

## RIGHT ACT, VIRTUOUS MOTIVE

THOMAS HURKA

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**Abstract:** The concepts of virtue and right action are closely connected, in that we expect people with virtuous motives to at least often act rightly. Two well-known views explain this connection by defining one of the concepts in terms of the other. Instrumentalists about virtue identify virtuous motives as those that lead to right acts; virtue-ethicists identify right acts as those that are or would be done from virtuous motives. This essay outlines a rival explanation, based on the “higher-level” account of virtue defended in the author’s *Virtue, Vice, and Value*. On this account rightness and virtue go together because each is defined by a (different) relation to some other, more basic moral concept. Their frequent coincidence is therefore like a correlation between A and B based not on either’s causing the other but on their being joint effects of a single common cause.

Keywords: virtue, right action, motives.

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In this essay I explore the relation between right acts and virtuous motives. The two are, I take it, closely connected, since we expect people with virtuous motives to at least often act rightly. But what exactly is the connection, and what is its basis? Why do right acts and virtuous motives so often coincide?

The answer I give arises out of the account of virtue defended in my book *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (2001). This “higher-level” account, as I now call it, was widely accepted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example by Hastings Rashdall, Franz Brentano, G. E. Moore, and W. D. Ross, and in my view it is far more illuminating than the better-known one derived from Aristotle. I will not say a great deal that is new about the account, but will highlight a feature of it that was underemphasized in my book and that contrasts interestingly with the dominant views in present-day writing about virtue.

In exploring the relation between rightness and virtue, I will abstract from an issue that arises on one side of it. This concerns the relation between occurrent virtuous motives, such as my compassionate desire now to relieve your pain now, and longer-lasting virtuous traits of character, such as standing compassion. Theorists influenced by Aristotle take traits of character to be the primary subjects of virtue, and call occurrent motives virtuous only if they issue from virtuous traits; a rival

view treats occurrent states of mind as primarily virtuous, with virtuous traits just dispositions to have or be in those states. I believe the second view, which emphasizes occurrent virtuous states, is both philosophically more persuasive and truer to everyday thinking about virtue than is the first (Hurka 2006); here as elsewhere Aristotle is a poor guide. But I will ignore this issue and consider the relation between right acts and virtuous occurrent motives however the latter come to count as such.

The two best-known views about this relation each take one side to be primary and identify the other in its terms. The first view is instrumentalist about virtue. It takes the rightness of acts to be determined independently of virtue, and identifies virtuous motives as those that tend to result in right acts, so they are reliable means to right acts. Since there are different kinds of right act, there are different kinds of virtuous motive. Thus a benevolent motive tends to result in acts that promote others' happiness when that is right, a courageous motive to result in acts that accept the risk of harm when that is right, and so on. This instrumentalist view has been defended by Henry Sidgwick (1907, 392), G. E. Moore (1903, 172), and others, and it grounds the coincidence between right acts and virtuous motives in its understanding of the latter, since it takes them to be simply those motives that tend to cause right acts.

The second and opposite view is virtue-ethical. It takes the virtuousness of motives to be determined independently of rightness and identifies right acts by some relation to virtuous motives. One version of this view is Michael Slote's agent-based virtue ethics, which says acts are right when they are in fact done from virtuous motives. While allowing that there can be virtuous motives that do not issue in right acts, this approach has the radical implication that all right acts are virtuously motivated (Slote 2001). A weaker version of the virtue-ethical view identifies right acts counterfactually, as those that would be done by a person with virtuous motives, or those a fully virtuous person would perform. Defended by Rosalind Hursthouse, it differs from Slote's view in allowing that there can be right acts done from non-virtuous motives, but it joins him in implying that if a person has and acts from a virtuous motive, his act is necessarily right (Hursthouse 1999).

Despite their differences, both these views explain the connection between right action and virtue by treating one of the two concepts as primary and understanding the other in its terms. But this is not the only possible explanation, as the parallel case of causal explanation shows. If event types A and B are statistically correlated, the explanation can be that A causes B or, conversely, that B causes A. But it can also be that A and B are joint effects of a common cause C and so occur together even though neither causally influences the other. For example, it may be that smokers drink more than non-smokers, and drinkers smoke more than non-drinkers. But the explanation of this correlation need not be that smoking causes drinking or that drinking causes smoking; some third

factor such as sociability or a fondness for parties may cause people both to smoke and to drink without any causal connection between the two. The association will then rest on a shared link to a common cause rather than any causal influence between its effects.

The same possibility exists for right action and virtue. They may be connected not because either is identified in terms of the other but because each involves a relation to some third moral property whose shared role explains their frequent coincidence. Their relations to this third property cannot be the same if they are different concepts, but if each is somehow linked to the same property, their parallel links can explain their association.

This is precisely the type of explanation given by the higher-level account of virtue. My book presented this account primarily within a consequentialist framework, which is also how its first clear-headed proponents, Rashdall, Brentano, and Moore, presented it, and where its distinctive features are most evident. But the account can also be extended to fit within a deontological theory and was so extended by Ross. I will again first present it within a consequentialist setting and then add deontological elements later.

### **1. The Higher-Level Account: Consequentialist Virtues**

Described most generally, the higher-level account understands virtue and vice as higher-level moral concepts, identified by an intentional relation to other, more basic moral concepts. More specifically, it takes virtue and vice to be intrinsic values consisting in, respectively, morally appropriate and inappropriate attitudes to other moral concepts or to items falling under them. In consequentialist moral theories the basic moral concepts are those of intrinsic good and evil, so virtue and vice consist in appropriate or inappropriate attitudes to other, previously given goods and evils. It does not matter so much what these other goods and evils are, but let us follow Rashdall and assume that they are pleasure and knowledge as goods and their contraries pain and false belief as evils.

Now, the morally appropriate attitude to an intrinsic good is positive, so on the higher-level view it is virtuous and good to love for itself, or to desire, seek, and take pleasure in for itself, anything else that is good. This means that if another person's pleasure is good, it is virtuous and more specifically benevolent to desire, seek, and take pleasure in her pleasure for itself—certainly an intuitive implication. And the appropriate attitude to an intrinsic evil is negative, so it is virtuous and intrinsically good to hate—to desire and seek the absence of and be pained by the presence of—that evil for itself. So if another's pain is evil, it is virtuous and more specifically compassionate to want his pain to end, and to be pained when it does not. But the contrary attitudes to goods and evils, namely, loving the evils and hating the goods for themselves, are inappropriate and

therefore vicious. It is vicious and evil to maliciously want and take pleasure in another person's pain, and similarly evil to enviously want to destroy or to be pained by her pleasure. Just as loving goods and hating evils are intrinsically good, so loving evils and hating goods are intrinsically evil.

These various claims embody a simple pattern. What are appropriate are attitudes whose orientation matches the value of their objects, so positive attitudes to positive values and negative attitudes to negative ones are virtuous and good. But unmatching attitudes—positive to negative and negative to positive—are vicious and evil. The virtues match orientation to value; the vices clash. And for each virtue the relevant attitude can have either of two forms. I can desire a good like knowledge because I think it is good, therefore desiring it as something good. But I can also, without any thoughts about goodness, simply desire knowledge as knowledge, say, from simple curiosity. In the one case my attitude is based on an evaluative thought, about the goodness of knowledge; in the other it is not. But in both cases I desire a good either for its goodness or for the property that makes it good, and my doing so is a further intrinsic good.

A virtue ethicist may object that the higher-level account is wrong to treat pleasure and knowledge as goods independent of virtue. Pleasure, for example, is not always good; it is only good when it is such as a virtuous person would feel and not when it is, say, malicious pleasure in another's pain. The higher-level account partly agrees and partly disagrees with the premise of this objection. It holds that malicious pleasure is good as pleasure and evil as malicious, with the evil in most cases outweighing the good, so the pleasure is in most cases on balance evil.<sup>1</sup> In making malicious pleasure usually on balance evil the account agrees with the virtue-ethical premise, but in making such pleasure good as pleasure it does not. And in doing the latter it continues to treat pleasure always as such good and therefore as good independently of virtue. The argument that this is the right treatment of pleasure and other goods such as achievement is too complex to give here, but interested readers can consult the relevant sections of my book (Hurka 2001, 144–52).

The account as so far described is consequentialist because it relates virtue and vice to the central consequentialist concepts of intrinsic good and evil, though the relation is, more specifically, intentional. But consequentialism also identifies right acts by relation to good and evil, though the relation is now causal, with those acts counting as right that produce the most good or, more precisely, result in the greatest surplus of good over evil possible in the circumstances. So we have exactly the

<sup>1</sup> Intense pleasure in another's mild distress, as when one laughs at a David Letterman joke—and every Letterman joke is at least mildly malicious—can be on balance good. But that seems to me the right result.

possibility described above: neither virtue nor right action is identified in terms of the other, but each involves a relation, either intentional or causal, to a more basic third concept of intrinsic goodness or evil.

Nor is this general structure possible only with these three concepts. Shelly Kagan has made a similar suggestion for the relation within consequentialist moral theories between the rightness of acts and the rightness of moral rules. Again two main views have been defended on this topic, each identifying one of the two rightnesses in terms of the other. Act-consequentialism identifies right acts directly by relation to the good, as those that in themselves maximize the good, and then takes right rules to be those whose acceptance is most likely to lead to right acts. Rule-consequentialism, by contrast, identifies right rules directly, as those whose acceptance will maximize the good, and right acts as those that are, say, prescribed by the right rules. But Kagan defends a third possibility, which he calls “direct consequentialism,” and in which neither kind of rightness is understood in terms of the other. Right acts are related directly to the good, as those that maximize the good; right rules are also related directly to the good, as those whose acceptance will maximize the good. But there is no conceptual tie between the two: each is independently connected to the same basic concept of intrinsic value, just as in the higher-level account of virtue both virtue and right action are independently connected to that concept (Kagan 2000).

We can illustrate these connections by adapting some diagrams of Kagan’s. Assuming a general consequentialist structure, the instrumentalist view of virtue is represented in figure 1, where the arrows show identification relations: the basic concept of intrinsic value is used to identify right acts, which are then used to identify virtuous motives, so right acts are related directly to the good and virtuous motives only indirectly.

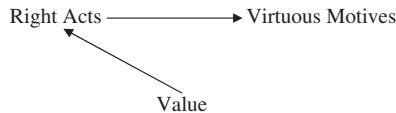


FIGURE 1.

The competing virtue-ethical view—given the consequentialist framework, it will be unlike the best-known such views—uses the concept of intrinsic value to identify virtuous motives, namely, those involving an appropriate attitude to good or evil, and then uses those motives to identify right acts, say, as those that do or would spring from virtuous motives so understood. The resulting view, represented in figure 2, relates virtue directly to the good and right acts only indirectly.

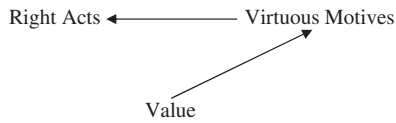


FIGURE 2.

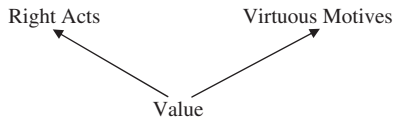


FIGURE 3.

But the higher-level account I have sketched relates both right acts and virtuous motives directly to the good, though by different relations. It is represented in figure 3, which mirrors Kagan's diagram for direct consequentialism by having separate arrows running from the basic consequentialist concept to these other two.

What are this account's implications for the connection between right acts and virtuous motives? The first is that the connection is not exceptionless. On the contrary, the higher-level account allows that there can be both right acts performed from non-virtuous motives and wrong acts performed from virtuous ones. To illustrate the first possibility, consider Sidgwick's famous example of a prosecutor who prosecutes a defendant from personal malice (Sidgwick 1907, 202). His act of prosecuting may by consequentialist standards be right, because it incapacitates the defendant from further crimes and also deters others from crime, but if it is done from malice it has a vicious motive. For the converse possibility, imagine an act done from virtuous motives but with false empirical beliefs. For example, imagine that the prosecutor prosecutes believing sincerely and on the basis of good evidence that the defendant is guilty, and from a benevolent desire to protect society and its members. But in fact the defendant is innocent, and punishing him will cause more harm than good. Here the prosecutor acts from a virtuous motive, but given his act's actual effects it is wrong.

This implication should not be surprising, since Ross, one of the main defenders of the higher-level account, insisted precisely on the logical separateness of rightness and virtue or moral goodness, arguing that whether an act is right is independent of its motive while whether it is virtuous depends only on its motive (Ross 1930, chap. 2). The implication is surely also intuitively attractive. Slote's virtue-ethical view implies that an act is right if and only if it is virtuously motivated, while Hursthouse's implies, more weakly, that it is right if it is virtuously motivated. But

surely commonsense moral thought recognizes that one can not only do the right thing for the wrong reason (contra Slote) but also do the wrong thing for a right reason (contra both Hursthouse and Slote). If the prosecutor in the second example above in fact convicts an innocent man, he has, despite his admirable motives, done something objectively wrong, and it is a merit of the higher-level account to allow that possibility.

At the same time, however, the account implies that there is the following significant tie between rightness and virtue: if a person has ideally virtuous motives *and* all relevant true empirical beliefs, she will of necessity act rightly. While there can be wrong acts done from virtuous motives, they require false empirical beliefs or at least the absence of true ones; given all relevant true beliefs, virtue and right action coincide. To see why, however, we must elaborate the higher-level account somewhat.

As described so far, the account says only that morally appropriate attitudes like loving the good are good and inappropriate ones, such as loving evil, are evil. But as fully developed, the account also says that ideally virtuous attitudes are proportioned to their objects' degrees of value, so one loves greater goods more and lesser ones less, and by as much more or less as their relative values make appropriate. If you can produce either a small pleasure for one person or a ten times greater pleasure for another, you should ideally desire the latter ten times as much. If one person is feeling a mild pain and another a five times more intense pain, you should be five times more pained by the latter. This perfect proportioning of attitude to value is only an ideal: if you care only four times as much about a five times worse pain, that is just a slight shortfall in virtue rather than any vice. But significant disproportions in one's divisions of concern do constitute vices, and some familiar vices have just this basis. If you care much more about your own mild pleasure than about the vastly greater pleasure of other people, you are viciously selfish; if you care more about avoiding some slight harm to yourself now than about preserving a significant good such as your nation's independence long into the future, you are cowardly; and so on. So an ideally virtuous agent will not only love goods and hate evils, but do so with intensities proportioned to their degrees of goodness and evil (Hurka 2001, chap. 3).

This explains why, given all relevant true empirical beliefs, an ideally virtuous agent will always act rightly. Imagine that he can and knows that he can produce either some greater good A or some lesser good B. Given the ideal of proportional division, he will want to produce A more than he wants to produce B and, acting on his stronger desire, will therefore produce A. But the very fact that makes this his ideal combination of desires—that A is a greater good than B—also makes it by consequentialist standards right for him to produce A, because then he is producing more good. So if he acts on his ideally virtuous desires, he will of necessity act rightly. Because both virtue and right action are identified by relation to the good, and in a way that prefers relations to greater goods to

relations to lesser ones, they necessarily coincide in this way: given all relevant true empirical beliefs, a person with ideally virtuous motives will always produce greater rather than lesser goods and so always act rightly.<sup>2</sup>

This initial connection is very tight but of limited application, since few if any agents are ideally virtuous. But we can make a more broadly applicable claim if we weaken the connection somewhat. Imagine someone who is slightly selfish, caring, say, 30 percent more about her own good than about other people's. Even with true empirical beliefs she will not always act rightly: given a choice between nine units of good for herself and ten for another person, she will prefer the nine for herself. But because she is reasonably virtuous—I am assuming her degree of selfishness is not enough to constitute a vice—she will act rightly a reasonable amount of the time. More specifically, she will act rightly whenever she has a choice between seven or fewer units of good for herself and ten for another person. And the explanation of this looser connection is the same as for the initial tighter one: since the very same fact that tends to make a combination of desires virtuous—that the thing one wants more is a greater good—also tends to make the action those desires would issue in right, we should expect agents who are reasonably virtuous and have all relevant true beliefs to act rightly a reasonable amount of the time. That is another connection, though a looser one, implied by the higher-level account's commitment to proportionality.

These connections run from virtuous motivation to right action, but what about the converse connection? Can we say that if an act was wrong, the agent had to have less than ideally virtuous motives? We cannot say this, because of the possibility of innocent empirical error. But there are also culpable errors, where a person acts from a false empirical belief that he should not have had and is to blame for having. In one case of this type, a prosecutor should know that the defendant she is prosecuting is innocent, because there is readily available evidence proving that, but she did not do the simple work needed to discover it. When there is culpable error of this kind the person will of necessity have had less than ideally virtuous motives, but showing why again requires elaborating the higher-level account.

The simplest forms of virtue involve attitudes to goods and evils one knows about or has noticed. For example, one's hatred of the evil of pain will show itself in wanting and trying to prevent pains that one knows threaten another person or in being pained by pains one knows he is feeling. But another form of virtue involves wanting to know about goods and evils and making sure you do. If you really care about another

<sup>2</sup> This may not be so if some of the relevant beliefs are probabilistic; then, given bad luck, the person can fail to produce the most good. The beliefs must therefore all be non-probabilistic, so they concern what the consequences of different choices actually will be.



person's pain you'll be attentive to signs that he's feeling it, even if he's trying to hide the fact; you'll also be alert for threats of pain to him, so you can ward them off. Your virtue will make you look for opportunities to benefit others, so you can exploit those opportunities, and threats of harm, to ward them off. And if you don't look when you could—if you blithely prosecute a defendant you should know is innocent—that shows that you didn't really care about avoiding those harms. Your act was thoughtless, and since thoughtlessness involves a lack of virtuous concern, it involves at least a lack of full virtue.

More strongly, in many cases it involves a vice. My initial formulation of the higher-level account made all loves of evils vicious, and all hatreds of evils virtuous. This implies that the intermediate state of being indifferent to an evil, where you have neither a positive nor a negative attitude to it but are neutral, is itself of intermediate or neutral value. But while that is a possible view, it is not intuitively most plausible. Complete indifference to another's intense suffering is callous, and callousness is not just the lack of a virtue; it is a vice and therefore evil. Similarly, a complete lack of interest in goods you could achieve if you tried is sloth or apathy, which are also vices. So the most attractive versions of the account treat indifference to goods and evils as not just neutral in value but evil, which requires some very mild hatreds of evil and loves of good also to be evil. If a soldier liberating a concentration camp at the end of World War II feels only mild distress at what he has discovered, say, as much as he would at a friend's hangnail, then his attitude is surely still callous. Though appropriately oriented, it is so inadequate to the evil he has stumbled upon that it is positively vicious. The same can be true of thoughtless action: someone who performs a wrong act because he couldn't be bothered to find out that it would cause immense harm can act from motives that are not just less than fully good but positively evil. What makes him culpably ignorant is a lack of concern serious enough to constitute a moral vice.

So the higher-level account underwrites a number of connections between virtuous motivation and right action. Going in one direction, agents with virtuous motives and all relevant true empirical beliefs tend to act rightly; going in the other direction, when wrong acts are due to culpably false beliefs, the agent's motives are less than ideally virtuous and often vicious. But the basis of these connections is not that one of the two concepts is understood in terms of the other; rather, each is identified by a relation to the same concepts of intrinsic good and evil. And though the relevant relations are different, one intentional and the other causal, they both favour relations to greater goods over relations to lesser ones, so desiring a greater good is other things equal more virtuous and producing a greater good is other things equal right. And that overlap between the relations grounds the connections between virtue and right action.

The overlap has another implication, for the role of virtue in our first-person deliberations about what it is right for us to do. If consequenti-

alism identifies right acts as those that produce the most good, and among the relevant goods is virtue, then in evaluating an act we should include the value of any virtue it may express or lead to. But in an important range of cases doing so can make no substantive difference to the outcome of our deliberation: counting the value of virtue can change by how much a right act is preferable to its alternatives, but not which act that is.

These are cases where the virtue in question will be expressed in an act we can perform now, given the motives from which it will spring. Imagine that I can now produce either greater good A or lesser good B, so it is on that basis right for me to produce A. The most virtuous motive I can act from now is the desire for A; just because B is less good, the desire for it is also, given the ideal of proportionality, less good than the desire for A. But if I produce A, it will have to be from the desire for A: the desire for B could not have that effect. So if in my deliberation I consider the values of the motives I will act on, the act of producing A will have an overall outcome that is better than the act of producing B by a larger margin than if I did not consider my motives. It will have not only the non-moral superiority of A over B but also the moral or virtue superiority of acting from the desire for A over the desire for B. But considering the value of my motives now cannot change which act my deliberation finds right, for the very fact that made the choice of A initially right—that A is better than B—also makes my desire for A more virtuous. So counting the value of my motive only amplifies the superiority of a choice that was already on other grounds best.<sup>3</sup>

It may be objected that this is true only if I can in fact be most virtuously motivated. Imagine that I can produce either a slightly greater good A, but only from malice, or a slightly lesser good B from benevolence. Can it not be on balance preferable, counting both outcome and motive, for me to produce B? And does my present motive's value not then make a substantive difference? It does, and this can be recognized from a third-person perspective; thus, another person can see that it would be on balance better, given my present motives, to produce B rather than A. But the limitation discussed above applies only to first-person deliberation, and it is harder to see how my present motive's value can make a substantive difference there. If it does, I will choose to produce B from benevolence rather than A from malice because I believe the former is better. And it is puzzling how a desire for what is better could motivate me only at this higher level, where I consider my motives as well as A and B, and not also at the lower level, where I consider just A and B. If I can desire and then choose the greater good when considering outcomes-plus-motives, why can I not do the same when considering just outcomes? Why can the knowledge that A is better than B not by itself

<sup>3</sup> For an early statement of this point, see Rashdall 1907, 2:42–43.

motivate me to produce A, independently of my malice? At the very least, cases where considering the value of my present motives changes which act my first-person deliberation identifies as right will be very rare.

This limitation on the role of virtue in deliberation holds only for the virtue that will be expressed in my own act now, and not to other people's virtue or even my own virtue at other times. It may be that if I raise my child to be compassionate that will make her less happy, because in an evil or unjust world she will be saddened by suffering around her that she would not be troubled by if she were callous. Counting the value of virtue can then favour developing compassion in her, whereas counting only the value of happiness would not. And the same can hold if I contemplate my own future. If one course of self-development will make me more compassionate but less happy in later years, then counting virtue among the relevant goods may make me prefer that development where not doing so would not.

The fact remains, however, that the higher-level account implies that considering the value of my own virtue now cannot usually change my first-person judgment about which act is right for me now. And this claim may seem to support a further conclusion. One of its implications is that it can almost never be right for me to decide to act in a way that involves less than my own greatest possible virtue now: whatever the right act is, it can almost always be done from the best possible motives. But the idea that it can never be right to sacrifice my own virtue now may seem to suggest that virtue is more valuable than other goods, and even infinitely more so, as several philosophers have held (Ross 1930, 150–54). I have elsewhere argued against this view, holding to the contrary that virtue is always a lesser good, in the sense that an attitude to an object always has less intrinsic value than that object; so, for example, my compassion for your intense pain, though good, is always less good than your pain is evil (Hurka 2001, chap. 5). And it does not count against this lesser-good view that it can never be right to decide to sacrifice my own virtue now: the latter is not a point that bears on virtue's comparative value but simply follows, for the specific context of first-person deliberation, from the way virtue and right action relate to the same concepts of intrinsic good and evil.

## **2. The Higher-Level Account: Deontological Virtues**

So far I have presented the higher-level account and its explanation of the link between virtue and right action within a consequentialist framework. To some this may seem of limited interest: since consequentialist theories are utterly implausible, they may say, so is any account of virtue couched in their terms. But the higher-level account can also fit into deontological theories, where it gives a similar explanation of the tie between virtue and right action.

Showing how is a little difficult, however, for there are different kinds of deontological theory. The simplest, typified by Ross, holds that alongside any duty to promote the good are underivative duties forbidding, other things being equal, such acts as lying, harming the innocent, and breaking promises. These deontological duties have no deeper explanation, and in particular none in terms of intrinsic good and evil (Ross 1930, chap. 2). But two other kinds of deontology do ground these duties in claims about good and evil. The neo-Thomist theory championed by John Finnis agrees with consequentialism that goodness always inheres in states of affairs, but holds that alongside the consequentialist duty to promote the intrinsic goods is a separate and stronger requirement not to destroy or choose directly against them, with Ross's deontological duties just specific instantiations of this single more basic one (Finnis 1980, chap. 5). And some Kantian theories ground deontological duties in a requirement to respect value, not in states of affairs, but in entities such as persons; here the prohibitions on lying and harming are specific expressions of the more general duty to respect valuable persons (see Audi 2004, chap. 3).

Neo-Thomist and Kantian deontologies make distinctive claims about virtue, finding important forms in appropriate attitudes of respect for values in states of affairs or in persons. But I will concentrate on Ross's simpler theory, because the duties it treats as underivative at least appear in all deontologies, and there are deontological virtues that involve attitudes to acts having the properties they pick out.

The higher-level account defines virtue as involving appropriate attitudes to other, more basic moral concepts, and so far, working within consequentialism, those concepts have been limited to intrinsic good and evil. But moral rightness is also a basic moral concept, and there can be virtues defined by relation to it. This is already possible in consequentialism if, as most consequentialists believe, an act's being right is analytically distinct from its producing the best outcome. Then it will be appropriate even within a consequentialist framework to desire and perform acts because they are right—since rightness is a positive property of acts, doing so will involve a positive attitude to something positive. And this attitude will express a virtue, namely, conscientiousness, that is distinct from any virtue of loving good or hating evil.

Deontological theories will also recognize the virtue of conscientiousness, as in the desire to perform an act that is all things considered right because it is right. But they can go further. If there are deontological duties making it other things equal wrong to lie, harm the innocent, and break promises, then a person can have desires, other things equal, not to do those things, because they are other things equal wrong. These desires will involve an appropriately negative attitude to acts with a morally negative property, making the desires in question virtuous and good. But the virtues they express will be distinctively deontological, since they will

concern a property of other-things-equal wrongness not found in consequentialism.

It may be said that these claims are not very novel: deontologists have always taken virtue to involve a desire to perform right acts because they are right. This is true, but it only shows that deontologists have always understood virtue in a higher-order way, as involving attitudes to an independently given property of rightness. And the deontological virtues they have emphasized share other features with the consequentialist ones described above. For example, they are guided, like the consequentialist virtues, by an ideal of proportionality. If being a lie tends to make an act slightly wrong while seriously harming an innocent makes it very wrong, an ideally virtuous person will be more averse to acts of harming the innocent than to acts of lying. More generally, if a given act has various right- and wrong-making properties, he will desire it for each right-making property and shun it for each wrong-making one in proportion to that property's right- or wrong-making weight. Thus, if a given act will involve a white lie but save many lives, he will be mildly averse to it given that it will involve a lie, strongly inclined to it given that it will save lives, and inclined to it on balance or given both properties. And his virtuous attitudes will again have two forms: he can be averse to lying either because he thinks lying is other things equal wrong or because, without any thoughts about wrongness, he simply does not like lying or prefers to avoid it. Just as he can desire knowledge without thinking it good, so he can prefer not to lie without thinking that lying is wrong but just because he dislikes untruthfulness. Finally, it is again not just not virtuous but positively vicious to be completely indifferent to these properties. Someone who is not at all averse to lying, feeling no hesitation whatever about intentionally telling untruths, displays the deontological analogue of callousness about lying, which is again a moral vice.

The account of deontological virtue therefore parallels that of consequentialist virtue in defining virtue by an intentional relation to a more basic moral property, though that is now rightness, either all-things-considered or other-things-equal, rather than goodness. But there is also a deontological account of right action. This too identifies right acts by a relation to the property of rightness, but instead of being causal this relation is now one of instantiation. An act is all things considered right if it instantiates the property of all-things-considered rightness, and it is other things equal right if it instantiates the property of other-things-equal rightness, because it instantiates some other property that makes acts other things equal right. So a deontological theory that includes the higher-level account has the same basic structure, and can be represented in the same kind of diagram, as a consequentialist theory. It too defines deontological virtue and right action by different relations to a single central property, either an intentional relation or that of

instantiation. And neither virtue nor right action is understood by relation to the other; instead, each relates in a different way to a common core concept of rightness (figure 4).

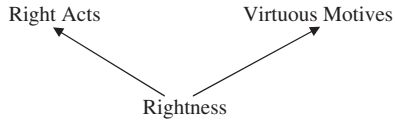


FIGURE 4.

Because of this, the deontological theory has similar implications for the connection between right action and virtuous motives. Again the connection is not exceptionless. A person can fulfill a deontological duty such as that of keeping a promise from a vicious motive, as when she repays a debt to a heroin addict because she wants him to buy the drugs that she believes will kill him. And she can act wrongly from a virtuous motive, as when she fulfils what she innocently but falsely believes is a binding promise rather than promote some significant good.

But the theory also implies that there are significant connections between the concepts. A person who is ideally deontologically virtuous and has all relevant true beliefs will always act rightly, again because of proportionality. Imagine that some act has several properties that tend to make it right and several that tend to make it wrong, but where the right-making properties outweigh the wrong-making ones and the act is on balance right. If a person's desires to do and not do the act given these various properties are proportioned to the properties' deontological weights, as proportionality requires, his desires to do the act will be stronger than his desires not to, and he will do it. And if he is not ideally but only reasonably virtuous, his coming reasonably close to proportionality implies that he will act rightly a reasonable amount of the time.

A similar point holds in the reverse direction. An ideally virtuous person may act wrongly if she has innocently false beliefs, but if her error is culpable then she is in some way not ideally virtuous. She has not cared enough about avoiding harming others or about keeping her promises to check what effects her act will have or to remember what promises she made, and her doing so again involves, if not a vice of indifference, then at least a shortfall in virtue.

So the higher-level account of virtue can easily be extended to incorporate deontological ideas and fit within a deontological moral theory, and the same holds for the account's explanation of the connection between virtue and right action. In both theoretical frameworks this connection rests not on identifying one of the two concepts in terms of the other, as in the instrumentalist and virtue-ethical views, but on relating both to another, more basic concept: in consequentialist theories that of

the good, which virtue is intentionally directed toward and right acts promote, and in deontological theories that of rightness, which virtue is intentionally directed toward and right acts instantiate. And in both cases the overlap between the relations is sufficient to make virtue and right action go together as often as they do.

Of course this explanation will only be compelling if the higher-level account is acceptable in its own right, and I cannot address that issue here. My aim has only been to show that this account gives an explanation of the connection between virtue and right action different from either of the two more familiar views in the literature, an explanation that treats the two concepts as on a par rather than giving one primacy over the other.

*Department of Philosophy*  
*University of Toronto*  
*170 St. George St.*  
*Toronto, ON M5R 2M8*  
*Canada*  
*tom.hurka@utoronto.ca*

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