural law thesis that there is an essential connection between law and justice; his own contributions to *Virtue Jurisprudence* suggest that practical wisdom and justice are the key judicial virtues. Hursthouse’s contribution

to this volume turns attention to the professional roles of lawyers and to the difficult moral dilemmas those roles can present. She applies virtue ethics to the Lake Pleasant Bodies Case, in which the defense lawyers knew the location of the victims’ bodies but were bound by confidentiality not to reveal the information to the grieving family that sought closure. Her treatment of how we would expect the virtuous lawyer to act and feel in situations colored by special professional responsibilities is seen as applying also to a much broader set of professions.

VII. CIVIC VIRTUES AND DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

In his book *Justice, Democracy, and Reasonable Agreement* (2007a), Farrelly further applies virtue theory to a range of issues in political philosophy, including constitutional design, economic incentives, free speech, and reasonable pluralism (see also Wiggins 2004). A somewhat overlapping collection, *Aristotle’s Politics Today*, edited by Goodman and Talisse (2007), asks how Aristotle’s moral and political insights might bear on pressing problems in contemporary liberal politics. One question that several contributors address is whether contemporary liberal theorists have something to gain from setting aside Rawlsian neutralism and embracing substantive moral discourse (as Solum thinks). The study of deliberative virtues and the conditions for their vitality has been lively, raising concerns that intersect with epistemology and ethics. Talisse focuses on some specific epistemic virtues that deliberation requires, while Goodman highlights the role that *phronesis* plays in law and politics. Contributors to this collection also discuss other-regarding moral virtues such as generosity, friendship, justice, and, drawing from the work of Confucius, filial piety (see also Ivanhoe’s “Filial Piety as Virtue” in Walker and Ivanhoe, *Working Virtue* [2007]).

From work on civic virtues (Audi 1998) to more recent discussions of deliberative virtues and how they illuminate moral disagreement, several authors have considered whether and to what extent democracy requires not only institutions like constitutionalism and the rule of law, but also a more active and educated citizenry (see esp. Gutmann and Thompson 1996, Misak 2000, Misak 2009, and Aiken and Clanton 2010). The editors of *Deliberative Democracy in Practice* (Kahane, Weinstock, Leydet, and Williams, 2010) bring together eleven essays devoted to exploring the prospects and obstacles that lie ahead for deliberative democratic theory. Deliberative democracy aims to provide more than just a normative philosophical perspective on political engagement; it also prescribes the active redesign of political processes and institutions in order to increase and to improve citizen participation and to help bring about moral or political agreement among citizens.

The political concerns of deliberative democracy clearly overlap with interests in virtue education (see section III, above). One central question addressed by the contributors to *Deliberative Democracy in Practice* concerns “which traits of character . . . the ideal deliberator possess[es], and what should the role of the state, via the institution of public schools, be in inculcating them?” (Kahane et al. 2010, p. 7). Endorsing a “weak” version of Rawls’s theory of legitimacy, Brighouse hypothesizes that reasonable religious and nonreligious persons are more likely to endorse together the “constitutional essentials” of a democratic polity if the state seeks “to collaborate with religious parents in the provision and regulation of schooling” (Brighouse, 2010, p. 52). Weithman questions “strong deliberativism’s” claim that “public deliberation can serve its legitimating function only if participants in public deliberation are prepared to offer one another, and are responsive to, a class of reasons that is inher-

ently public or accessible” (Weithman 2010, p. 65). Weithman draws attention to the danger that members of a privileged class may seek to normatively elevate their discourse by dubbing their reasons “public.” As an alternative to strong deliberativism, Weithman offers that “mutual translation” of arguments across discursive traditions “can go some way toward mitigating the problems that are said to be posed by citizens’ ineliminable reliance on their conceptions of the good in political argument” (p. 68). To be effective, this alternative requires that schools try to educate students about the rhetorical conventions and the historical and cultural backgrounds that inform different discursive traditions.

Weithman’s essay foreshadows Ivison, Coulthard, and Valadez’s shared concern that the “virtues” of liberal democrats may privilege the political interest of certain participants while marginalizing indigenous, colonized citizens. Each of these authors recognizes the demands of deliberative democracy in relation to matters of global justice concerns, rather than merely local or national ones. Relatedly, Tessman’s *Burdened Virtue: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (2005) is a reflection upon oppression and liberation and the uneasy role played by “burdened virtues”—that is, traits of character that allow one to endure or to resist political oppression as well as other, less overt kinds of oppression (see also Friedman 2008). Works such as these can also raise the issue of the distinction between a virtue ethics and a “virtue politics” and the need to differentiate between them.

VIII. PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES FOR APPLIED VIRTUE ETHICS

This essay concludes with some general observations about the state of applied virtue ethics (and applied ethics more generally), along with some suggestions for future research. As was indicated in the introduction to this essay, virtue ethics challenges certain assumptions that have dominated applied eth-

ics, and these challenges, if taken seriously, affect our very conception of the field of applied ethics and of the methods appropriate to it. More specifically, virtue ethics first challenges the idea that *what* is applied in applied ethics must always be general rules or principles. Second, virtue ethics seeks to expand the range of subject matters *to which* moral norms or theories are appropriately applied. Third, it seeks to refashion our understanding of what it can mean for ethical norms or theories *to be applied*.

The foregoing review of literature clearly demonstrates that work in applied virtue ethics can be motivated by a number of theoretical paths that reveal no unanimity, including over questions about whether virtue ethics offers (1) an independent, “third” moral theory, (2) a theory of right action, (3) a theory of moral decision making, and (4) whether virtues qua character traits are properly conceived as practice- or role-based traits or as more global traits. Nevertheless, recent work in applied virtue ethics is distinctive in a number of important ways. In what follows, three distinctive features of applied virtue ethics will be discussed. As we shall see, one of these features supports a pluralist perspective, which weakens the bite of theoretical disputes that otherwise threaten to sidetrack applied ethicists’ shared pursuit of practicable solutions to concrete moral concerns. Finally, this essay will conclude with a reasoned recommendation for increased dialogue across subfields within applied ethics.

First, contributions to applied virtue ethics involve a distinctive focus on features of the moral agent herself. These include psychological, characterological, normative, and social features that inform agents’ conceptions of the good, as well as agents’ moral deliberations. These features (whether they are conceived globally or locally) may serve as independent sources of value, and thus as criteria for the evaluation of moral

agents’ actions, attitudes, and deliberations. What distinguishes virtue-ethical treatment of agents has to do with the place that these features occupy in the description and evaluation of moral conduct and moral life, although again, virtue ethicists are not the only moral philosophers who consider these features of agents to be important.

Second, the focus on features of agents expands the purview of applied ethics to include problems directly related to agents themselves. Traditionally, applied ethics has sought to propose solutions to problems that exist within real or imagined states of affairs that exist, as it were, “outside” of the moral agent. If the subject matters of applied ethics are thought to be exclusively these sorts of problems, then it is understandable that the norms appropriate for responding to practical moral concerns will always be action-guiding norms aimed at providing answers to the question, “What must I do?” Contributors to applied virtue ethics draw attention to problems concerning characteristics of agents themselves (i.e., their attitudes, motives, feelings, emotions, deliberative strategies, conceptions of the good, etc.), each of which may affect moral development, reasoning, and conduct. But even when applied virtue ethicists stress the importance of the question, “What kind of person should I be?” they need not be arguing for the universal explanatory or evaluative priority of character-based norms over act-based norms.

Third, work in applied virtue ethics is distinctive on account of its diachronic or longitudinal approach to the study of moral agents and moral agency. Whether or not virtue ethics is appropriately understood as offering a theory of right action, it does seek to understand particular actions and particular decisions within the context of the agent’s life as a whole. It is this interest in the diachronic that most clearly distinguishes virtue ethical treatments of moral agents from act-based perspectives on moral agency. This feature of

virtue ethics most often leads to its association with eudaimonism. But that connection seems to be less essential to a viable virtue ethics than is a strong connection with moral development and moral education, for even those virtue ethicists who oppose happiness-based conceptions of virtue (e.g., Zagzebski 1996) insist upon the central role of education for the inculcation and exercise of the virtues. Although discussions of moral growth and development are not entirely absent from act-based approaches, virtue ethics has clearly heightened attention to a longitudinal view of moral agents and to the diachronic as opposed to merely synchronic considerations in moral judgment. As Kupperman (2009) points out, in numerous versions of virtue ethics (from Aristotle and Confucius to contemporary authors) “there is great attention to a longitudinal view of virtues, with emphasis both on how people can come to be virtuous and on the rewards of a life that centers on being virtuous. This longitudinal view sharply separates virtue ethics from much in contemporary philosophical ethics, especially the emphasis on dramatic cases (e.g., the trolley problem) that lend themselves to atomistic consideration” (p. 250). Surely we want to retain norms and procedures that allow us to evaluate human conduct synchronically at the level of acts. But virtue ethics reminds us that the aims of moral inquiry are not all reducible to the distribution of praise or blame for particular actions.

One important theme for virtue ethicists to consider is how a longitudinal view of moral agency and moral judgment makes important contributions to the field of applied ethics, and again how these longitudinal considerations potentially change our understanding of how that field should be approached. This third distinctive feature of virtue ethics can easily be taken as recognizing the mutually supportive roles of rules, consequences, and virtues in the assessment of agents’ moral growth and development over time. In this

way, a diachronic or longitudinal account of moral agency and moral judgment undercuts the theoretical turf battles that drive a great deal of contemporary discourse in ethics. A more pluralistic approach to applied ethics, one that recognizes multiple sources of moral value, could very well have a practical advantage. When the different emphases of “ethics to do” and “ethics to be” harden into dichotomies, the ability of virtue ethics to provide action guidance becomes much more problematic. Emphasizing theoretical turf battles in the moral education of nurses, social workers, and other professionals may distract and frustrate students, leading them to lose sight of real-world problems and perhaps encouraging a crude relativism or skepticism about ethics. In the context of moral education, aretaic norms can work in conjunction with deontological and consequentialist norms to inform and facilitate responsible deliberation and action. A virtues aspect to education may help to inculcate appropriate responsiveness to salient moral principles or rules and appropriate sensitivity to significant conditions antecedent to and consequent of particular actions. In effect, an overemphasis on theoretical differences and rivalries undermines a natural (and perhaps well-founded) inclination to view different normative ethical theories as offering complementary tools and resources, all of which are needed to address serious, shared social problems. By transcending the reductionistic spirit so evident in moral theory today, applied virtue ethicists—indeed, all applied ethicists—will better succeed in fulfilling a socially useful role.⁷

If the subject matters of applied ethics are to include problems concerning the growth and development of moral agents over the course of their lives as a whole (including infancy, childhood, and elder years), then a diachronic approach will help us to appraise and evaluate the moral trajectory of agents. Kamtekar (2004) reminds us that an over-

emphasis on particular actions and behaviors can overlook “information about subjects’ feelings about their actions,” which is “information that might further the understanding of why people act as they do” (p. 474). Moreover, Kametar (2010) says, practically wise agents use this information to “improve” upon their capacity to order goods and to act rightly (p. 157). Agents engaged in serious moral reflection can make sound, practical use of the “thick” affective and characterological concepts that virtue ethics provides. This is true even if human character and the virtues are more fragmented and less unified, more “modular” or local and less global, than some versions of virtue ethics take them to be. Virtue ethicists are right to challenge the assumption that there is little more to moral motivation and decision than a procedure of applying a criterion of rightness to the choices of action with which one is faced. What kind of person (or what kind of doctor, patient, parent, etc.) one wants to become is an important consideration in one’s moral decisions. And becoming a good person, professional, and so on does not require that one know in advance all that it is required to be what one wants to become.

The long-acknowledged importance of context in virtue ethics may also illustrate how changing social problems fundamentally change the kinds of persons we need to be in order to flourish. While this may affect personal virtue, it perhaps has a deeper impact on group and public virtues (see MacIntyre 1984, pp. 181–203). A good illustration may be the call for “new” environmental virtues in light of “environmental changes—the realities of global warming for example . . . [which] can bear upon the environmental virtues, having effects not only on the conditions of their application but also altering the concepts themselves” (Thompson 2010, p. 56; see also Hursthouse 2006b and Treanor 2010). Changes in social and environmental contexts challenge us to grow and develop as

moral agents. It may not be so much that the importance of particular political or public virtues is heightened by the severity of the challenges of one’s historical context, as that the importance of imaginatively redefining and then internalizing the virtues is needed to successfully deal with present and foreseeable problems. By prescribing, for instance, new conceptions of eco-citizenship or a new set of public environmental virtues, environmental virtue ethics clarifies our environmental choices and responsibilities. This reminds us that there is something irreducibly pragmatic in virtue ethics’ focus on actual practices. The practices with which one starts may be approached critically by applied researchers, and the goods and virtues required by the professions may be persuasively redefined in light of evolving problems of practice.

This last observation about the need to rethink virtue and character, with regard to ongoing changes in social and environmental problem contexts, leads into a final recommendation for future work in applied virtue ethics. The foregoing review of literature repeatedly draws attention to the ways in which the problems of applied virtue ethics intersect with one another in important ways. Yet there remains a conspicuous lack of explicit dialogue across the various subfields within applied virtue ethics. Clearly, several authors have participated in discussions within a number of different areas of applied ethics; but even if an author’s distinct contributions are grounded in a single theoretical perspective, this general theoretical unity cannot replace the sort of practical cooperation between subfields from which applied ethicists, as well as the persons and communities they aim to serve, would more greatly benefit. The force and appeal of applied virtue ethics will strengthen if increased attention is given to the shared perspectives, themes, and practical counsels that virtue ethics provide across all areas of practical moral concern. Some

authors are beginning to recognize the need for greater exchange across subfields. For example, in their lengthy and rich introduction to *Working Virtue*, Walker and Ivanhoe (2007) seek to provide “a general sense of . . . how [the essays] relate to one another . . . how they can be located in the bigger picture of virtue ethics as practical ethics,” and how the essays “relate to some of the broader themes in contemporary virtue ethics” (p. 36). Still, the essays collected in this wide-ranging volume are not themselves explicitly in conversation with one another. Perhaps the demands of professional specialization partly explain why these intersections remain largely underexplored.

Another plausible explanation has to do with the place of social roles and practices within contemporary applied ethical discourse. As indicated in the introduction to this essay, applied virtue ethics has been strongly influenced by practitioner-academics, whose focus on problems of practice often seeks to identify virtues that are “local” to particular professional roles and practices. Role ethics, and what Radden (2007) calls “role-constituted virtues,” have received a good deal of attention from contemporary applied virtue ethicists. Philosophers and social psychologists who sympathize with recent “situationist” critiques of virtue ethics might find role-constituted virtues more plausible than the “global” conceptions of virtue that certain empirical studies are thought to render untenable (see Doris 2002). Yet even role-constituted virtues might not be local enough to fully satisfy those who argue that traits of character do not even manifest consistency across different concrete situations *within* practical domains. Most moral philosophers now agree that the “situationist challenge” has brought into focus some serious obstacles to the acquisition of virtue. But contemporary virtue ethicists do not see these obstacles as insurmountable; and even advocates of role-constituted virtues show interest in con-

necting practice-localized virtues with more general traits of character.

In *A Theory of Virtue*, Adams (2006) argues that virtues local to a type of situation (what he calls “modular virtues”) can serve as a moral starting point from which agents may develop virtues that exhibit “sufficient generality and consistency across situations to count as traits of character” (p. 120). Radden shares with Adams what we might call an “expansionist” account of virtue acquisition. In “Virtue Ethics as Professional Ethics: The Case of Psychiatry” (2007), Radden argues that there is a practical need to identify and sanction, in addition to general moral virtues, traits of character “which, outside the context of professional practice, are morally neutral—neither virtues nor vices—or are at most prudential and intellectual virtues, rather than moral ones” (p. 114). These traits deserve more than an honorific status as virtues because, Radden believes, they advance the goods internal to professional practices and because they “might be expected to spread, eventually affecting the rest of [the practitioner’s] non-professional life” (p. 130). Thus, role-constituted virtues can facilitate the development of general virtues, thereby contributing to the agent’s self-unity and moral integrity. Whereas Radden’s “weak” role ethics presumes a hierarchy of moral obligations and permissions, according to which the more exacting demands of professional roles cannot override more general moral obligations, Swanton (2007) advocates “a genuine pluralism of ends” (p. 208) that does not subordinate role virtues to more general, traditional virtues. Following Slote (2001), Swanton claims that the value of role-defined virtues does not necessarily derive from any contribution that those virtues might make to the good of society at large or to the good of the person possessing those virtues. Recognizing that the goods internal to particular practices may conflict with the human good in general, Swanton contends that both sorts

of good come into focus together: role virtues offer greater action-guidance than do thinner, “prototype virtues” (e.g., justice, honesty, etc.), while the prototypes help to temper the pursuit of professional goals.

Adams, Radden, and Swanton each make some use of the bottom-up, practice-based approach to virtue acquisition that practitioner-academics advocate. But a bottom-up approach to applied ethics need not locate roles or practices at the bottom. Indeed, by focusing upon problems rather than practices or roles, applied virtue ethicists could take the lead in fostering greater dialog across any number of subfields within applied ethics. Bottom-up approaches that identify roles and practices as the basis for virtue acquisition and action-guidance face the dilemma of either having to reestablish connections between various roles and practices (as Adams, Radden, and Swanton try to do) or having to accept a compartmentalized conception of virtue and human functioning. But a problem-based approach avoids this difficulty, while also respecting the practitioner goals and norms that top-down approaches disregard.

The various fields of practical moral inquiry are themselves organizations of the conclusions of past inquiries. The goals, methods, and norms that govern these various fields may facilitate intelligent problem solving by providing funds of settled knowledge that serve as resources for addressing the problems of applied ethics. These resources can serve as preconditions for applied ethical inquiry only insofar as they actually help us to define and resolve concrete moral concerns. But different roles and practices do not provide criteria for determining what our problems are or how best to resolve them. Rather, the value of the norms that govern particular practices should be assessed in terms of how well those norms help us to resolve the moral difficulties that we currently face or which we can reasonably expect to face. Furthermore, lasting solutions to our most pressing moral problems are likely

to demand the concerted efforts of persons occupying a number of roles and practices. For these reasons, applied virtue ethics could become stronger by focusing more broadly on virtues that facilitate the resolution of shared practical problems instead of on the narrower problems of practice.

In practice and in effect, our decisions and actions inevitably have implications that are not confined to the purview of any one role or practice. This fact alone should provide sufficient impetus for developing more fully the kinds of deliberative virtues, processes, and institutions that take these intersections into account. Moreover, we can expect to find more circumspect and more effective solutions to concrete moral problems by drawing simultaneously upon the resources provided by theorists and practitioner-academics in both education and bioethics; in EVE and virtue jurisprudence and business ethics; in education and legal and political ethics and feminist ethics and the ethics of love and sex. It is unwise to pretend to be able, in advance, to define the problems that lie at these intersections. It is a task to be undertaken through processes of cooperative dialog among practitioners and theorists working upon shared (or overlapping) concerns across subfields of applied ethics. Some applied virtue ethicists have begun to turn in this direction, prescribing public virtues, which denote actions, characteristics, or dispositions that benefit the community rather than the individual (Holland 2010b). Treanor (2010) is probably right to point out that “while both personal and public virtues ultimately contribute to one’s flourishing, virtue ethics, including environmental virtue ethics, has tended to focus on the former to the neglect of the latter” (p. 26). And Lapsley and Power (2005) wisely urge that “more emphasis is required on notions of community, on civic virtues proper to democratic citizenship, and on the interpersonal basis of character and its relational functions” (p. 337; see also the

exemplary work of Aiken and Clanton [2010] on group deliberative virtues). Public virtues always contribute essentially to eudaimonia, and applied virtue ethicists will do well to try to balance individualistic notions of trait possession with a more social approach, distancing virtue ethics from the methodological

individualism so strong in twentieth-century analytic philosophy.

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NOTES

1. While many applied ethicists specialize in one subfield or another, there are others who demonstrate wide-ranging interest, participating in conversations across theoretical and applied virtue ethics, as well as within a number of different areas in applied philosophy. Credit for the development of applied virtue ethics (a lion's share of it going "down under" to research centers in applied philosophy and public ethics in New Zealand and Australia) goes especially to authors like Hursthouse; Swanton; Zyl; van Hooft; Solomon; and, of course, to those editors—Carr, Cocking, Oakley, Steutel, and others already mentioned—whose collections serve as first-of-their-kind models of research and resources for work in applied virtue ethics.
2. As Rhodes earlier put it, "a virtue-based ethics seems particularly appropriate to professions, because the ethical issues often focus on the nature of the relationships and our responsibility in those relationships—to the client, other colleagues, our supervisors, the agency itself. What sort of person is a 'professional' social worker to be? What is human excellence in that context?" (Banks and Gallagher 2008, p. 41).
3. The distinction between practice-relative and practice-neutral values is an adaptation of Quinn's distinction between "agent-relative" and "agent-neutral" values (Quinn 2007).
4. As McDowell (1998), too, contends, undertaking a particular behavior "as constituent means to eudaimonia . . . [specifies] a distinctive sort of reason an agent can have for behaving as he does. . . . It is the sort of reason for which someone acts when he does what he does because that seems to him to be what a human being, circumstanced as he is, should do" (p. 10).
5. Although the more deontological language of some codes of professional conduct can make them more onerous among professionals themselves, these may be appropriate in some circumstances of public trust and may also occasionally give rise to recognition of "new" professional virtues.
6. "Professions have identifiable and defining ends, that is, each serves certain universal human needs . . . in each of these professions, the end or telos is the welfare of a human being and particular existential state, in need of a specific kind of help. . . . This is the meaning of the very first sentence of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*—'every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and choice, is thought to aim at some good, and for this reason the good has really been declared that at which all things aim'" (Pellegrino 2007, p. 64).
7. "Critics of virtue ethics have argued that its focus on character rather than action, as well as its rejection of universal rules of right action renders virtue ethics unable to shed much light on the question of what ought and ought not to be done in specific situations" (Zyl 2002, abstract).

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