Fall 12-13-2018

Virtue Ethics, Deontology, and Consequentialism

Brandon Roby
University of Mary Washington

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.umw.edu/student_research

Virtue Ethics, Deontology, and

Consequentialism

A Thesis Presented by

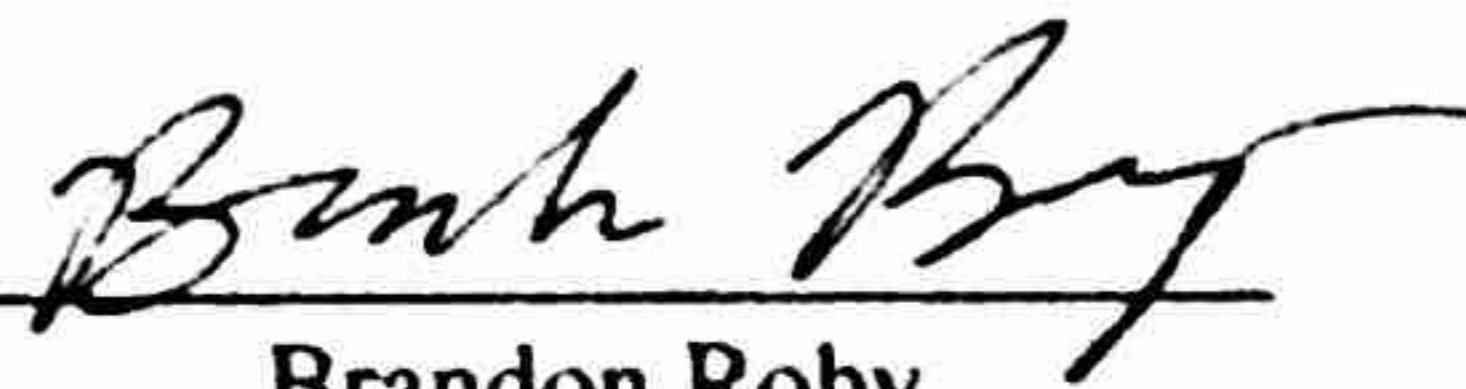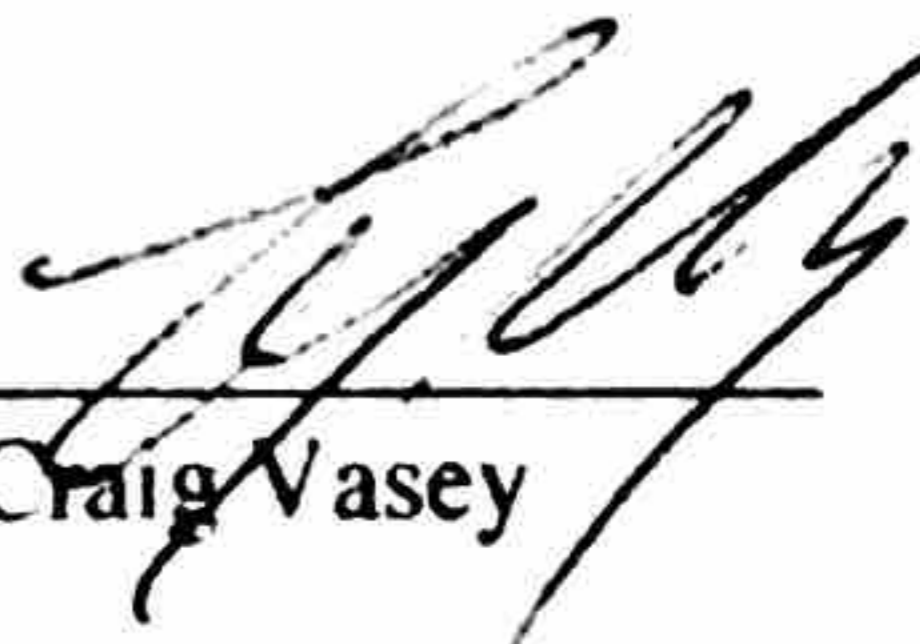Brandon Roby

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

Honors in Philosophy
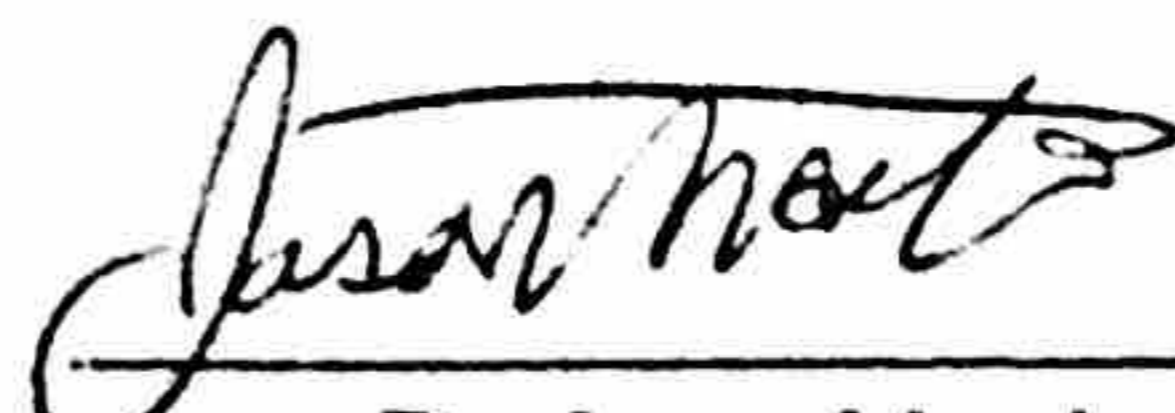
University of Mary Washington

December 12, 2018

_____
Brandon Roby

_____
Dr. Craig Vasey

_____
Dr. David Ambuel

_____
Dr. Michael Reno

_____
Dr. Jason Matzke

1. Introduction

In the field of ethics, various theories have attempted to set themselves apart as the "right" one, i.e., as superior to the rest. By "right" in this context I mean that it fits with more intuitive notions about morality, ensures agents are acting in ways that are genuine, allowing for people to trust one another, and it benefits human welfare generally. I will discuss three such theories throughout this paper: virtue ethics, Kantian ethics (or deontology), and consequentialism (usually represented by the utilitarian theory).

Primarily, virtue ethics might be attributed or used to appeal to ideas of philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, with concerns being directed at the harmony of one's soul or "eudaimonia," i.e., human flourishing respectively. In this theory, the morality of the virtues is placed in a more important light and grounded in different ways than simply in religion, pure reason, or utilitarian calculations. Aristotle sets the foundation for perhaps the most popular form of virtue ethics, with eudaimonia playing a large role in discussion throughout his *Nicomachean Ethics*. The question he concerns himself with is quite simply: in what does the highest human good consist? (Baril, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 2, p. 18). He would hold that this concept of eudaimonia, the most comprehensive good available to human beings, is where the highest human good is found. When we hear this, the modern word "welfare" comes to mind, but it is important to differentiate the two concepts. One is significantly narrower than the other. Welfare would indicate that an individual is "well-off" while eudaimonia would indicate a more noble or admirable form of living. This differentiation is important in the sense that the idea of eudaimonia is an activity rather than just something to be obtained. The *Handbook of Virtue Ethics* describes an example of a person who chooses to work at a physically demanding and dangerous job so he can provide the best possible life for his family. However, he ends up dying

a painful early death due to this job (Baril, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 2, p. 19). We would say that this person may have realized the highest human good for someone in his position as he was *acting* in this most admirable way, but it would be incorrect to say that he was "well-off." This discussion holds relevance in Aristotle's conception of how one is in control of one's happiness and one's eudaimonistic standing. That is, Aristotle would say that the man described above was happy and lived in such a way that he achieved and embodied the highest human good—eudaimonia even though he may not be as successful in terms of his physical well-being.

      Kantian ethics or deontology is the theory that reason tells us how we are to act in a given situation and comes bundled with the concept of duty. In contrast to virtue ethics, which tells us primarily about what kind of *person* we are and should be, deontology might be considered a more direct ethical theory that allows us answers about what *acts* we ought to perform. With this theory, compatible with some virtue ethics theories, some choices that we make are morally forbidden and cannot be justified by the effects of those acts. Choices are considered right through conformity with a moral norm. Importantly, Kant is involved in this sense through his categorical imperative, which simply means that these moral norms ought to be obeyed by every person universally. For deontologists, the "right" is more important than the "good," which here shows a stark contrast with the tenets of virtue ethics, which clearly emphasizes the highest human *good*. This means that whether an action is judged to be "good" is not of primary concern for a deontologist. Rather, it is "right" if it accords with duty, which *is* of primary concern. An important feature of this theory that will be discussed more a little later is the concept that there is a separate group, if you will, for acts that individuals are *permitted* to do but not *obligated* to do. This negative sense is important in that it reinforces the sense that the most important thing in deontology is the instantiation of norms by whatever acts an agent does, regardless of whether

they are obligatory or not. Three common forms of deontology include the agent-centered, the patient-centered, and the contractualist. These forms can, however, all be attributed to Kant, although they differ in various ways (Alexander & Moore, 2016, section 2.4). Overall, Kantian ethics claims to accord more with conventional aspects of our moral duties rather than, in comparison to consequentialism, restricting the scope of our actions and being overly demanding and alienating (Alexander & Moore, 2016, section 3). An example would be the permission to take family or friends into account in our actions such as a case where one's parents would be killed if one acts in a certain way while if this act is not performed a bus of random people would be saved. This is an unrealistic example of course, but consequentialism (specifically utilitarianism) illustrates not only that we do not view all people as morally equal but also that the calculations required are difficult and unreasonable. Unlike the conception of duty or the virtues, these calculations can seem like one could always be doing something morally better and never the best action in a given situation. Proponents claim that theories like the one discussed next, consequentialism, do not give agents the freedom to take these into account.

The third main theory, consequentialism, is the view that, as its name suggests, actions are determined to be right or wrong based on consequences. As mentioned before, the paradigm case of consequentialism is utilitarianism, where the amount of good must outweigh the amount of bad in order for an act to be considered morally right. In short, the good must be maximized, and in this case, it is hedonistic, meaning happiness and pain are the important good and bad respectively. In a more general consequentialist sense, though, a calculation is needed to determine the weight or rank certain values are given in comparison to others. There are several problems that consequentialism, specifically utilitarianism, is subjected to, which I will go into

later as well as the possibility of virtue consequentialism. For example, the most common claim

has to do with the demanding nature of the theory, for which there are several responses.

This paper will attempt to set apart virtue ethics from deontology and consequentialism

as the most intuitive and flexible moral theory. While virtue ethics has problems like potential

circularity and the possibility for terrible actions to be considered morally praiseworthy, the

advantages of adopting virtue ethics are much broader and allow for a more intuitive system.

There are advantages like genuineness, not relying on codification, and placing the individuals at

the center. All of these will also help to create more trust among people. Consequentialism and

deontology do not allow for this and in addition, are much too restricted when it comes to the

scope of situations. I hope to show that a virtue ethics that utilizes aspects of the other theories is

the fullest, most attractive, and most desirable.

1. Virtue Ethics

In "Virtue Ethics, Kantian Ethics, and Consequentialism," Singleton puts forward the basic tenet that virtue ethics is concerned with the development of a virtuous character (Singleton, 1999). This is a more specific way of delineating what might be the "highest human good" as mentioned in the previous section. This essentially means that an individual cultivates his or her character in such a way that the actions performed accord with admirable virtues, external as well as internal. Indeed, if this is the most important aspect of the ethical theory, then it will be helpful to appeal to what Hursthouse and other neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists have thought. Hursthouse, from the *Handbook of Virtue Ethics,* is credited with the following idea: An action is right if and only if it is what a virtuous person would characteristically do in the circumstances (Zyl, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 10, p. 118). This theory of right action can be looked at in different ways, such as the fact that the action is right because it would be done by a virtuous agent acting in character or that all right actions have in common that they are the kinds of actions that virtuous agents would typically perform. These two interpretations of this claim are distinct and though there is a common discrepancy that will be discussed later from this characterization, Aristotle's discussion in the *Nicomachean Ethics* of a virtuous person as the "standard or yardstick" for ethical truth can allow us to conclude that it is fair to assume that the reason a virtuous agent chooses to perform a specific action is for reasons that are independent of the fact that other virtuous agents would also perform it quite simply (Zyl, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 10, p. 118). Rather, this is broader and allows us to compare our character with the character of this virtuous person. The importance of an individual's character emerges again, and we have an explanation of why a virtuous agent might choose to act a certain way, i.e., that he or

she sees that the action itself is virtuous, thereby appealing to the virtues rather than to consequences or duty. However, what makes the action "right" in this case even if it is virtuous?

What makes the action "right" according to those like Hursthouse is the conception of motive. This needs to be taken into account to get deeper into morality and in the case of virtue ethics, is a focus, unlike other theories that acknowledge it but do not place that great an importance on it. Some virtue ethicists argue that motive does not affect rightness, meaning they take the internal virtues such as motive to be less important in determining the rightness of an action than the external virtues. However, the target-centered account of right action (where actions must be overall virtuous and hit the target of certain virtues) allows for flexibility regarding how we assess different actions as right. This is unlike deontology, specifically, where we could not for example, claim that it is right to lie in order to hide a Jew from Nazi soldiers. However, because this action hits the target of benevolence and can be overall virtuous in this respect, it can be right (Zyl, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 10, p. 121). However, there are situations where unlike beneficence, targets of virtues are internal (e.g., tolerance, generosity, motive) as well as character itself, making objections that this theory allows for poorly motivated agents to perform right actions refutable—if we do not hit these internal targets, we are not actually developing our character and acting virtuously. In some cases like those that will be discussed in the context of the other two theories in question, individuals may be able to perform right actions without them being virtuous, i.e., they do not really care and are solely doing them for the purpose of either duty or consequences. Evaluations of two cases within this target centered account of right action need not be done in the same way.

Let us take the example given in the *Handbook* of a nurse who takes care of a patient who is very wealthy and pays him well but secretly he cannot stand her. If she did not pay him so

well, he would not try so hard to please her. In so far as this nurse hits the target of caring, described as promoting human welfare and displaying appropriate behavior, he is externally performing a right action. However, he is missing an important internal target that is encompassed within caring for others, i.e., a genuine concern for another person. It is not only the motive here that is causing wrong action, but the important missed target of caring. With that said, this would not matter for a deontologist, but the important virtue of genuineness is missing, and we feel differently about this. Then say there is another nurse who takes very good care of her patient and genuinely cares for her but makes a mistake and causes her great pain or discomfort, (e.g., administering a wrong dosage). She actually fails to act rightly because she misses a target of the virtue of caring that the first nurse actually hit, i.e., promoting human welfare. This will bring about the problem of saying that the target-centered theory fails to make a distinction between the two cases. However, a proponent of virtue ethics in this sense could argue that, mentioned earlier, the evaluations do not really feel like they should be done in the same way. We should appreciate the character of the second nurse and blaming or praising her is not necessarily as important as the first case, where we feel very differently about the entire situation (Zyl, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 10, p. 123). It seems to be the case that even though the stories have the same result, being that neither nurse acted rightly, the evaluations are different based on how we perceive the conception of motive in conjunction with the targets of whatever virtue is in question. Virtue ethics in this way can be utilized differently and unlike deontology and consequentialism, which may claim that because of some other factor that each case involved a right action, virtue ethics appeals more to our moral intuitions. I think that analyzing this case from a virtue ethical position leads to a positive evaluation about the theory,

although I will now turn my attention briefly to look at two more theories of right action, the qualified-agent and agent-based.

The qualified-agent theory of right action present within virtue ethics is most agreeable with Hursthouse's claim about right action stated earlier. The agents in this theory are, of course, qualified, that is, they are moral experts and as they are virtuous, their actions are considered to be virtuous or not because they are either the actions of a virtuous agent or judged to be wrong by the agent. There is another portion of this that is necessary to understand: "…a *decision* is right iff it is what such an agent would decide, but the action decided upon may be too terrible to be called 'right' or 'good'" (Kawall, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 11, p. 130). This allows us to add a component to virtue ethics that allows it to be more complete in an area where utilitarianism is lacking. Just because the virtuous agent makes the decision we can say is right, we do not have to conclude that the action itself is right or good.

Jason Kawall's chapter in the *Handbook of Virtue Ethics* discusses agent-based virtue ethics, i.e., a form focused on the motivations of agents, wherein actions are right if motivations are good overall and permissible if motivations are at least not bad (Kawall, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 11, p. 131). The virtues themselves are the most important in ethics and all actions should be judged on whether or not the agent has good motivations. With that said, there are several factors that come into play when acting virtuously or not, and even though virtue ethics primarily focuses on the agent rather than individual acts, acts can still be *judged* as right or wrong and without genuine and good motivations, this judgment will always be negative. This conception of right action may be easily confused with the target-centered theory, but it is important to note the key difference being that motivations are not how acts are judged in the

target-centered theory; rather, there is the fact that the agent is able to hit the target—internal or external—virtue(s) or not that determines rightness or wrongness.

Some may make the claim that because with virtue ethics we are trying to account for human concerns while still attending to objectivity, a rule-centered system with rules anchored in human concerns is more beneficial as this kind of system will preserve both objectivity and human concerns. Reaching the main reasons against this requires looking at two particular arguments: the determinacy thesis and anti-codifiability. Yuval Eylon's chapter in the *Handbook of Virtue Ethics* describes this argument. To begin with, rules are unable to give meaning to ethical requirements. They fail to respond to questions involving the rule's application as well as questions about motivation. Instead, there is the concept of a VP (virtuous person), a person who "gets it right," is ethically competent in all areas, and in short, a blueprint for virtuous action (Eylon, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 12, p. 141). This person possesses the ability to seek out ethically relevant aspects of certain situations and act accordingly, using the situation to determine what actions to take. This leads into the other part of the argument, that of anti-codifiability. Virtue ethics itself is not meant to be codified. Within the system, there seems to be a sense available to the VP that is unable to be codified. Moreover, there is no way to justify codifiability as necessary if we recognize this sense of the VP, for example. This means that there is a way for the VP to accord his or her actions with a virtue ethical system because it fits well with intuitive morality. Thus, this allows us to argue for a virtue ethical system rather than deontological because of deontology's principles of rules and codifiability. Again, this limits deontology and is an area where virtue ethics shows its flexibility and application.

Even more importantly for a virtue ethical system, there is a difference in the approach that is taken when it comes to ethics in itself. This differs from both deontology and

consequentialism, as we will see in the subsequent sections. Instead of looking at acts as individual and specific, the agent is brought to the forefront, such as in the target-centered theory within virtue ethics, where the agent hitting the target virtues in a given situation determines good- or badness. This difference in approach also grants us the flexibility to take other aspects of situations into account like circumstances surrounding an act. An example will be addressed later: If good people allow for the torture of others, does that make them "bad" or anti-virtuous?

2. Deontology

I will now turn to discussions about deontology, its basic tenets, and arguments for and against while maintaining that virtue ethics is a more attractive theory. Immanuel Kant is the person most associated with deontology, so much so that this theory is often referred to as Kantian ethics. Singleton mentions what she calls the central activity of deontology. Kantian ethics' is given as the development of a good will (Singleton, 1999, p. 14). A good will is important to the Kantian system precisely because of duty, since individuals need to will themselves to their duty, and importantly *for the sake of duty itself*, in order to be acting "rightly" within this ethical system. This is primarily how she breaks down the Kantian ethical theory in comparison to virtue ethics and consequentialism, the latter of which will be discussed in the next section.

Acting in ways that we judge to be "good" is a key part of any ethical theory and deontology has reasons that are framed somewhat differently than those in virtue ethics. This is an important concept to clear up because what can be considered "good" in the two theories essentially determines the reasons for any theory of ethics—for virtue ethics, this means the virtues. However, Kant believes that the only thing in the world that can be considered good *without qualification*—an important distinction from simply good in that it is good in itself—is a good will. This good will comes from acting in accordance with maxims that pass Kant's test, the categorical imperative. This, according to Kant, means that maxims must be imperatives, i.e., rules that "…concern only [one's] will regardless of whether any purposes [one] has can be achieved by it or not" (Kant, 1956, p. 19). So, for Kant, maxims are merely subjective principles so by acting in accordance with maxims that are imperatives in the sense above, we are able to develop a good will. We could say that Kant agrees with the concept of the VP in so far as the

VP is someone who follows this account of action. The VP would agree as close as possible with having a good will and acting in ways that can become universally applied (Singleton, 1999, p. 15). We can begin to see some similarities between virtue ethical theories and deontology here. On one hand, the two utilize a good will, and virtue ethics, I would argue, requires it in order to act accordingly. On the other hand, this good will might not exist in the same way as virtue ethics, but an agent might accord with duty and still act accordingly within a deontological system. To clarify, the will may not be "good" in terms of intentions, but good in terms of duty. Like other theories of ethics, Kantian ethics can be instantiated in a variety of ways, including the agent-based and the patient-based.

Agent-based deontological theories place the agent at the center. In addition, they give the agent special permissions and obligations that are agent-relative, i.e., they are relative to the agent and do not need to constitute a reason for anyone else (Alexander & Moore, 2016, section 2.1, para. 1). This can be represented through examples involving individuals' family or friends, where individuals are obligated to treat these people in certain ways even if this takes away from benefits that could be given to others. Every person is to focus on their duty to other moral agents as well as keeping their own agency "free of moral taint" (Alexander & Moore, 2016, section 2.1, para. 2). There are three main types of agent-centered deontology: one focusing on our intentions as critical to the definition of our agency, one that more so emphasizes actions over intentions, and a third that conjoins the two former types (Alexander & Moore, 2016, section 2.1, para. 16). It is less important to get into details regarding these types of agent-centered deontology, but important to recognize that certain forms of deontological ethics even in the same field differ with regard to how agency is perceived. Regardless, it is important to make the following distinction between placing the agent at the center in deontology and doing

the same in virtue ethics. With virtue ethics, the agent's *development* is key, while in deontology, the act is still in many ways just as important as the agent; it is simply framed in a way that merely references the agent in terms of duty rather than character. This referencing comes from the fact that in many cases, the world may not be a better place by performing our duties or even acting within the rights of others without some sort of weighing system .

Patient-based deontological theories differ from agent-centered in that they are more rights-based rather than duty-based. These are not to be confused with basic core rights, such as the right not to be killed, but more along the lines of the right not to be used by another for another's benefit, without *consent*. They do not put emphasis on the mental state of the agent or the harm done to victim, but more so on whether or not the victim's body, labor, or talents were the means by which the results were produced (Alexander & Moore, 2016, section 2.2, para. 2). Thus, a patient-centered deontology would not allow any acceleration/causing of death in any sort of case (e.g., all will die in a given situation unless some other person is killed) while an agent-centered theory would allow these acts in the event that the agent's intentions are concentrated on saving the several people in danger and *not only knowing* that they will be saved and the intention is actually to harm the one person in the situation. The focus of the individual must be on saving the people with the unfortunate knowledge that someone else will die. The virtue ethical standpoint here supports actually being able to decide and act in acceptable ways through the qualified agent theory. Just because we can make the right decision does not mean we must conclude that the action itself is right—of course killing anyone is fundamentally wrong in any system of ethics focused on human welfare. For my argument, these two theories of deontology help to illustrate examples of theories that appeal to duty and rights, respectively.

However, these are plausible and ethical discussions would not be complete without an account of a deontological theory of ethics.

I will turn my attention to three main advantages that arise from the aforementioned theories of deontological ethics. Primarily, the theories provide a simpler and more straightforward account of action by appealing to duty rather than complex moral intuitions. As mentioned earlier, deontology allows individuals to act on a broader scale than a more demanding theory such as consequentialism (e.g., in consequentialism, in any situation, there is always something "better" that one could be doing). Acts that are not morally demanded in deontology are permissible (see p. 11), i.e., not morally wrong or praiseworthy within the system itself (Alexander & Moore, 2016, section 3, para. 2). A second advantage is brought about by our moral intuitions and is illustrated through examples placed within the scope of the acceleration of death cases. There is a difference in the way we think about someone who makes a choice to kill one person to save five who are in immediate danger and a doctor who decides to kill one person to provide organs, etc. for five other people. Of course, this depends on the theory of deontology one may subscribe to, but generally, if our intentions are good (and our primary objective is on saving the one instead of harming the five), we feel that the act is justified. This advantage gives deontology a versatility in the thought processes behind criticizing certain actions, because we can see that in the case of patient-centered theories, and in fact more generally in deontology, individuals have duties and rights. Whether one or the other is the focus of that particular theory is up to the theory. We would say that the doctor who wants to kill is wrong because there is no immediate danger for the other five—in fact, they may die even if something is done. But, the other acceleration of death cases may be judged as right. Consequentialism in this particular case would judge the act (in virtually all instances) to be right because the benefits (saving five)

outweigh the costs (killing one). Regardless, this advantage does not hurt a virtue ethical position, since even though the act may or may not be done, the focus is completely different by being on the agent rather than the act. Another advantage of deontology is that it has the potential to explain why certain people have the moral standing to hold others into account for not doing their duties (Alexander & Moore, 2016, section 3, para. 4). This is precisely because deontology is a *personal* ethical theory, i.e., *agents* are involved and taken into account, though tangentially through their duties. Indeed, these duties are to other people, unlike consequentialism or even virtue ethics—there is no vagueness or misunderstanding as to the nature of a duty in the sense that they do not refer to a state of affairs where it is unclear who exactly the duty falls on (Alexander & Moore, 2016, section, 3, para. 4).

Deontology of course has weaknesses that must be addressed. One is the fact that very rigid senses of duty, i.e., exclusively attending to duty, could make the world morally worse off. Second, despite Kant's insistence that conflicts between the duties, specifically imperfect duties, are inconceivable, this is a very real possibility that deontologists would need to address. This is far from inconceivable in fact, as we can clearly think of simple examples where this is realistic. Does a duty to one's family surpass the duty to one's job? A duty to save someone in danger or not to lie? An approach that has been brought up to deal with this potential conflict is that of *prima facie* duties (Alexander & Moore, 2016, section 4, para. 2-3). The problem with this is that it is in danger of falling into a kind of consequentialism, meaning that if we set certain duties as more important than others, we are weighing them based on circumstances outside the scope of duty or rationality. This is close to relative stringency, i.e., weighing various duties, which is almost forced on deontologists in the case of when conflicts arise between duties. Within relative stringency the deontologist is stuck because of the previous point about conflicts, but also

because in real life we do not punish all breaches of duties equally, nor does it seem rational or productive to do so. Even if a combination of deontology and consequentialism is proposed (e.g., "rule consequentialism"), some argue that it will simply fall into blind rule-worship, direct consequentialism, or nonpublicizability (Alexander & Moore, 2016, section 5.2, para. 2). Rule worship is undesirable in the sense that it will end up as irrational, i.e., why follow the rules if not doing so produces better consequences? Direct consequentialism we will see is undesirable but in this context rule consequentialism would fall into direct consequentialism by looking at the rules in terms of producing better consequences. Finally, there is the concept of nonpublicizability, which means that people should be instructed to follow the rules while their consequentialist bases should be hidden. This is so that those following the rules do not depart from them by believing that better consequences might be achieved. This is undesirable and in fact incompatible with what has been discussed so far about deontology. Deontology, simply put, involves "treating others the way you want to be treated," and, whether duty- or rights-based, nonpublicizability is directly contradictory to that. In addition, having consequentialism as a base in itself has constant potential to become strictly consequentialist.

How far does deontology stray from the virtue ethical standpoint, though? Dr. John O'Connor's article "Are Virtue Ethics and Kantian Ethics Really So Very Different?" gives an interesting perspective on the relationship between the two theories. This involves looking at intentions and principles and specifically interpreting what Kant means by "maxim" in his categorical imperative. If Kant defines "maxim" as a "subjective principle of volition," we do not exactly know how to take this because it is ambiguous and does not mean that the reason is included in the maxim, as required by Kant. So, O'Neill's interpretation is explained in this article: "those underlying principles or intentions by which we guide and control our more

specific intentions" (O'Connor, 2006, p. 246). This interpretation seems compatible with virtue ethics and unlike such a strict, codified approach to deontology that is common, this leaves room for our underlying intentions to be influenced by the kinds of people we are. Indeed, O'Neill also says that because her interpretation requires more specific situations and institutions, morally required rules of action may not be able to be generated without context (O'Connor, 2006, p. 247). This would employ almost a combination of virtue ethics and deontology as we have discussed the fact that virtue ethics is not really meant to be codified, but one portion of Kantian ethics that is often overlooked is present here, i.e., the recognition of specific situations and the difficulties that arise regarding creating rules of action. Likewise, there is a connection between the two theories in the larger sense as well, as in order to get to these specific situations, one must have an idea of the wider goals or aspirations of life to incorporate into decision-making. John McDowell's conception of virtue ethics, an agent-based approach, involves the agent (the virtuous person) necessarily stepping back to examine their own credentials for acting in certain ways, which requires looking at the wider goals and aspirations of the self (O'Connor, 2006, p. 247). Thus, we can say that if we take O'Neill's interpretation of Kant's "maxim" as plausible, then an agent-based virtue ethics fits well in terms of the concerns of the theory. Although this discussion involves one interpretation that helps to combine deontology and virtue ethics, virtue ethics by itself does not require codifiability to be present (see p. 8). This supports an argument that deontology is inferior to virtue ethics because it does not require rules and the ability to set out guidelines; rather, it might be considered that the virtues in the target-centered account are guidelines. Further, virtue ethics also does not take this out of the question. With that in mind, acting in ways that develop our character positively form virtuous individuals who will—and should—not need codified rules to act in virtuous ways.

Virtue ethics generally assumes that human nature can be shaped into virtuous ways of behavior through habituation; Kantian ethics is similar in this respect. Since Kant focuses on reason rather than the emotions, the reasoning part of an individual's character is what must be discussed. Kant views an individual with an inconsistent, particularistic will as no different than someone with no will at all (O'Connor, 2006, p. 252). This notion of consistency is key in this argument because Kant does not say anything to undermine the concept of habituation as far as the reasoning part of character is concerned. It makes sense even within Kantian ethics to say that the will needs to be consistent to develop ethical character and form moral agents with a will worth counting. However, I think it is worth mentioning that regardless, this is not something within the theory of Kantian ethics and instead a way to connect the two theories discussed so far.

Deontological theories hold the foundation for a virtue such as integrity, but Becker's article "Virtue Ethics, Applied Ethics, and Rationality Twenty-Three Years after *After Virtue*" gives reasons why deontology is not an applicable theory for analyzing virtues such as this. He claims that the deontological understanding of integrity—according with minimum standards—is too narrow (Becker, 2004, p. 277). This is done by appealing to chaotic behavior and constancy of character. In virtue ethics, individuals work to develop their character by according with various virtues, but with deontology, character is related directly to duty, regardless of whether particular situations in life require different actions that might affect an individual's character. Moreover, Becker says that this understanding of integrity has problems because "it implies that there are fixed standards and clear distinctions" when in reality we do not feel this way, since we think of individuals as having more or less integrity, not simply with or without (Becker, 2004, p. 277). This helps show the main advantage of virtue ethics discussed throughout the paper as

being more flexible and able to take note of different aspects of situations like the conception of duty and rights rather than strict, rigid senses of duty with no room for conflict. It is interesting to connect this with medical ethics later in the paper (see p. 29), where the professional vs. personal ethics distinction is analyzed. It will be shown that professional ethics may end up being too minimal. In this situation, no conflict is even necessary between these two; in fact, they are complimentary.

3. Consequentialism

Throughout this section, I will attempt to explain consequentialism and show that this theory lacks the genuineness and variety that virtue ethics addresses. The paradigm for consequentialism is utilitarianism, with proponents such as John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham. Classic utilitarianism refers to hedonistic act consequentialism, which holds that acts are morally right if and only if the act maximizes good and minimizes bad with the net good outweighing any bad that might arise, specifically referring to pleasure and pain as the only intrinsic good and bad, respectively (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2015, section 1, para. 1). This ethical theory is different from deontology in its essence. Moral evaluations are completed based on nothing other than consequences, whereas deontology uses principles and rules to judge right and wrong. For example, if an individual breaks a promise, deontology—and virtue ethics, for that matter—would claim that it was wrong to do so because of the fact that a promise was made in the past. Consequentialism would say that the act was wrong only in the case that breaking the promise would make other people unhappy, more so than the good that may come out of breaking the promise. This approach to ethics is fundamentally different than virtue ethics in particular (while similar to deontology in this respect) in that again, the act is centralized as being right or wrong while even more importantly, the agent is less important. However, there are differences in the kinds of consequentialism that affect evaluations of acts. Two main types are hedonistic and pluralistic.

Hedonistic consequentialism is a more simplistic form of viewing the world. Everything is reduced to two things: pain and pleasure (Moore, 2013, para. 1). More specifically, this is relevant to my arguments in that this form of consequentialism places value only in pleasure and disvalue only in pain or suffering. Years ago, many opposed hedonism on the grounds that

human life was reduced to that of animals, to which Mill responded with the idea that there are

different (higher and lower) forms of pleasures to be had (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2015, section 3,

para. 3). This means that if individuals have experienced both, they can judge which are which

and use this to sophisticate human life. This claim still gets challenged as being incoherent and

implausible using examples such as a sadist's pleasure from whipping his victims or due to the

fact that we hold many things to be valuable independent of pleasure or pain derived from them

(e.g., freedom or choice even when it causes anxiety, knowledge of the "unknown" with no

pleasure or pain had yet) (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2015, section 3, para. 4). Others reject hedonistic

consequentialism because it seems to overlook the value of *real* friendship, achievements, and

freedom for more superficial forms. One example, involving the "experience machine" is

discussed. This is essentially a hypothetical machine which people can enter and really *believe*

that they are with their friends, winning prizes, or getting maximum pleasure over pain. In reality

these people do not have the friends that they think they have nor do they accomplish anything

like what they felt in the machine. This kind of example shows that hedonism is limited in the

sense that we actually feel that more things matter in life than simply pleasure and pain. It may

be interesting, but it is not real; because we would say it is not irrational not to enter this

machine, pleasure and pain cannot be the only two things that matter (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2015,

section 3, para. 5). I also think the theory of virtue ethics is enhanced with this kind of example

because this superficiality does not take the deeper aspects of life into account just as other

ethical theories do not take deeper *moral* aspects of situations into account like virtue ethics

does. This point is clear, I think, but a hedonist could respond to this by saying that the values

instead *enhance* the values of real friendship through having those experiences in the machine.

Regardless, it seems too superficial for hedonism to be a widely accepted theory because most

people would agree that many things are valuable to us independent of pleasure or pain. This can

be supported by using an example like those discussed later, where we might feel differently

about a doctor if he or she is a cold person but very knowledgeable rather than less

knowledgeable but with a genuine care for the patient (see p. 27). Even if the doctor were to

cause us a significant amount of pain, the fact that we value his or her genuineness (as intuitive

morality would tell most people) means that we view pleasure or pain as less important and not

the fundamental "good" and "bad" in a situation.

      Pluralistic theories of value in consequentialism oppose hedonistic theories in the sense

that all values are not able to be reduced to a single ground like pleasure. Other values like

beauty, truth, knowledge, friendship, or freedom might be included in evaluations in addition to

pleasure and pain. This variety requires a kind of ranking or weighing in case of conflicts in

values; like deontology, this is difficult to accomplish, but allows for the recognition of

irresolvable moral dilemmas, which Kant himself claims do not exist (see p. 14). Pluralistic

consequentialism runs very close to deontology in some respects, especially when we consider

some examples of how evaluations might work. First, hedonists would not be able to come to an

answer in a case where we think promises should be kept and lying should not happen even

when no pain is caused or pleasure is lost. However, a pluralist could hold that knowledge is

intrinsically valuable and false belief is intrinsically bad. Agents lying promotes deception,

which is in itself a cause of false belief, so we can say that agents ought not to lie without a good

reason for it (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2015, section 3, para. 16). While I think this view is more

accurate and applicable than a hedonistic view, it seems very close to virtue ethics and I would

say that a pluralistic view is not utilitarian at all. This is because of the placement of value on

individual virtues, or intrinsic "goods" in this case rather than the traditional maximization and

consequentialist bases. The difference between this and utilitarianism is the fact that more matters than only a state of happiness or suffering, i.e., different concepts and values, which is why I find it quite close to virtue ethics. This makes virtue ethics more applicable because it is broader and, again, applies to individuals rather than each individual act. Moreover, the calculation aspect of consequentialism requires much of individuals and it makes ethical decisions much easier to make when the virtues are accorded with the people involved rather than weighing the consequences of one specific act against others.

A key set of problems for consequentialism is that of actual versus expected consequences. This can be discussed in terms of the calculations that seemingly must be done for those acting from the principle of utility, i.e., maximizing the good while minimizing the bad. The calculations aspect of certain types of consequentialism is meant to be a guide for action and indeed, it is impossible to calculate every consequence for every act of every person in any given situation. If this is the way to go about decisions, then this objection can turn consequentialism—classic utilitarianism in particular—into a self-refutable theory. If in certain cases it does not maximize utility to do these calculations before acting, then it makes it morally wrong to use the principle of utility, even with its centrality to the theory. Indeed, if some utilitarians were to suggest that many people should not usually perform these calculations because they may make serious miscalculations that lead to less than ideal consequences and ought to usually follow their moral intuitions, then the force seems to be taken away from consequentialism in that the theory seems useful only for theoretical situations rather than with real individuals making real decisions. Virtue ethics does not require as much in terms of these calculations because of the broader scope of the theory and as such, applies better in real-life decisions. Instead, the examples illustrating genuineness (see p. 7 and p. 30) show the much quieter way of making

decisions, where in many cases, there will not even need to be decisions; the virtuous person will act within his or her own nature.

Another challenge that consequentialism faces, again using the paradigm of utilitarianism, is that it seems to overlook justice and rights (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2015, section 5, para. 1). I will use an example from earlier (see p. 13), that of killing one person to save five others: one person must be killed in order to provide organs for five other people and the legal circumstances for the doctor are unproblematic. According to utilitarianism, it is not morally wrong to do the procedure and actually morally wrong for the doctor to *not* perform the operation. To the ordinary person this is not intuitive in terms of a moral choice and in fact gives no consideration to the donor's willingness (or unwillingness) or, more importantly, his or her right to life. This makes a theory such as virtue ethics seem more attractive as an ethical theory because of the respect given to others.

However, there may be a possibility for a virtue consequentialism, clarified and detailed in Bradley's article "Virtue Consequentialism." He criticizes and attempts to reform Julia Driver's formulation of virtue consequentialism throughout the article, which essentially provides a link between the virtues and certain traits that have good consequences. Some incomplete versions of virtue consequentialism do not properly evaluate some examples, such as the example of Downer who produces no intrinsic evil or good but maliciously prevents people from being happier than they could be if his actions were different. One such version is the following: "V is a virtue iff V is a character trait that produces more good in the world than it produces evil in the actual world" (Bradley, 2005, p. 284). This is problematic for the above example because the events that are prevented are obviously not intrinsically evil, but not good. So, he adjusts by saying that "V…character trait that systematically produces a greater balance

of intrinsic good over intrinsic evil in the actual world than the absence of V would

systematically produce" (Bradley, 2014, p. 285). The idea is then brought up relating the

consequences of traits to virtues. Bradley does this through disagreeing with the concept of

maximizing, which becomes a problem in any consequentialist theory, as it seems wrong to say

that someone is not virtuous because he or she does not have the best possible trait that he or she

could have. His conception of virtue contrastivism deals with the necessity of a choice from a

contrasting class of traits (C2) to be compared to a character trait (C1). Counterfactualism also

plays a role in his view of virtue consequentialism, where in his preference, "…a virtue is a

character trait that would have good consequences if people were to possess and exercise it"

(Bradley, 2005, p. 291). Essentially, this seems to mean that virtues and consequentialism are

linked and that virtues are considered good character traits if they produce good consequences.

This variation of consequentialism is valuable, I think, because of the emphasis on virtues as part

of consequences rather than simply an act consequentialism as discussed earlier. Although

Bradley does not argue against virtue ethics or Kantian ethics or for any form of

consequentialism, his main goal is to detail virtue consequentialism and it seems more attractive

to include virtues in discussions of consequentialism rather than simply utilizing a simpler act

consequentialism.

I would conclude that consequentialism is not a complete ethical theory and even in cases

where virtues are involved, a complete ethical theory would need to tell us what is good and how

to make ourselves "better" people, i.e., having strong character. Singleton makes the claim that

consequentialism falls short in that it tells us neither how we ought to act (only in immediate

decisions), nor what character we should develop, nor what counts as a "good" outcome

(Singleton, 1999, p. 7). In addition, she claims that it is a doctrine about promoting an end that

does not exist, "doing rather than being" (Singleton, 1999, p. 7). Directness and clarity are

conveyed here but it is limited as developing an individual's character is totally irrelevant since

consequences are all that matter. This directly references the agents vs. acts concept as virtue

ethics is a way of being rather than doing, which I think makes it both more applicable as well as

intuitive.

Related to the conception of character, Becker's article discussed in the previous section

with regard to integrity is also applicable in this case to compare a utilitarian approach and a

virtue ethical approach to integrity. Becker analyzes the 'dirty hands' example from an older

article by Michael Walzer: there is a politician who is opposed to the war that his country is

involved in and runs on platforms of peace. He goes to the colonial capital to negotiate with the

rebels and is asked to authorize the torture of a captured rebel leader (Beckers 2004, p. 278). I

have established that the traditional understanding of integrity given by deontology is complying

with minimum standards but here, we will see that according to utilitarianism, the definition still

does not work. In the example, the man orders the rebel leader tortured even though he strongly

opposes it and often preaches against it. This man is considered "good" and has done many good

deeds in his life to show for it (Becker, 2004, p. 278). Should we view this man as losing his

integrity or not? Utilitarianism might claim that this man does not lose his integrity because of

these many good deeds despite the fact that he is going against his deeply held convictions.

However, it is missing the point that is going beyond the calculation of a utilitarian. We still trust

this man because of these good deeds he has done and understand that the situation demanded

certain actions from him according to a deeper rationality found in a virtue ethical system.

However, utilitarianism would not necessarily say that we could trust this man precisely because

the calculative nature of the system does not take the deeper moral dimension of the case into

account (Becker, 2004, p. 278). Virtue ethics reveals the deeper morality that allows us to still

trust this man precisely because of the circumstances surrounding the authorization of the torture

of the rebel leader. I think this example supports the claim that utilitarianism is limited in terms

of its conclusions (or lack thereof) about individuals' characters, specifically here, integrity.

Similarly, it helps show that virtue ethics is much more applicable because it takes the

circumstances surrounding the choice of the "good" man in the example into account more than

a simple calculation involving good deeds outweighing bad ones.

4.   Medical and Environmental Application

In this section, I hope to make the case for virtue ethics as the most applicable theory for the areas of medical (specifically nursing) and environmental ethics, although both can be muddy in terms of moral decisions. Starting with medical ethics, McCabe's chapter in the *Handbook of Virtue Ethics* details the virtue ethics of care in medical practice, with the motive of care or concern for others as the foundation for moral judgment. Three features stem from this: empathetic understanding, sensitivity to context, and balanced care (McCabe, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 29, p. 330). Autonomy is discussed with empathetic understanding, and although much of the time this concept is discussed deontologically, in virtue ethics it becomes a part of human welfare and helps to develop and nurture relationships and positive interactions between the person caring and the person being cared for. It is also noted, connecting with sensitivity to context, that virtue ethics will not take a rigid stand on any general practice or action and will instead base decisions from the foundation of care for others and in many cases will consider alternatives to a general rule. And finally, balancing will be necessary for the person caring for someone else (e.g., balancing his or her own family life with current and prospective patients). Overall, these three bases of the virtue ethics of care should be embodied within the actions of anyone caring to make the action more admirable, virtuous, or even morally intuitive (McCabe, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 29, p. 330-331). Likewise, the less these are embodied, the more an action might be judged as negative or insensitive. However, we must keep in mind that in the virtue ethics of care there are cases where exceptions should be considered which can be relevant in situations where other ethical theories may fall short, specifically Kantian ethics. This concept of the virtue ethics of care has its foundation in the virtue ethical idea of the

development of character and, as we will see in the next few pages, the ability to make difficult choices and, again, genuineness.

One case discussed in this chapter of the *Handbook* to illustrate the concept of confidentiality is the Tarasoff case decided in California in 1976. The facts of this case involve the murder of Tatiana Tarasoff by Prosenjit Poddar. In 1969, Poddar admitted his intentions to a psychologist who worked with others to have him admitted to a mental hospital for observation. Police officers, shortly after taking Poddar into custody, released him after believing he was rational and accepting his promise to stay away from Ms. Tarasoff. Within two months of his release, he convinced the brother of the victim to share an apartment near Ms. Tarasoff and when she returned from a trip, he went to her residence and killed her. The parents of Ms. Tarasoff sued the psychiatry department for negligence, i.e., failing to inform Ms. Tarasoff of the danger to her life.

This case illustrates the fact that common sense morality tells us that we should be able to break confidentiality due to the significance of the potential danger to the victim's life. Virtue ethics would agree with this idea as well in the sense that virtue ethics of care would not generally hold such rigid standards where in *no* circumstances could confidentiality be broken. Virtue ethics of care justifiably allows for the breach of confidentiality in this case. There was a lack of concern for the welfare of Ms. Tarasoff, even though she was not a patient, through the two months after Poddar's release where nothing was done by either the doctors or the authorities. This goes against the foundation delineated through the virtue ethics of care, developing from a concern for others. Confidentiality, in this case, could have been broken due to the severity of danger to Ms. Tarasoff (McCabe, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 29, p. 335). This can evolve into a slippery slope where patient confidentiality is constantly broken due to

concern for third parties, but it is important to remember that virtue ethics is not a one-size-fits-all approach and this is precisely where it is more advantageous than Kantian ethics. This is through the fact that in deontology, there would need to be a rule to apply to all people to justify breaking this when in reality, it is up to individuals' judgment and never clear-cut. As we have seen using the example of the leader who authorized the torture of a rebel, just because confidentiality is broken does not mean that trust is broken within the moral system. We still trust the people who broke confidentiality because of the requirements of the deeper moral aspect of the situation. I think this shows a strength of virtue ethics because the system will allow the individuals making the decisions to determine whether breaking confidentiality will primarily develop virtuous character in an individual and secondarily produce either good or bad consequences. However, I think this is where it would be helpful to look at consequences, since one of virtue ethics' strengths involves taking other circumstances into account, but not as a final solution, as this is one of the weaknesses of consequentialism.

What sets virtue ethics apart from other ethical theories with respect to medical ethics is the genuine concern for others, i.e., the genuine kindness. Putman's article "A reply to 'Scepticism about the virtue ethics approach to nursing ethics' by Stephen Holland: the relevance of virtue in nursing ethics" details arguments for virtue ethics in this field. He discusses the fact that anyone subscribing to a theory of Kantian ethics can show this concern without "being kind" at all. For example, as discussed earlier, there could be a nurse who dislikes a patient but still behaves positively due to duty. Another example is someone visiting a dying family member out of duty, not necessarily acting in a way that most people would regard as "good" or "right." Instead of truly caring for this person, duty plays the only role in the visit. This goes against the virtue ethics of care and shows again how deontology can allow agents to perform acts without

being genuine. In addition, Putman mentions that this limits the scope of the nurse/person caring's actions towards to the patient to only those according with the "professional duty" of the nurse. Anything beyond this would give the patient the idea that the nurse really does not truly care for him or her at all (Putman, 2012, p. 142). Thus, being kind and genuine and acting kindly from duty are not equivalent. Likewise, this applies to utilitarianism or consequentialism as well. Whether the patient's pain or suffering is relieved is all that matters, not genuine concern for him or her (Putman, 2012, p. 143). I think most people would perceive this genuineness to be a key factor in whether or not they feel someone is acting rightly, especially when one is being cared for and the possibility for an illusion of this in both deontology and consequentialism helps make the case for virtue ethics stronger.

Putman argues for the importance of virtue ethics against Holland's view using the personal-professional dilemma, i.e., one's professional ethics should be distinct from his or her personal ethics. Putman claims that virtue ethics has nothing that inherently disregards differences in roles in life and using Aristotle: "[His] example of the soldier is clearly a different role than the educator, but courage is courage" (Putman, 2012, p. 143). This is intuitive and clearly different manifestations of virtues in various situations will occur. Using a modern example, a soldier might have to face an enemy with a gun while educators may risk their careers bringing up critical but controversial topics in class (Putman, 2012, p. 143). According to Putman, Holland's claim that virtue ethics focused on eudaimonia destroys nursing ethics in itself is the most critical area, among others, where Holland fails to reject virtue ethics. Putman responds by saying that professional ethics are neither stand-alone nor complete but rather "minimum guidelines" (Putman, 2012, p. 143). The virtuous person will not need to be told to act kindly in this context but will likely need guidance in how to act *in certain situations*. Virtue

ethics is stronger here because the professional code is not the most important aspect; the motivator, the virtuous person is. Indeed, the reliance on professional codes as complete, Putman says, is the reason why virtue ethics is needed today (Putman, 2012, p. 144). Virtue ethics is a way of being more so than simply a way of acting, and separating professional ethics from personal ethics implies that something other than what we have set out as the goals of an ethical theory is the goal in our professional lives even if, as is generally agreed upon, we are to strive for these in our personal lives. This supports my main claim throughout this paper about virtue ethics, i.e., it may involve looking at consequences or duties, but it does not limit itself in the context of nursing to only looking at those things since clearly it will depend on the situation. Holland claims that virtue ethics reduces the amount of resources available to a nurse, but Putman responds by saying that the focus of virtue ethics in Aristotle and Plato is the virtues in *practice* and uses Holland's point that the nurse should utilize all resources available to him or her to contradict, in fact, the claim that professional and personal ethics should be separated (Putman, 2012, p. 145). The notion of practice is important, to go further, in that this implies a use in the larger societal context (e.g., nursing).

Inherently, personal ethics is not separated from professional ethics and virtue ethics provides a way to combine these while also using intuitive morality to take consequences or duties into account in various situations while not limiting oneself to these rigidly. An important concept of Kantian ethics that deals exclusively with agents' intentions is discussed in Donaldson's article "Using Kantian Ethics in Medical Ethics Education." This concept fits with a virtue ethical approach as well, with a focus on the intentions of the physician, keeping away from expectations of perfection within the medical field (Donaldson, 2017, p. 843). Instead of focusing on outcomes and blaming doctors for bad outcomes, Donaldson claims that we should

focus on the *intentions* of the physician in looking at ethical situations, recognizing of course that this is not the only approach, but useful in thinking about physicians individually. This is important because it connects to the virtue ethical advantage of taking the circumstances of situations into account just as we can use aspects of our personal ethics in professional ethics. This is also relevant to the discussion of integrity and character, since these choices that physicians or nurses make, regardless of the consequences, have a deeper moral meaning that needs to be taken into account that the other theories simply are not able to address.

The second field of focus in this section, environmental ethics, is also one that is debated heavily, and virtue ethics seems to be the most applicable option. Holly's review of environmental ethics literature is purported to show virtue ethics, which she refers to as "virtue theory," as superior to both deontology and utilitarianism. To start, she says that virtue theory provides an attractive alternative to environmentalists not satisfied with deontology or utilitarianism because these "were not intended to apply to nonhuman nature" (Holly, 2006, p. 392). Indeed, this is evident in the theories themselves, as humans are involved consistently in all examples in one way or another; in environmental ethics, the environment plays a much different role. The first section of this review discusses Lisa Newton's book *Ethics and Sustainability,* which centers on why utilitarian consequentialism and deontology do not pertain to the environment using the virtue of simple living or simplicity in itself as a main focus. This includes less consumption of material resources and goods, and is brought about, Holly notes, by virtue theory (Holly, 2006, p. 395). We should use this in conjunction with a thinking about the environment (called the "Land Ethic" in the paper), a virtually consequentialist approach that helps us to develop our virtuous character towards the environment for future generations (Holly, 2006, p. 395). This can help with criticisms that virtue ethics can reach places that are too

subjective because we are still thinking about the effects on the environment for future generations. It is more objective since it gives a more certain criterion for what would be virtuous, rather than simply saying it is so because the person is virtuous. Of course, it is important to reinforce that virtue ethics will not be a certain moral theory despite it being more attractive. In the above sense, we can see how consequentialism is used in a way that enhances a virtue ethical system and does not restrict one's morality to simply consequences.

Holly makes the distinction between two joys that illustrates the benefit that virtue ethics can have on a person. Joy 1 comes from directly viewing a beautiful landscape while Joy 2, an additional joy, comes from knowing that one is a person who protects that landscape (Holly, 2006, p. 396). This is important to my argument because I think it shows that an environmental virtue ethics is superior in that its effects are more genuine and therefore more valuable than deontology. Virtue ethics in the example produces joy in valuing the environment for its virtues of beauty or stability in themselves and knowing that one is contributing to that. Deontologists may be able to benefit the environment out of a sense of duty, but virtue ethical approaches do so from an intrinsic motivation and so the benefits are greater. Utilitarianism might also benefit the environment, but it could also motivate a destructive action just as easily depending on the consequences.

Holly also looks at Holmes Rolston III's article "Environmental Virtue Ethics: Half the Truth, but Dangerous as a Whole," which discusses human beings as existing within a natural environment and needing an evolved fittedness to it, i.e., we must defend ourselves in nature and respect it, the latter of which being our goal. Holly, then, recognizes that we should have the motive to respect the intrinsic value of the creatures in nature, not in attaining virtue (Holly, 2006, p. 408). Indeed, it is contrary to this theory to act selfishly just to attain virtue. Only

through showing respect for intrinsic virtues, such as the example above that describes joy 2 as valuing the environment for its intrinsic values like beauty and stability and knowing that you are contributing to that; there is no selfish intent here, but a respect for the intrinsic values of the environment.

Another article that Holly analyzes that I think is of importance is "The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Language" by Louke van Wensween. In this, Holly recognizes the evolution that virtue ethics has undergone and compares van Wensween's view of what virtue ethics should be regarding the environment to Aristotle, saying that we should not create character that fits with an ideal social system, but rather go beyond simply changing our views about the environment and engage in discourse that opens ourselves up to possible changes in more or less important virtues that should be taken into account (Holly, 2006, p. 417). This is relevant to earlier discussion about integrity because we need to be able to trust each other in order to make well-informed ethical decisions and this discourse will only work if we take deeper moral circumstances into account, especially about something as large-scale as the environment. I think that this view again is much more applicable than deontology or consequentialism because it allows for much more flexibility with moral decisions about the environment. This is due to the potential for necessary or more urgent change created by scientific evidence. It helps people discuss what should be done in the context of a situation while not reducing decisions to specifics. With that said, these things can still be taken into account in conjunction with agreed upon virtues.

5. Problems with Virtue Ethics

With any system of morality, there are problems that need to be addressed and the same is true for virtue ethics. I have discussed some relevant to both deontology and consequentialism but this final section will focus on the problems with specifically virtue ethics and the responses that might be given for these by proponents of the theory.

One problem for virtue ethics is discussed in the *Handbook of Virtue Ethics* in Kawall's chapter. This is the problem of circularity in establishing the basis for rightness. Essentially, the problem comes about when we say that actions are right if and only if virtuous agents would perform them. However, we need to then provide an account of the virtues in order for this to work; this could potentially involve appealing to right actions, making the system circular (Kawall, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 11, p. 134). Kawall analyzes Hursthouse's response to this worry, that is, that her virtue ethics relies on the concept of the *good* of human beings and what actually benefits them in some way. In this view, it is more intuitive to be able to understand the virtues and right action through appealing to the "good" and other moral concepts (Kawall, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 11, p. 134-35). It may be said that this response looks a lot like utilitarianism or some form of simple consequentialism. This is recognized in this chapter as well, with the author noting that Hursthouse would say that rightness is not linked to any form of maximization of human flourishing while it is linked to, as she says, the good and benefit of human beings. I think this means that there is a clear separation between a virtue ethical approach and a utilitarian one (in terms of *maximizing* the good or only taking it into account) while it still keeps open the possibility of looking at consequences to make decisions and does not limit the system as consequentialism seems to do.

A second problem brought up in this chapter is that of bridging the gap between ordinary and virtuous agents. Kawall uses Robert Johnson's position to illustrate this problem, i.e., that there are actions that seem clearly right for certain ordinary agents but that virtuous agents would never perform (Kawall, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 11, p. 136). For example, taking an agent who has a tendency to lie, it seems plausible that this agent ought to keep a log of his or her lies as well as when or why he or she feels tempted to lie. However, no fully virtuous agent would perform actions such as these, because he or she would not have a character inclined toward dishonesty from the definitions of virtue ethics set forth earlier. On a similar note, there are some actions that we would say ought to be performed by virtuous agents but not certain ordinary agents. An example for this would be a virtuous tennis player, where we say he or she ought to go up to the victor after a loss and congratulate him or her. But, for an ordinary agent with the character trait of being a sore loser and the likelihood or starting an altercation, if he or she were to go up to the victor, the situation may escalate, and a virtuous character would not be developed. In this case, we would say that the ordinary agent ought not go up to the victor and should perhaps smile and walk away (Kawall, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 11, p. 136-37). These examples show that there is a problem within a virtue ethical system with what is virtuous for different people, but I think it is also clear that it has to do with an individual's character and more specifically, the circumstances that the agent finds him- or herself in. Thus, there is a response proposed by Valerie Tiberius in this chapter following the examples above: "An action A is right for [an individual] in circumstances C [if and only if] it is the action in accordance with the reasons that would guide the action of a completely virtuous person acting in C" (Kawall, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 11, p. 137). Related to the example above, we can see that this might refer to self-improvement (Kawall, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 11, p. 137). The liar

is working to improve him or herself through keeping track of information regarding the lies since this would guide a virtuous person within the circumstances the agent is in. In the other case, the virtuous tennis player would be acting out of respect for the opponent. Similarly, by smiling and walking away, the sore loser would be showing respect for the victor in a way that would guide the actions of a completely virtuous person in the same circumstances (Kawall, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 11, p. 137). Further, virtue ethics supports the habituation of individuals (see p. 18). I think this fits with an intuitive sense of morality and again, allows one to take in other aspects of a situation other than only consequences or duty.

A third problem for virtue ethics is found in Oakley's chapter of the *Handbook of Virtue Ethics*. The section of the chapter discusses criticisms that are commonly applied to a virtue ethical approach to morality from the perspective of consequentialism. One criticism recognizes that in certain cases, virtue ethics can justify actions that have terrible consequences (Oakley, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 6, p. 68). The example of a Catholic missionary is used. This missionary is in Africa, working to undermine government efforts to provide contraceptives to people living in certain areas. In this case, the consequences of preventing contraceptives to reach the population could be the opposite of virtuous, i.e., contributing to the explosion of the population, which is potentially devastating for future generations, and the subjection of women (Oakley, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 6, p. 68). This problem does create issues for virtue ethics and its accounting for right action when bad consequences such as these are perhaps foreseeable. A common response by virtue ethicists to this problem is described by Oakley in the chapter, where it might be said "that the agent involved does not have the relevant virtue after all, or that the agent lacks another virtue which would be more important in this context" (Oakley, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 6, p. 69). This response works well when it is put into

the context of the example given previously. The missionary described could be said to be acting

from a virtue of religious devoutness, which I think is to be viewed as a virtue due to its

requirements regarding the will, etc. However, we might say—due to these disastrous

consequences—that he or she lacks the broader virtue of justice in not foreseeing (assuming this

was possible) the continual subjection of women in the regions in which he or she is working

(Oakley, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 6, p. 69). So, virtue ethics then has the ability to

evaluate actions by some virtuous agents as wrong due to looking at the consequences. Again,

here I feel that this is a strength of virtue ethics because it can take consequences into account

but is flexible and also requires agents to be held accountable and vigilant when making moral

decisions rather than blindly following a generic act-based system of ethics. This chapter refers

to the fact that some virtue ethicists have argued for a "regulative ideal" or "internalized

normative standard of excellence" that helps to guide individuals' actions to conform to that

standard depending on the circumstances (Oakley, in van Hooft (Ed.), 2014, Chapter 6, p. 70).

This is almost describing a target-centered account of right action (see p. 7), which I think is

another way to deal with this problem of consequences. If the most important virtues are reached

by an agent's act, then we would say the act is right. Overall, though, I do not think that this

problem is all that disastrous for the virtue ethical point of view because it is easily refutable.

     Another problem that may be raised by opponents of virtue ethics is from Louden's

article "On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics." This article primarily deals with problems arising

from the fact that the focus in virtue ethics is on the agents rather than the acts and Louden notes

that moral backsliding may occur due to this focus (Louden, 1984, p. 231). According to him,

this backsliding is bound to occur because the emphasis is on long-term patterns of behavior

rather than individual, specific acts: "Even the just man may on occasion act unjustly, so why

haggle over specifics?" (Louden, 1984, p. 231). This problem is to be expected, since it seems that in everyday life, we experience similar situations, i.e., where we think one small wrongdoing will be okay since we view ourselves still as "good" or virtuous. This may well quickly cause us to fall into a cycle of doing the wrong things rather than the right, which would indeed not be in accordance with virtue ethics. I think that a virtue ethicist would say in response that it is not only the person that is being looked at, but also the circumstances he or she finds him or herself in; however, they would not dispute that individuals would be acting wrongly in those cases and likely mistake themselves to have whatever virtue they think they have. Moreover, it is incomplete to criticize virtue ethics on this account because—using a target-centered account of virtue ethics—there are several different virtues which could be in question and while one small lapse might make the person lack slightly a piece of one virtue, they would not instantaneously become a bad person. There is still the potential to have other virtues which, depending on the situation, might be more important. After all, this is hypothetical and is not guaranteed to happen, so the kind of person involved might also play a role.

The final problem that I would like to bring up is given by Louden and is termed utopianism. This is due to, as he says, the fact that virtue ethics is almost a way to resolve the fact that our society has no set way of looking at morality, i.e., there are different virtues for different aspects of society. Further, he says "our world lacks the sort of moral cohesiveness and value unity which traditional virtue theorists saw as prerequisites of a viable moral community" (Louden, 1984, p. 231). This essentially is viewing virtue ethics as too idealistic and in fact, it may be in certain forms. However, Louden responds with his own view that is a potential response by a virtue ethicist to this claim. This is essentially summarized as being a coordination between different theories rather than thinking within a "single-element or mononomic tradition

(a tradition which contemporary virtue-based theorists have inherited from their duty-based and goal-based ancestors)…" (Louden, 1984, p. 235). Nothing of what I have said here would indicate that a virtue ethicist would disagree with this kind of statement since, throughout this paper, I have emphasized virtue ethics' strength of flexibility and non-rigidity. In addition, I believe that by using elements like the professional vs. personal ethics distinction (or lack thereof), one can see the ways that virtue ethics can be used in different ways rather than a more rigid form. It does sound perfect to reduce everything to generic and easily recognizable virtues, but realistically, this will not work for every situation.

6. Conclusion

Several options may seem plausible in the moral world, but I think it is clear from this paper that neither deontology nor consequentialism is a good fit for making moral decisions on their own. I believe that a virtue ethical system that, as I have discussed, incorporates aspects of deontology or consequentialism in the appropriate situations is the most applicable and valuable theory of morality. Misselbrook makes the case for a similar form of virtue ethics in his article: "Virtue ethics – an old answer to a new dilemma? Part 2. The case for inclusive virtue ethics." He does this through utilizing the three systems' purposes similarly to how Singleton described them: virtue ethics provides the system for the agent, deontology for the act, and consequentialism for the consequences (Misselbrook, 2015, p. 91). This is especially true in the real world, where we need to use our judgment to make decisions and act. In addition, from personal experience it is clear that few, if any, actions we perform are perfect. Thus, I think virtue ethics allows us to build trust with each other through a development of character while the other theories give us appropriate "heuristic tools" to support those decisions (Misselbrook, 2015, p. 92). Finally, Misselbrook mentions that moral reasoning in itself is a human activity rooted in "human givens, human transactions, [and] human relationships" (Misselbrook, 2015, p. 92). With this in mind, why would we solely rely on ethical systems that reduce moral reasoning to calculative structures or requiring duty for the sake of duty? It is much more valuable for us to not only have flexibility in our moral decisions, but also to be focused on the agent as equally as important as, or even more important than, the act. Actions are not individual and unconnected in this way; rather, they are indicative of human beings and perhaps working to develop our character will allow us to make more "right" decisions more often.

Regardless, I believe that the position of virtue ethics and its differences from deontology and consequentialism are evident. Virtue ethics allows for, primarily, the ability to take more circumstances into account than duty and consequences. It creates trust among people, and this is a key part of any effective ethical theory. This genuineness that exists comes into play in various ways, specifically in medical ethics. In addition, the idea of character, specifically integrity, is also connected, as virtue ethics allows for individuals to make decisions precisely because they have done something in the past, while the other theories approach these kinds of decisions and evaluations in different ways; virtue ethics focuses on the agent himself rather than the act. I believe that this allows for the focus on the individual's character to be fuller and more genuine because even in deontology, if the agent is important, the act is still more important because of the emphasis on duty. Finally, virtue ethics is superior to deontology and consequentialism respectively because it requires very little calculation and is not meant to be codified. As mentioned, I think that these two are undesirable because they do not fit with our moral intuitions. Virtue ethics, however, does, so this helps us learn to act virtuously and hopefully, be able to habituate ourselves to the point where we are our own example for "good."

References

Alexander, L. and Moore, M. (2016). Retrieved from https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-

    deontological/.

Becker, M. (2004). Virtue ethics, applied ethics and rationality twenty-three years after *After*

    Virtue. *South African Journal of Philosophy, 23*(3), 267-281.

Bradley, B. (2005). Virtue consequentialism. *Utilitas, 17*(3), 282-298.

    doi:10.1017/S0953820805001652

Donaldson, C. (2017). Using Kantian ethics in medical ethics education. *Medical Science*

    Educator, 27(4), 841-845.

Holly, M. (2006). Environmental virtue ethics: A review of some current work. *Journal of*

    Agricultural and Environmental Ethics, 19(4), 391-424.

Hooft, S., (Ed.). (2014). *The handbook of virtue ethics*. Durham: Acumen Publishing Limited.

Louden, R. (1984). On some vices of virtue ethics. *American Philosophical Quarterly, 21*(3),

    227-236.

Misselbrook, D. (2015). Virtue ethics – an old answer to a new dilemma? Part 2. The case for

    inclusive virtue ethics. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine, 108*(3), 89-92.

Moore, A. (2013). Retrieved from https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hedonism/.

O'Connor, J. D. (2006). Are virtue ethics and Kantian ethics really so very different? *New*

    Blackfriars, 87: 238-252. doi:10.1111/j.0028-4289.2006.00143.x

Pettigrove, G. (2011). Virtue ethics. Retrieved from https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-

    virtue/.

Putman, D. (2012). A reply to 'Scepticism about the virtue ethics approach to nursing ethics' by

      Stephen Holland: The relevance of virtue in nursing ethics. *Nursing Philosophy, 13*(2),

      142-145.

Singleton, J. (1999). *Virtue ethics, Kantian ethics, and consequentialism*. University of

      Hertfordshire. Retrieved from:

      https://uhra.herts.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/2299/1152/103504.pdf?sequence=1.

Sinnott-Armstrong, W. (2015). Retrieved from

      https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism/.