

# Journal of Ethical Urban Living

## Having One Without the Other: An Account of Loosely Bound Virtue

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### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank Professor Hilary Bok, Michael Anfang, and Aaron Sibarium for their earlier feedback on this paper. I would also like to thank the audience at the Center for Cognition and Neuroethics' Ethics and Social, Political, and Legal Conference for their insightful and helpful feedback.

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### **Publication Details**

*Journal of Ethical Urban Living* (ISSN: 2470-2641). May, 2018. Volume 1, Issue 2.

### **Citation**

Mayer, Jared. 2018. "Having One Without the Other: An Account of Loosely Bound Virtue." *Journal of Ethical Urban Living* 1 (2): 51–65.

# Having One Without the Other: An Account of Loosely Bound Virtue

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## Abstract

Aristotelian virtue ethics is noted for, among other things, promoting the “unity of the virtues” thesis: that is, if one is to possess one of the virtues, then one must have all of them. This leads us to conclude that, in all likelihood, there is nary a virtuous person on Earth. Yet some defenders of the unity of the virtues thesis claim that any account that rejects that thesis will inevitably paint an incoherent picture of practical reasoning, moral psychology, and human achievement. If we see virtue as being wholly speareable, so the argument goes, then we find that seemingly virtuous persons will be living fragmented lives replete with conflicting, if not wholly contradictory, values. The dilemma then unfolds: either craft a theory of virtue that risks incoherence, or have a virtue ethics that is seemingly distant and, in some sense, inaccessible.

This paper attempts to solve this puzzle by recognizing the need for coherence and synthesis in our moral commitments while also rejecting the “unity of the virtues” thesis. Borrowing a distinction between the individual “small v” virtues (such as temperance, courage, and so on) and holistic, complete “Capital V” Virtue (such as when Aristotle speaks of the “Virtuous person”), this paper builds off of the later Wittgenstein’s work to suggest that we acquire concepts using what I call the Basic Concept Acquisition (BCA) and Practical Perception (PP). Since the acquisition and proper employment of concepts are inseparable from one another, the BCA and PP are, too, inseparable from one another. A virtue, then, is the mastery over a particular “moral skill,” as it were – being generous, just, brave, and so on. Since learning what these moral concepts are involves seeing how they are enacted over a range of varying circumstances, having a particular virtue entails having a matching phronesis. Because virtues are simply a mastery of particular skills that we adopt when we first learn moral (and other, non-moral) concepts, possessing one virtue still must fit into the web of commitments that one has acquired via the BCA and PP. Having a single virtue, then, does not necessarily entail that one’s life is replete with inconsistent commitments. So while the virtues must be evaluated holistically – that is, in light of the totality of one’s commitments – this account of virtue allows for one to have one virtue without having the others so long as one’s moral outlook is coherent; that is, the virtues are not unified in the traditional sense but rather loosely bound. Moreover, this account allows us to make sense of our difficulty in ascribing virtue to those who demonstrate an inconsistency in their holistic moral picture, even if they genuinely attempt to acquire a particular virtue.

## Keywords

Virtue Ethics, Practical Reasoning, Aristotle, Wittgenstein

## Introduction

Virtue, it seems, is rather elusive. To be virtuous, we might say, is to be virtuous in all respects. After all, we wouldn’t call the brave soldier who rapes and pillages

innocent non-combatants, virtuous in any sense; we may even feel compelled to call him vicious. This critique's sharpness might come from an implicit commitment to the claim that a failure to express a virtue means that, at least in part, the agent fails to *see* the situation in the proper light (Murdoch 2001, 37). Aristotle posited that, without more, virtue is not possible, for it cannot tell us how to apply the virtues of generosity, justice, magnanimity, and so on to those occasions that confront us. For that, we need phronesis, that is, practical wisdom that tells us how to bring about virtuous ends (Aristotle 1999, 1144b24-28, 31-32, 1144a9-10).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, since, on the Aristotelian account, virtuous actions can only come into fruition by acting in particular ways and in particular situations that call for acting with a particular virtue in mind, we must conclude that virtue and phronesis have a biconditional relationship: virtue requires phronesis and phronesis requires virtue (Aristotle 1999, 1144a22-1144b1).

If we adhere to this biconditional relationship, then we will quickly find ourselves with the unity of the virtues. For if every virtue entails phronesis, and phronesis entails the other virtues, it follows then that a single virtue entails all of the virtues. Moreover, rejecting the reciprocity of the virtues allows for abominable examples, such as a supposedly brave soldier who rapes and murders non-combatants. And such examples may arise *precisely* because every virtue must, as it were, cohere with a broader sense of the good. Thus, this soldier must have some unfathomably disjointed notion of goodness – “it is bad to retreat from our lines despite being under heavy enemy fire, but morally permissible to abuse, rape, and murder non-combatants.”

On the other hand, we *do* want to say that skills and understanding relating to one area of expertise by no means entails knowledge, let alone expertise of another area. We notice this with ordinary skills as well; being an excellent chef certainly doesn't entail that one is an excellent athlete. So why not for virtue? We can imagine cases where someone who genuinely possesses the virtue of bravery totally fails to possess the virtue of, say, temperance.<sup>2</sup> I call this the non-reciprocity of the virtues.<sup>3</sup> So now we are in a real vice: either we have the reciprocity or non-reciprocity of the virtues, and both leave us somewhat unsatisfied.

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1. I will use practical wisdom, prudence, and phronesis interchangeably.

2. Indeed, it does not seem so far fetched to imagine an incredibly brave soldier who takes up a nasty drinking, smoking, or drug habit simply because he or she continuously presses him or herself to act bravely.

3. By “non-reciprocity,” I simply mean that the possession of a single virtue does not entail that one possesses the entire gamut of virtues.

There might yet, however, be a solution. In this paper, I argue for an account of the non-reciprocity of the virtues, but one that attempts to respond to the concerns mentioned above. Borrowing from Robert Merrihew Adams, I distinguish having full, or “Capital V” Virtue, from having at least one of the “small v” virtues (Adams 2006, 32).<sup>4</sup> I argue that, contra the reciprocity thesis, we can possess one of the “small v” virtues without having to possess all of them, not to mention having “Capital V” Virtue. My thought is that all of the problems raised by the objectors to the non-reciprocity thesis can be responded to if we investigate how we come to grasp moral concepts and the knowledge of how to apply them. In Part I, I claim that, as rational beings who learn in a holistic and gradual way, we all have some form of what I call “Basic Concept Acquisition,” or BCA, where we master the concepts and rules necessary not only for leading a moral life, but for adopting skills in general. This includes not only concept acquisition and mastery, but also what I call “Practical Perception,” or PP that allows us to see those features that are salient to the particular rules that we are attempting to apply in a given situation. I claim that BCA and PP are in exactly the same biconditional relationship that Aristotle posited with respect to virtue and phronesis. Part II will provide an account of the non-reciprocity of the virtues based on my conceptions of phronesis, virtue, and the BCA. I defend the thesis that virtues are particular exercises of mastery over particular moral skills. Virtues and phronesis can be freestanding and differentiated from each other such that there is a phronesis for each virtue. Yet this will not cause the radical incoherence that we feared earlier *precisely* because our BCA provides a basic understanding of moral (as well as other) concepts necessary to unify our worldview. This allows us to grant that there *can* be cases where an individual bears one virtue but fails to have all of the rest of them; it also allows us to say that there are indeed cases where it is incoherent for an agent to possess a particular virtue given the agent’s other sufficiently weak – or even vicious – moral commitments. We find, then, that we can have a theory of the non-reciprocity of the virtues without succumbing to the objections that such theories tend to face. Part III will conclude the paper with some remarks as to how to proceed under my conception of virtue.

### **I: BCA, PP, and Virtue**

As we grow up, we learn countless concepts, including moral ones, much in the way we learn to cook as adults. In a now famous passage, Wittgenstein essentially

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4. My understanding of virtues, however, sharply departs from Adams’ account.

proposes the spirit of this thesis: “When we first begin to *believe* anything, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions. (Light dawns gradually over the whole)” (Wittgenstein 1969, 21e §141; emphasis in original).<sup>5</sup> Much like with cooking, we begin learning our language and network of concepts gradually, as a holistic set of commitments; chopping alone does not make a chef, and knowing one or two words does not make a fluent speaker of any language. But at this juncture, we can begin to notice a fundamental difference between initial concept and language acquisition and learning how to cook. Unlike cooking, we *must* learn about our world and the methods by which we are to navigate through it from others who have already mastered these concepts.<sup>6</sup> These tutors of ours are not simply those who can *help* us master our concepts, though we may be able to get by on our own accord; rather, they are the ones from whom we take our worldview *carte blanche*.<sup>7</sup> Thus, we adopt a set of linguistic, epistemic, moral, and other concepts as a system when we first start learning how to interact with the world around us.

A significant – if not *the most* significant – part of learning these concepts is the ability to apply them in accordance with particular rules. In an early passage, Wittgenstein rhetorically asks, “What is ‘learning a rule’? – *This*. What is ‘making a mistake in applying it’? – *This*. And what is pointed to here is something indeterminate” (Wittgenstein 1969, 6e §28; emphasis in original). So rules rest on a mix of different kinds of linguistic and communicative markers, including ostensive ones. We must guide those whom we wish to educate by, at times quite literally, pointing to the items in question.

But that only gives our students a few items that correspond with the rule at hand. Rules, however, are supposed to apply to a whole range of circumstances. Wittgenstein’s further point is that rule learning itself must be learnt by engaging in the act itself – “we did not learn [calculation] through a rule, but by learning to calculate”

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5. It is important to note that I don’t see this passage as saying that we are simply given a whole set of commitments in one instance. Rather, when we first adopt these propositions, we do so gradually, eventually learning to unify and alter them into a coherent whole.
  6. Obviously, learning how to cook itself presupposes knowledge of language and other basic concepts. Accordingly, cooking can be hypothetically learned from a book and practiced. Cooking also relies upon some notion of rule following, a topic that we will address shortly.
  7. “But I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false.” (Wittgenstein 1969, 15e §94).

(Wittgenstein 1969, 8e §44). The chef must learn to cook not by merely reading a cookbook, but rather *engaging* in acts that constitute cooking – chopping, slicing, sautéing, and the rest of it. And the initial “student” of language and concepts must learn them by actually employing them in practice.<sup>8</sup> At first, we find ourselves at a loss of knowing even roughly where to begin; but once we begin to understand how these rules work, we use our prior experience and deliberations over these rules to further refine the meaning of these rules (Wittgenstein 1969, 21e §140).<sup>9</sup> So we find ourselves inheriting a whole network of commitments and concepts and we learn to use them in part from our educators and largely from our own use of them.<sup>10</sup> This, in sum, is what I call the Basic Concept Acquisition (BCA) model of concept acquisition and employment.<sup>11</sup>

Implicit in BCA is the thought that it will never be possible to give a complete list of reasons or procedures for determining when a given rule applies. There will therefore be cases in which it is clear that a rule *does* apply, even though we may not be able to supply a concrete, formalistic explanation for why it applies and there may

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8. In fact, on Wittgenstein’s account of it, it makes little sense for us to ask for explicit rules for how to apply these concepts, for there is really *no such thing*. See Wittgenstein 1969, 15e §95.
  9. We should not convince ourselves that this point is limited, or indeed primarily discussing, abstract notions, such as time, justice, appropriateness, etc. Rather, it is first and foremost concerned about mastering how to identify particular things that we come across in our ordinary lives. So the toddler who first sees a husky in the park might be told, “Look! A dog!” and learn that this fluffy, four legged thing is indeed a dog, but she might be at a loss when she next encounters a cat, which she determines to be a dog by virtue of being fluffy and having four legs. All the more so is she bamboozled when she learns that playing games with people is a way for her to be good, yet doing so during a funeral procession is indeed rather bad.
  10. “Educators,” here, should not be interpreted so narrowly as to only include formal teachers. Of course, everyone who employs these concepts and responds in accordance with them to another person’s use of these concepts is an educator in the relevant sense. Julia Annas makes the point quite nicely: “we learn, from other people and the surrounding culture, and we learn how to do it (whatever the practical skill is) for ourselves, coming to see the point of what we have learnt and to practice it in a way independent of the path by which we have learnt it” (Annas 2016, 230).
  11. Notice that, for Wittgenstein, learning and employing rules and concepts are part of a single process. We continue to do this, even as we get older and more of our conceptual and rule-related commitments become fixed. As Wittgenstein says, “It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid” (Wittgenstein 1969, 15e §96). So I envision the BCA governing over both the roles of concept and rule acquisition and employment.

be borderline cases as well. Cavell puts this point quite nicely when discussing rule-bound acts: “The [acts are] not (and could not be) “everywhere circumscribed by rules.” (§68) Does this mean that the rules are “incomplete?” It tells us something about what “being governed by rules” is like” (Cavell 2002, 49; quoting Wittgenstein 1959). To be governed by rules is indeed to be governed by some standard that is inevitably vague in the scope of its application. Learning how to apply the rules in new circumstances entails learning how to *see* what obtains in the circumstances such that one would want to make the bridge between previous instantiations of the rule and the current circumstance.<sup>12</sup>

The “perceptual” faculty we are after is one that allows us to identify those features of a particular situation that call for the application of certain rules. I call this faculty “Practical Perception,” or PP. If we are to avoid the “myth of the given,” we must posit that our world, when we first encounter it as toddlers, is a set of unprocessed, potential perceptions (Sellars 1997, 75-77). To make sense of it, we have to find the particular elements of those potential perceptions as salient to us.<sup>13</sup> To that end, PP allows us to apply the rules that we will acquire via the BCA to those potential perceptions.

Now, as we noted earlier, concepts adopted via the BCA only become acquired when we have learned to master them in myriad contexts. But without the aid of PP, BCA would not be able to get off of the ground. And PP only exists as such by virtue of us trying to map on our concepts onto the external world. Without the concepts provided by the BCA, we would find ourselves unable to focus on any particular feature of the situation. So the BCA without PP and the PP without the BCA is not just impractical; it is outright unintelligible.

Since we have investigated how the BCA and PP allow us to acquire concepts of all kinds, we may now focus on moral concepts and rules. Moral rules are like other rules

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12. It is important to note that, on Wittgenstein’s account, new cases might more or less fall under the aegis of the current rule. *Whether* or not it does so is a separate, and far more difficult question. “The expressions ‘and so on,’ ‘and so on *ad infinitum*’, are also explained in this teaching. A gesture, among other things, might serve this purpose. The gesture that means ‘go on like this’ or ‘and so on’ has a function comparable to that of *pointing to an object or a place*” (Wittgenstein 2009, 89e §208).

13. See John McDowell, “Virtue and Reason,” *Monist* 62, no. 3 (1979): 344 (“It is by virtue of [an agent] seeing this particular fact rather than that one as the salient fact about the situation that he is moved to act by this concern rather than that one.”) While I adopt McDowell’s notion of moral perception (what I call PP) as that faculty that allows us to pick out one element of a situation from other ones, I reject McDowell’s radical monistic account of the virtues.

in that they are initially adopted from and provided by those who also provide us basic notions of language and moral concepts. Moreover, we acquire them by practicing these moral rules in our early, toddler lives.<sup>14</sup> Crucial to all rules, and especially moral rules, is the ability to provide reasons not only for their employment, but also for why those rules operate in the way that they do. This, as we have noticed earlier, is deeply tethered to the relationship between concepts, rules, and ostensive definitions.<sup>15</sup> Answering a child's question, "Why is sharing my toys good?" requires us not only to employ verbal reasons (and thus other concepts), but also to direct the child to those haecceitical, ostensive factors that allow the relevant reasons and concepts to become apparent to the child. Those reasons may be able to be formulated into our language – "Because that would make Timmy happy and you like to be happy, right?" – but will always include some element of our cognizing the situation at hand that fails to be formulated in our ordinary language.<sup>16</sup> And we can immediately recognize that PP plays a crucial role here as well. Seeing what about the situation is such that it calls for Sally's generosity with her toys is just as important as knowing what generosity means and how one performs generous acts.<sup>17</sup> So much like with our other concepts, we find

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14. Hursthouse notes that even for an account of virtue ethics, we must admit that "sentences such as 'Don't do that, it hurts the cat, you mustn't be cruel', 'Be kind to your brother, he's only little'... are commonly addressed to toddlers" (Hursthouse 1999, 38). Note as well that Aristotle posited the thesis that virtues are acquired by practicing them such that they become habituated (1999, 1103a32-1103b2).
  15. It is important to note that our ability to *provide* reasons does not necessarily mean that we are always able to do so verbally. Even if we are, it is not clear that our reasons will amount to much more than an attempt to direct our interlocutor(s) to those features of the situation which we find to be morally salient. Hursthouse notes that we cannot reasonably expect those who act virtuously to give a full account of just *why* the situation called for the action that they performed. As she says, "Virtue must surely be compatible with a fair amount of articulacy about one's reasons for action... We expect variety, not the same reason every time ('This is doing well, or virtuous'). And we do not automatically expect the variety to be expressed in the full vocabulary of the virtues and vices" (Hursthouse 1999, 127).
  16. We might respond to the child, "Don't you *see*, Sally, how happy Timmy will be if you share your toys with him?" Even here, there is obviously no *tangible* element that represents Timmy's possible happiness to which we can direct Sally's attention. Yet even so, Sally may be able to comprehend that Timmy's happiness, prompted by the opportunity to play with a new set of toys, is quite similar to her happiness when given the same opportunity.
  17. Annas makes a good point that I have so far underemphasized. She notes that in addition to learning our concepts and rules through direction and experience, children must learn them *as* rules and *as* concepts, which demand to be applied throughout a whole range of circumstances. So the boy who learns his first taste of bravery by seeing his father chase away antagonistic dogs must acknowledge that

ourselves acquiring and modifying moral concepts and rules as we go along. The BCA and PP, then, govern over our acquisition and understanding of moral concepts, rules, and perception.

Now we can (*finally*) address the question of how virtues are to arise. We have just noted that, given both the BCA and PP, we are able to master a whole variety of concepts, both moral and non-moral. Virtue consists in mastering a particular moral concept and its rules. I understand “mastering” here to be akin to how we would use the term with respect to other forms of skill that, too, are acquired by us via the BCA and PP.<sup>18</sup> Since both the BCA and PP are needed for mastering moral (as well as other) concepts, virtue and phronesis are simply the using both the BCA and PP to gain a scheme of particular virtue term concepts.<sup>19</sup> As we will see in the next section, most of the worries that are associated with non-reciprocity theses are disarmed once they assume the model of practical reasoning and learning that we have outlined here.<sup>20</sup>

One more word of clarification, however, is necessary. It is important to issue a distinction, which I borrow from Robert Merrihew Adams, between an agent having “Capital V Virtue” and having one, if not more, of the “small v” virtues (Adams 2006,

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“coming to be brave does not consist in his chasing off dogs.... [rather, bravery] requires thoughts about what is dangerous, and what is appropriate as a response to things that are” (2011, 22-23).

18. In this respect, I join Annas’s helpful and instructive analogies of cultivating virtue to, say, cultivating a skill in masterfully playing the piano and masterfully driving a car (2011, 13-14).
19. The differences between the BCA and PP on the one hand, and virtue and phronesis on the other hand, are certainly apparent and will be discussed in the next section.
20. One important question that can be raised here is how my account of the virtues can fit with Aristotle’s teleological account of the virtues. For him, the virtues are those character traits that allow us to live well-going, flourishing lives, that is, *eudaimonically* (1999, 1098a12-17). I think my account can adopt *eudaimonia* because it is essentially an all-encompassing predicate with respect to one’s life; any end that one adopts necessarily fits in with one’s desire to live the well-going life (or at least one’s better or worse conception of one’s life). Now, some may fear that my account allows for the specter of relativism; after all, if one’s moral concepts are inherited from one’s educators, then how can there be objectivity? Two items in response: first, Aristotle seems to be in line with this kind of reasoning when he claims that one needs a good upbringing in order for one to be virtuous (1999, 1099b2-4). Second, this fear simply relates to larger fears about Wittgenstein’s ordinary language philosophy. Wittgenstein certainly never promises us that our concepts, moral or otherwise, will be objective – that would undermine his “language game” thesis (Wittgenstein 1969, 10e §62-65). But what he does say is that different language games can have more or less coherent pictures of how the world works and how one’s moral commitments operate together. This, as we will see later, will play a large role in determining that one has a particular virtue just in case one a) has the potential virtue in question, and b) has sufficiently coherent moral commitments that support the supposed virtue.

32). "Small v" virtues are those virtues whose content is shaped by a mastery of a particular moral skill such that one's BCA and PP with respect to that skill are mastered. So the "small v" virtue of temperance is an inflated form of self-moderation while also having a sense of which things and at which times should one, say, have dessert or engage in some other moderately healthy, but immoderately harmful act. Having "Capital V Virtue" entails that one has the entire and complete set of "small v" virtues such that one excels at all of the individual virtues (Adams 2006, 32). When one has "Capital V Virtue," one has complete goodness. I see this as being possible, but unlike the traditional Aristotelian thesis, I do not see having *all* of the virtues as being a necessary condition for having at least *one* of them.

## **II: The Virtues and Their Non-Reciprocity**

Let us entertain the following scenario. Suppose there is a trial court judge who is known to have the virtue of justice; he listens attentively to both parties' cases, treats defendants sternly but with dignity, is willing to sentence convicted defendants fairly and in light of all of the circumstances to the best degree that the law provides him, and so on.<sup>21</sup> But concurrently, this judge lacks the virtue of temperance. He is known to be a drinker and smoker, but never does so in court nor in such a way as to compromise his judicial duties.<sup>22</sup> For him, his judicial duties are a strong and direct expression of his virtue of justice. Surely, we can all agree that the judge is not Virtuous in the "Capital V Virtue" sense; nevertheless, does the judge have the virtue of justice? Does his intemperance compromise his status of having even that single virtue?

Some, like Julia Annas and Rosalind Hursthouse, say yes. Annas points out that we might be tempted to claim that the judge has a cluster of virtue and phronesis that relate to justice; virtues outside of this cluster can, on this theory, fall by the wayside. But if this were to be the case, then this account,

strikingly fails to produce an integrated view of the values in a person's life as a whole. Rather, it produces a person who is, and feels, stuck with potentially, and predictably actually conflicting, values with no obvious resources available for dealing with the situation. (Annas 2011, 88)

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21. Of course, as we have noted earlier, with virtue comes phronesis. So the question of whether the judge has virtue includes the question of whether the judge has phronesis.

22. It is imperative to note that, in this case, the judge is neither temperate nor *intemperate*.

The judge, then, will be living a morally frayed life, one where his values, when evaluated holistically, feature strong tensions between themselves. These tensions can, at least in some cases, lead us to think that the judge is, in fact, not virtuous in any sense. And Hursthouse emphasizes this point: “Someone who does not see the relief of others’ suffering as a good worth pursuing, something it is worth facing danger to achieve, lacks the virtue of courage (though without, thereby, being cowardly)” (Hursthouse 1999, 154). Part of phronesis is seeing which ends are valuable and which are not.<sup>23</sup> If one cannot do this in a coherent and unified way, then one does not have virtue.<sup>24</sup> Because virtues, on these accounts, require a kind of coherence with respect to one’s life project and, more specifically, how one views morally laden situations, virtue must be unified.

Seemingly, Adams’ distinction between “V Virtue” and the “v virtues” will be insufficient to repel Annas and Hursthouse’s assaults on the non-reciprocity of the virtues. Yet the appeal of a theory of non-reciprocal virtue remains; we still want to leave open the possibility that there *are* some persons who genuinely have at least one of these virtues, in a coherent fashion, but fail to express the other virtues (Adams 2006 189; Wolf 2007, 146).<sup>25</sup> The essential point of contention that I take from both of them is that even a theory of non-reciprocal virtue must account for the fact that the separate virtues, if they are to be in any way coherent, must at least have some kind of moral linkage between themselves. So what we need is some account of how persons

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23. This largely relates to *eudaimonia*. Once one understands what constitutes the well-going life, then the virtuous person, on the Aristotelian account, will be able to coherently weave together those ends.

24. Even Adams, whose account features the separateness of virtues, concedes, “It is hard to imagine a form of human life in which excellence in being for the good would not be gravely undermined by a total lack of courage, a total lack of temperance and self-control, a total lack of justice, or a total lack of practical wisdom, or even by a blatant and *comprehensive* deficiency in any one of these” (2006, 201; emphasis in original).

25. Suppose we have a sommelier that can perfectly describe the region, flavors, and quality of any given wine. Now, much like the chef, the sommelier must have sufficient familiarity with various flavors of fruits, spices, and other ingredients in order to even *be* a sommelier; all the more so she must have a mastery of them (and the other categories of evaluation) if she is to be an *master* sommelier. But it doesn’t follow from the fact that both her and the master chef have a mastery of these various flavors that she has *any* serious mastery of the chef’s skills that are pertinent to his line of work alone, e.g. slicing, dicing, etc. So she needs to have mastery over the category of evaluations used to evaluate wines, and she must have a sufficient sense of some other relevant indicia of good wine that overlaps with that of the chef (e.g. food-wine pairings), but she does *not* need to have all of the skills that the chef has.

can, at one and the same time, maintain distinct areas of moral expertise while also possessing a unifying element that coheres all of one's moral commitments.

The BCA and PP allow us to do just that. Recall how we adopt our moral concepts via the BCA and the PP. They allow us to say that we have a basic, moral conceptual scheme that, like the rest of our conceptual scheme, undergirds the whole way in which we approach the world. Since virtues, on this account, are skills that we can hone and work on, we can, as it were, perfect particular elements of our scheme of moral concepts and rules such that some of them demonstrate a certain kind of mastery while others demonstrate only a kind of sufficient capability.<sup>26 27</sup> Since the BCA and PP remain when we attempt to master an element of the scheme of moral concepts and rules that are acquired by them, such as the notion of justice, our understanding of this virtue *might*, in certain cases, have be tethered to *some* substantive sense of kindness, generosity, bravery, etc.

Going back to one of the earlier examples in this paper, a soldier who exhibits bravery on the battlefield yet rapes and pillages innocent non-combatants indeed *cannot* be said to have the virtue of bravery. Bravery, as a virtue, cannot be wholly deaf to the soldier's other moral concepts. It *would* be incoherent if we said that the soldier understands the notion of goodness with respect to risking his life (at the right time, for the right reasons, etc.) while also saying that such a notion of goodness plays little role (or perhaps an *ad hoc* justificatory one) when it comes to raping and pillaging the non-combatants.<sup>28</sup> Contrast this shameful soldier, however, with that of the many

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26. There is also a question, however, of just *where* these virtues are to express themselves. Badhwar argues that virtue can be exhibited in particular contexts with particular persons, but when it is, virtue must be unified. See Badhwar, *ibid.* At 308, 318-319. If we admit this, then we may jeopardize the notion of virtue being a kind of skill that one has *mastered*. Mastery here certainly means knowing just when to use the skill in question; but it doesn't follow that mastery allows one to willingly surrender one's commitment to being good in particular spheres of action (Aristotle 1999, 1140b22-25). That, in fact, would lead to precisely the incoherence that Hursthouse noted earlier. See, *supra*, p. 12. After all, what would it mean for a chef to be a master in cooking in her restaurant, yet be more than willing to settle for a can of Campbell's soup at home? What would with think of her claim to be a master of cooking?

27. It follows from this that an agent cannot possess a virtue along with a vice, even if that virtue and vice are not direct opposites of one another. Consider, for example, the prospect of bearing the virtue of justice and the vice of intemperance. While both claims are seemingly orthogonal to one another, upon reflection it becomes clear that his intemperance – drinking and smoking to such excess that it unquestionably damns the judge's health – becomes a source of unfairness, and thus *injustice*, to *himself*.

28. I think Philippa Foot is right when she says that we make a distinction in our ordinary ascriptions of

examples of those that fought for the United States during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Many are of the opinion that that engagement was unjust, unnecessary, and overall unwise. On the account of virtue just presented, the soldier who enlisted to serve in the armed forces during that conflict may well master the skill of being brave – she can push forward through enemy fire to her objectives, she can continue to fight gallantly even while facing overwhelming odds, and so on. Indeed, this bravery is tethered to other moral concepts and rules, e.g. liberate those who live under dictators (generosity, justice), protect your nation when it is attacked (justice), etc. Notice how these moral concepts and rules themselves do not have to be wholly correct in order for us to make sense of them. We can commend this soldier for her bravery because her bravery was sufficiently tethered to her other moral concepts and rules, while at the same time critiquing those very concepts and rules.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, we can make sense of what she did *and* still grant her claim to having the virtue of bravery.

We can now return to the case of our judge. Despite his intemperance, I'm inclined to say, given the description above, the judge does indeed have the virtue of justice. He is a man who is fair, impartial, and deeply engaged with each case that comes before him. His intemperance, to be sure, may be off-putting, but it does not warp his virtue of justice in any way that makes it less of a mastery of the skill of acting and resolving disputes justly. In this and in similar ways, one can have a mastery of a single virtue without having a mastery of the other virtues so long as one has a coherence in one's scheme of moral concepts and rules.

### Part III: Conclusion

I would like to conclude by noting that, despite the work that has been done in this paper, more work still needs to be accomplished, especially in two respects. First,

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virtue between *being* virtuous and acting in a way that mimics or resembles virtue. So we might say that "it 'took courage'" for a bank robber to risk his life for the sake of stealing, say, the Hope Diamond, "yet it seems wrong to think of courage as equally connected with good and bad actions"(Foot 2002, 15-16).

29. Now, of course there are limits as to how far off or how mistaken one's conception of a moral concept to be in order for one to still consider it to be moral. So for example, we would call an individual who believed generosity to mean "inflict pain upon others" as demented; we would call a person who believed generosity to mean "sofa" as delusional. But what are exactly the limits of this claim? How are we to know when someone is demented and when someone simply has a slightly different conception of a particular moral concept? We must remember that learning about how to apply our given set of concepts and rules is itself an ongoing educational process, one where we learn by experience. And much like we said earlier, there is no antecedent rule that governs how to apply the rule.

this paper says little about how the moral emotions play into both concept acquisition as well as the formation of virtues. And second, this paper is agnostic as to just *why* one would want to cultivate one of the virtues. The simple answer is, of course, because they are good. But in what sense and in which ways they are good, this paper remains silent. These are critical issues that must be provided for any serious account of the virtues. Although I was unable to present these issues here (mainly due to time considerations), my hope is that this outline of virtue allows us to best account for our intuitions about virtue while also opening avenues for future investigation into these meta-ethical and moral-psychological considerations.

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