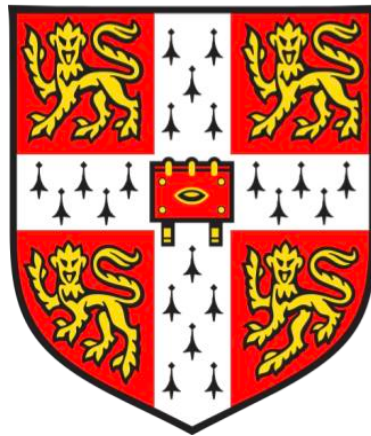


# Neglected Virtues: Love, Hope and Humility

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# Neglected Virtues: Love, Hope, and Humility

## Thesis Abstract

Love, hope and humility are neglected elements of our moral lives in comparison to widely recognized traits like justice and courage. In my dissertation I explore these phenomena in order to have a better conception of them and vindicate their place in our moral lives.

In the first section I examine the connection between love and knowledge in Murdoch's *The Sovereignty of Good*. Murdoch makes the strange suggestion that love is a form of knowledge. How do we reconcile this claim with love's heterogeneous and messy everyday manifestations? I develop an interpretation of Murdochian love, arguing that Murdoch conceives of love as a virtue, and as belonging at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of the virtues. This vindicates the epistemic role Murdochian love fulfils, since she conceives of the virtues as involving knowledge. I then apply this conception of love to debates about epistemic partiality, and suggest that it gives reason to think that such discussions have gone awry in taking for granted a questionable conception of friendship.

Next, I turn to hope. Hope can powerfully influence our lives, deeply shaping our actions and character, as well as being essential for social and political movements. I propose a new account of hope in which hopes characteristically shape and figure in intentions. This account does justice to hope's distinctive manifestations in action, explains the rational constraints on hoping, and sheds light on the distinctions between hoping and related states such as wishing. Is hope a virtue? On the one hand, hope can be a powerful force for good. But on the other this thought is in tension with the observation that we can hope for evil things. I argue that hope is necessary for engaging in a broad kind of project which is essential in order to live a meaningful human life, and that this gives reason to think it is a virtue.

In the final section I explore an additional trait which can at first appear to be a strange addition to the canon of virtues: humility. Humility has sometimes been understood as a kind of servility or self-ignorance, but such traits do not obviously seem virtuous, and do not involve knowledge. In this chapter, I correct these misconceptions of humility and offer an account of it as a disposition not to valorise relative superiority. This account does justice to the moral value of humility while avoiding the concerning implication that ignorance can constitute a kind of virtue. I argue that humility thus understood plays an important role in our ethical development. Finally, I argue that some recent arguments offered by Morgan-Knapp suggesting that pride in relative superiority is theoretically mistaken are unsuccessful.



# Preface

## Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.



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## Introduction

# Neglected Virtues: Love, Hope and Humility

What is *Othello* about? We might pick out some core elements of the story as follows: Desdemona truly loves Othello; Othello (mistakenly) trusts Iago; Iago is consumed with envy of Othello and Cassio; Cassio hopes to regain his rank; Iago cunningly undermines Othello's love for Desdemona; Desdemona (fatally) hopes that Othello will see the light. This description of some of the play's themes picks out elements that are ubiquitous within our everyday lives: love, hope, trust, envy. Moreover, they seem like central elements of our specifically *ethical* experience: what we hope for, what and how we love, and what we take pride in seem like important respects in which we evaluate human lives.

Early twentieth century ethics was beset by the accusation that it discussed our ethical lives in terms that failed to resonate with our everyday experiences.<sup>1</sup> All too often, it seemed that philosophers ignored the diversity of ethical experiences, favouring an understanding of ethics in terms of abstract concepts that failed to do justice to concrete moral experiences such as those mentioned above. Iris Murdoch (1970), for example, expresses 'exasperation' with a

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<sup>1</sup> For variants of this dissatisfaction with contemporary moral philosophy, see Anscombe (1958); Foot (1958/2002); Murdoch (1970); Stocker (1976); Wiggins (1978); McDowell (1979); MacIntyre (1981).

philosophy that insists that “morality resides at the point of action” (Murdoch 1970; p. 16), leaving little space for such seemingly significant ethical concepts as love and humility.<sup>2</sup>

In response, recent decades have witnessed an increasing interest in virtue ethics, and a widespread acceptance of it as a viable framework within which to examine ethical questions. With this resurgence has come a much-expanded sense of the ethical questions worth asking; ethical questions are no longer understood to be only those that are about the good and the right, but also those that concern the kind, the just, and the generous. This thesis will not speak directly to debates about virtue ethics, and I shall not offer an argument for considering it the correct normative theory or indeed consider whether it is best understood as a rival theory to deontology and consequentialism at all. However, the thesis *is* framed by the assumption that the notion of virtue is both meaningful and useful, and that whether a particular trait is a virtue is a question that is worth asking.

In this thesis, I will explore three features of our ethical lives that, despite the resurgence of virtue ethics, remain underexplored: love, hope, and humility. I will seek to reflect on the nature of each of these in a way that does justice to the role that they play in our ordinary lives and to their wider ethical importance. Each, I will suggest, is well thought of as a virtue, although in somewhat different senses, and for very different reasons.

What might we hope to gain by having a fuller understanding of the particular virtues? Firstly, it seems important to understand such phenomena simply in order to have an accurate and undistorted view of our ethical lives. Murdoch, for example, describes the ‘task of philosophy’ as:

[T]he provision of rich and fertile conceptual schemes which help us to reflect upon and understand the nature of moral progress and moral failure and the divergence of one moral temperament from another. (Murdoch 1970; 45)

And she highlights in particular the significance of having adequate conceptions of the particular virtues within such conceptual schemes:

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<sup>2</sup> Of the impulse to reduce the ethical life to moments of choice and overt action, Murdoch writes “[t]his is one of those exasperating moments in philosophy when one seems to be being relentlessly prevented from saying something which one is irresistibly impelled to say” (Murdoch 1970; 21)

The concepts of the virtues, and the familiar words which name them, are important since they help to make certain potentially nebulous areas of experience more open to inspection. (Murdoch 1970; p. 57)

Murdoch's thought, and it is a familiar one, seems to be that an undue focus on a narrow range of ethical concepts can blind us to ethically significant aspects of the world. Conceptual poverty can lead to a kind of ethical blindness or myopia, distorting our conception of the ethical world.<sup>3</sup>

Relatedly, having a fuller conception of the particular virtues can help inform our thinking on further ethical questions. The fuller and more adequate our conceptions of the particular virtues, the more illuminating they will be when they are used as tools in further ethical thinking. In Chapter 2, for example, I suggest that a Murdochian conception of love can shed light on substantive and questionable assumptions often made about friendship in discussions of epistemic partiality.

Why might love, hope, and humility have been relatively neglected? After all, love and hope appear to be at least close descendants of traditionally recognised theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity), and humility, too, has been much discussed in religious contexts. Partly, it seems reasonable to think that these religious associations themselves may have led to this neglect, making these traits appear irrelevant or at least unobvious subjects of concern within secular philosophy. Partly, all three come weighted with further associations that may well have lessened their appeal to philosophers: love because of its association with femininity, hope because of its suggestion of powerlessness, and humility because of its association with low hierarchical status.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, recent decades have witnessed increasing interest in these concepts, and it is to these discussions that this thesis speaks.

This thesis comes in three parts, each consisting of two chapters. In the first, I look at love. Here I explore Iris Murdoch's conception of love and show that it offers insight into recent debates about epistemic partiality in friendship. In the second section I look at hope. I offer an account of hope inspired by the thought that it can importantly shape our lives, and argue that hope is a virtue. In the final section I turn to humility. I offer a novel account of

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<sup>3</sup> For discussion of wider social and political implications of conceptual poverty, see Fricker (2007).

<sup>4</sup> Though such associations are not uniform: humility has often been associated or identified with modesty, which some philosophers take to be associated not with low status, but high status or good qualities of achievements. See, for example, Slote (1983), Raterman (2006), and Bommarito (2013, 2018).

humility as involving not valorising relative superiority and argue that humility thus-conceived is not only a virtue, but beneficial in aiding us to become ethically better.

## **Chapter Overviews**

### **Chapter One**

#### **Iris Murdoch and the Epistemic Significance of Love**

In chapter one, I explore Iris Murdoch's conception of love in *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970). Murdoch makes some ambitious claims about love's epistemic significance which seem initially puzzling given love's heterogeneous and messy everyday manifestations. I provide an interpretation of Murdochian love on which Murdoch's claims about its epistemic significance can be understood. I argue that Murdoch conceives of love as a virtue, where the virtues are understood as epistemic sensitivities. I then provide an interpretation of Murdochian virtue, arguing that Murdoch conceives of the virtues as unified, and of love as belonging at the pinnacle of a hierarchy of the virtues, which vindicates the epistemic role Murdoch assigns it. Moreover, I suggest that there is good reason to think that Murdochian love is not as far from everyday conceptions of love as it can initially appear.

### **Chapter Two**

#### **The Epistemic Demands of Friendship**

In chapter two, I use the Murdochian conception of love discussed in chapter one to shed light on recent debates about epistemic partiality. Proponents of epistemic partialism have assumed that the norms of friendship and epistemology are independent of one another, and hence that they can constitutively conflict. And even those resistant to the notion of epistemic partiality in friendship have largely not questioned the assumption that friendship is not an epistemically rich state. I show that Murdoch's conception of love gives us reason to question this assumption since, on her account, love involves knowledge, and a progressive deepening of such knowledge. Friendship, I suggest, plausibly involves love, and thus being a good friend is not independent of one's epistemic standing. I also suggest that a Murdochian conception of friendship is well placed to explain many other intuitive features of friendship.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Hoping and Intending**

Hope can powerfully influence our lives, deeply shaping our actions and character, as well as being essential for social and political change. Many accounts of hope, however, fail to do justice to its active role, ignoring the connection between hope and action which make it a significant feature of our lives. In this chapter, I propose a new account of hope in which hopes characteristically shape and figure in intentions. I argue that this account does justice to hope's distinctive manifestations in action, explains why there are certain rational constraints on hoping, and sheds light on the distinctions between hoping and other states such as wishing.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Hope as a Virtue**

In chapter four I examine the ethical significance of hope. On the one hand, hope can be a powerful force for personal and political good, and the ability to maintain hope can be praiseworthy. On the other hand, we can also hope for bad or evil things, and hoping for such things can seem to be part of what constitutes a vicious character. These thoughts seem to pull us in opposite directions when considering hope's ethical standing: the former toward thinking that hope might be a virtue, and the latter toward considering it a state without any inherent value. In this chapter I argue that hope is a virtue. I argue that hope is necessary for engaging in projects which are essential for living a meaningful human life, and that this gives us reason to think that hope is a virtue, specifically, a virtue of self-governance. I allow, however, that it contributes to a life going well overall only in the presence of moral knowledge, and suggests that this is explained by understanding it as a virtue of self-governance.



## **Chapter Five**

### **Humility and Ethical Development**

Humility is a somewhat ‘unfashionable’ virtue: the word can conjure an image of cringing servility, unduly romanticised feelings of inferiority, or a level of self-denial which seems ill-placed in a life well-lived. But the term can also capture something of great ethical importance. In chapter five I propose an account of humility that attempts to capture this moral significance. I then explore the connection between humility and ethical development, arguing that humility plays an important role in ethical improvement. If such a connection is vindicated, it suggests that humility is valuable twice over: it has intrinsic worth but is also instrumentally valuable, enabling us to become better people.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Responsibility and Comparative Pride: a Critical Discussion of Morgan-Knapp**

Taking pride in being better than others is not uncommon. Such pride is opposed to humility as I have conceived of it in the previous chapter. In a recent paper, Christopher Morgan-Knapp (2019) argues that such pride is theoretically misguided: it ‘presents things as being some way they are not’ (Morgan-Knapp 2019: 317). In this chapter, I argue that Morgan-Knapp’s arguments do not succeed in showing that comparative pride is theoretically mistaken. And insofar as his arguments may seem tempting, I suggest that their appeal rests on ethical rather than purely theoretical considerations.



## Chapter 1

# Iris Murdoch and The Epistemic Significance of Love

*[A]t the level of serious common sense and of an ordinary non-philosophical reflection about the nature of morals it is perfectly obvious that goodness is connected with knowledge: not with impersonal quasi-scientific knowledge of the ordinary world, whatever that may be, but with a refined and honest perception of what is really the case, a patient and just discernment and exploration of what confronts one, which is the result not simply of opening one's eyes but of a certainly perfectly familiar kind of moral discipline*

*(Murdoch 1970: 38)*

In *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970), Iris Murdoch gives love an intellectual and epistemic standing with which many philosophers would be uncomfortable. She says not only that it is epistemically valuable – a claim already too strong for many, given the lover's seeming tendency to misperceive<sup>1</sup> – but also that we do not see reality as it truly is *unless* we love. This is a puzzling claim. We tend to think that the very point of objectivity is to abstract away from any personal, particular point of view, taking something like what Bernard Williams (1978) calls 'the absolute conception' as our standard. And we often think of love as a paradigm of

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<sup>1</sup> Keller (2004) and Stroud (2006), for instance, suggest that true friendship may constitutively involve epistemic partiality. I explore this in Chapter 2.

just such a personal, particular – and perhaps distorted – point of view. It thus seems precluded from playing the epistemic role that Murdoch assigns to it. Part of my aim in the present chapter is to offer an interpretation of the conception of love in *The Sovereignty of Good* such that this seeming tension between love and objectivity is dissolved.<sup>2,3</sup>

For Murdoch, love has a particular significance in the perception of *moral* reality.<sup>4</sup> There is an obvious causal connection between love and morality: love can be a powerful factor in motivating us to act in morally admirable ways. However, Murdoch's claim is that love is also *epistemically* significant for our ethical lives. On the Murdochian interpretation, 'loving thy neighbour' entails not only being motivationally affected by one's neighbour's wellbeing, but also entails standing in an epistemic relation to them that involves knowledge and continuous progression towards a truer understanding of them. This may seem counter-intuitive, but I will suggest that there are good reasons to take Murdoch's account seriously. Her claim is not ultimately as puzzling as it first appears.

I begin in §1 by outlining Murdoch's moral framework and the role of love within it. In §2, I then explore two contrasting interpretations of Murdochian love proposed by Velleman (1999) and Hopwood (2014) and discuss the ways in which each fails to do justice to the full epistemic role Murdoch assigns to love. In §3, I explore the notion of objectivity that underlies Murdoch's account. In §4, I argue that Murdochian love is best interpreted as a virtue, with a particularly lofty position in the hierarchy of the virtues. This is the point that will allow us to understand Murdoch's claims about love's epistemic value whilst retaining her claims about objectivity. My aims are not, however, only exegetical. In §5, I conclude by arguing that this reconstructive exercise yields an illuminating and plausible account of even our ordinary conception of love.

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<sup>2</sup> In this paper I shall focus on Murdoch's conception of love in *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970) and other early works: 'Vision and Choice in Morality' (1956) and 'The Sublime and the Good' (1959). Her overarching ethical vision in later work such as *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992) is somewhat altered, becoming more heavily Platonic and mystical. This corresponds with a linguistic change in Murdoch: in later work she refers primarily to *eros* rather than love. There is thus reason to think that her conception of love may have similarly developed and altered over time, and I shall not examine the later conception. I will therefore use the term 'Murdochian love' to refer only to the conception of love found in her early works.

<sup>3</sup> Haugeland (2002) similarly suggests that the capacity for love is necessary for what he calls 'authentic intentionality', which he understands as necessary for objective knowledge.

<sup>4</sup> In this paper I will focus on how Murdoch thinks love involves moral knowledge, though on her account it also involves wider knowledge. Moreover, she means something very broad by 'moral'.

## 1. Murdoch's Moral Framework

Murdoch's discussion of love is framed by the conviction that there is an essential kind of moral activity that is not reducible to publicly observable actions. She calls this neglected kind of activity 'attention'.<sup>5</sup> According to Murdoch, the dominance of broadly behaviourist theories of mind in 'modern moral philosophy' led to the conviction that "morality resides at the point of action" (Murdoch 1970: 16) and that moral agency must therefore relate only to publicly observable outward action. Murdoch is deeply resistant to this line of thinking, which she regards as distorting our understanding of what is at stake in ethics by disregarding important areas of our ethical lives. Such a conception of morality automatically rules out phenomena such as attention from moral consideration, but Murdoch maintains that these phenomena can be deeply morally significant. She thus advocates re-emphasising the importance of various concepts that were peripheral in much contemporary moral philosophy. I shall focus in this chapter on her attempted reinstatement of the concept of love. Murdoch's basic idea in this region is that we must *attend* to objects, must see them in a morally significant way, before we can ever hope for our publicly observable actions to be morally worthy. More deeply, she insists that the activity of attention is itself a fundamentally moral activity. Such attention, she thinks, is a kind of *love*.

Murdoch thus begins two of her most famous essays with assertions of the significance of love in ethics. She claims that "love is a central concept in morals" (Murdoch 1970: 2) and that "we need a moral philosophy in which the concept of love, so rarely mentioned now by philosophers, can once again be made central" (Murdoch 1970: 46). Having declared that love is a central moral concept, she specifies that one role love fulfils is epistemic: our coming to grasp moral truths, and the progressive deepening of our grasp of them, is dependent on love.

It is not obvious that love is morally and epistemically valuable. Love can appear to be as much bound up with illusion as perception, and to be capable of leading to cruelty as well as self-sacrifice. (Think, for example, of Othello's claim after murdering Desdemona that he

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<sup>5</sup> This is a term taken from Simone Weil (1956), whose work deeply impressed Murdoch and influenced her thinking on love.

has “loved not wisely but too well”.) Nonetheless, Murdoch presents love as fulfilling a crucial ethical and epistemic role:

Love is the perception of individuals. Love is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real. Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality. (Murdoch 1959: 51)

Love is knowledge of the individual... To speak here of an inevitable imperfection, or of an ideal limit of love or knowledge which always recedes, may be taken as a reference to our ‘fallen’ human condition, but this need be given no special dogmatic sense. (Murdoch 1970: 28)

In particular situations ‘reality’ as that which is revealed by the patient eye of love is an idea entirely comprehensible to the ordinary person. (Murdoch 1970: 40)

Murdoch here describes the ordinary concept of love as having an epistemic dimension: it involves *knowledge*, *discovery* or *perception* of the individual and reality. Love is thus presented as fulfilling some kind of epistemic role: Murdoch does not understand it as wholly a matter of sentiment or affect, but as in some sense involving grasping truths.

Murdoch illustrates this epistemic role of love with an example that is, for her, a paradigm case of both moral and epistemic progress through loving attention:

A mother, whom I shall call M, feels hostility to her daughter-in-law, whom I shall call D. M finds D quite a good-hearted girl, but while not exactly common yet certainly unpolished and lacking in dignity and refinement. D is inclined to be pert and familiar, insufficiently ceremonious, brusque, sometimes positively rude, always tiresomely juvenile.

... Time passes, and it could be that M settles down with a hardened sense of grievance and a fixed picture of D, imprisoned (if I may use a question-begging word) by the cliché: my poor son has married a silly vulgar girl. However, the M of the example is an intelligent and well-intentioned person, capable of self-criticism, capable of giving careful and just attention to an object which confronts her. M tells herself: ‘I am old-fashioned and conventional. I may be prejudiced and narrow-minded. I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous. Let me look again.’ Here I assume that M observes or at least reflects deliberately

about D, until gradually her vision of D alters. ... D is discovered to be not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful, and so on. (Murdoch 1970: 17-18)

Murdoch describes M's transition here as a transition to viewing D 'lovingly'. Although not attended by any outward change in M's behaviour it is intended by Murdoch to be a fundamentally moral transition, one in which M's moral standing improves.<sup>6</sup> As M lovingly attends to D, she becomes able to perceive features of D that were previously obscured or distorted by latent selfishness and prejudice. For example, as M attends lovingly to D, D's delightful youthfulness, which was previously obscured by M's snobbery and jealousy, becomes discernible to M. Murdoch depicts M as attending to D with love, and thus as overcoming such constraints and attaining a deeper knowledge of D: "[w]hen M is just and loving she sees D as she really is" (Murdoch 1970: 37).

Murdoch's claim is thus that love fulfils an epistemic role: love involves attending to reality, and results in a deepening understanding of reality. She understands attending to reality not merely as something that one *can* do lovingly but as *itself* "an exercise of love" (Murdoch 1970: 42). Such loving attention, she suggests, will progressively lead one towards a deeper, more adequate conception of reality. In the next section I shall explore two interpretations of Murdoch that offer ways of spelling out the way in which Murdoch thinks that love performs this function. I will suggest that in different ways both fall short of Murdoch's own claims about the epistemic significance of love.

## 2. Alternative Interpretations of Murdochian Love

Some philosophical discussions of love have assumed that there is a tension between morality and love.<sup>7</sup> By contrast, both Velleman (1999) and Hopwood (2014; 2017) follow Murdoch and make use of her thought in articulating models of love that aim to vindicate its

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<sup>6</sup> The illustration is thus meant as an illustration of the poverty of the conception of morality on which it 'resides at the point of action'. Murdoch insists that M's activity is a moral activity, and an activity that matters for its own sake despite not making any difference to her outward behaviour.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Williams' (1981) discussion of the permissibility of saving one's wife rather than a stranger, suggesting that the demands of the relationship might *conflict* with those of morality.

moral significance, and that make some place for love's epistemic significance. However, I shall argue that both square Murdoch's thought that love is a moral activity with her thought that love is epistemically rich only at the expense of denying further aspects of her view. They connect love and morality but fail to explain the broader connection between love and knowledge. Both accounts thus fail to explain the full epistemic significance of love for Murdoch, and therefore an alternative account of love is needed to elucidate its role in her thought. I will consider Velleman and Hopwood's accounts in turn, before discussing Murdoch's background commitment to realism in §3, and offering my own account of Murdochian love in §4.

In an account of love that he aligns with Murdoch's, Velleman argues that love is a rational state capable of being justified by reasons.<sup>8</sup> On his account, love constitutes an appreciation of inherent value in the beloved and brings with it a kind of emotional vulnerability to them. Specifically, he regards love as involving an appreciation of the value of rational natures and therefore suggests that Murdochian love resembles Kantian respect.<sup>9</sup> He claims that responding to the value of rational natures with respect is a rationally 'required minimum', and that responding with love is an 'optional maximum'. He draws upon the Kantian idea that rational natures are ends in themselves, arguing that love is an "arresting awareness of value" (Velleman 1999: 360), where the value that one is aware of in loving is simply the value of the beloved being a person, an end in themselves. This is an epistemically rich account of love insofar as love is understood by Velleman as subject to rational justification and as constituting a *recognition* of value. As such, it might vindicate the idea that love has an epistemic function: love involves awareness and appreciation of value.

However, this cannot be Murdoch's conception of love. Firstly, for Murdoch, love is not aimed exclusively at other rational natures or people. She discusses love and loving attention in the context of art, in the context of intellectual disciplines such as learning Russian (Murdoch 1970: 89), and as a virtue enabling one to perceive *all* of reality, even trivial

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<sup>8</sup> For example, Velleman writes "[t]his hypothesis would explain why love is an exercise in 'really looking', as Murdoch claims" (Velleman 1999: 361)

<sup>9</sup> Bagnoli (2003) also suggests that Kantian respect and Murdochian love are "significantly analogous", though not identical: they "exhibit a similar phenomenology and work likewise, as constraints on deliberation" (Bagnoli 2003: 506, 485). In Bagnoli (2018) she, like Velleman, identifies attention towards other people – 'recognition of others' – as the experience of loving attention (Bagnoli 2018: 95).



components such as “a blade of grass” (Murdoch 1970: 70).<sup>10</sup> On Velleman’s account, such objects seem incomprehensible as objects of love or, at best, seem mistakenly loved.

Secondly, Velleman suggests that love is a morally and rationally optional response to the unconditional value of rational natures, but Murdoch contends that love is morally necessary. In response to Kant’s contention that only practical love (performing loving actions) can be a duty Murdoch argues that ‘pathological love’ (love as an affective state and quality of consciousness) also matters morally: “I do not agree that only practical love can be commanded...Pathological love can be commanded too, and indeed if love is a purification of the imagination, must be commanded” (Murdoch 1959: 55). For Murdoch, what we are morally ‘commanded’ to do extends far beyond publicly observable actions. Her claim is that we are *obliged* to love in the sense of lovingly attending to others (‘purifying the imagination’), as well as treating them in loving ways.<sup>11</sup> For Murdoch, an unloving perspective will simply not allow one to perceive truths about the world that the lover can see, and therefore lovingly attending to the world is both epistemically and morally obligatory.

Finally, the most significant problem for Velleman’s model of Murdochian love is that for Velleman, love does not reveal the features of persons that Murdochian love reveals. For Murdoch love is an acknowledgement of the reality of particulars outside oneself, whereas for Velleman it is directed at the same universal aspect of each person, their rational nature.<sup>12</sup> Murdoch explicitly criticises Kant for exactly this failure:

Kant does not tell us to respect whole particular tangled-up individuals, but to respect the universal reason in their breasts. In so far as we are rational and moral we are all the same, and in some mysterious sense transcendent to history.  
(Murdoch 1959: 51)

Unsurprisingly, given Velleman’s belief in the similarity between Murdochian love and Kantian respect, this criticism of Kantian respect can equally be applied to Velleman’s account of love. For Murdoch, love directs one’s attention “towards the great surprising variety of the world”

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<sup>10</sup> Murdoch writes even of concepts: “why not consider red as an ideal end-point, as a concept infinitely to be learned, as an individual object of love?” (Murdoch 1970: 29).

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, given that Murdoch believes that loving attention will reveal aspects of an object that the unloving observer will be unable to discern, it seems plausible that the unloving observer might often be unable even to act in loving ways, since they might be precluded from seeing the reasons on which they should be acting.

<sup>12</sup> Clarke (2012) emphasises the idea that Murdochian attention involves seeing an object “in all of its (significant) particularity”, and the political potential of this idea for overcoming prejudice (Clarke 2012: 238).

(Murdoch 1970: 66). In loving another person, our attention is directed towards particular concrete individuals and their multifarious properties, not simply towards a universal abstract property instantiated in every person. Such emphasis on particularity thus precludes Velleman's account from capturing Murdochian love.<sup>13</sup>

Hopwood's account, on the other hand, correctly emphasises the particularity of Murdochian love. He contends that Murdoch's conception of love is that of Platonic *eros*, which he understands as follows:

[E]ros is (i) a form of desire that is (ii) directed at a particular object whose value (iii) cannot be captured under a closed description, that (iv) engages the imagination, and that (v) carries with it the awareness of a normative demand on the subject. (Hopwood 2014: 61)

A closed description, for Hopwood, is one in which the object can be exhaustively characterised in terms of its properties, where one's relation is to any object that falls under the relevant description.<sup>14</sup> To desire an object whose value cannot be captured in a closed description is therefore to value an irreducibly particular object. According to Hopwood, *eros* is a form of desire, an affective state that nonetheless involves recognition of the capacity of the beloved, as such, to place demands on oneself, enabling one to see one's response to the object of love as potentially inadequate, or as falling short in some way. Hopwood thus claims that love has an epistemic component, the (possible) awareness of one's response as failing to do justice to its object. He suggests that *eros* involves both 'world to mind' and 'mind to world' directions of fit; in loving, one desires the object of love, but in virtue of loving it, one also sees it as capable of making demands upon oneself.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Murdoch does believe that 'the Good' is also an object of love, which appears to be in tension with this. However, she maintains that it is a 'concrete universal' (Murdoch 1979: 29).

<sup>14</sup> Hopwood illustrates the idea of loving someone under a closed description with the following example: "If we were to propose to take Romeo away and replace him with another person possessing exactly the same set of characteristics ... Juliet would presumably not be happy to accept the swap. Her desire for Romeo is a desire for a particular individual, and precisely because of this, the value that she sees in him cannot be captured under a closed description" (Hopwood 2014: 8).

<sup>15</sup> Hopwood depends heavily on Murdoch's later work, particularly *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992), whereas in this paper I am exploring Murdoch's conception of love in *The Sovereignty of Good* and Murdoch's earlier work. Although I argue that Hopwood's account does not capture the conception of love at the heart of *The Sovereignty of Good*, it may capture Murdoch's later conception of love.

Unlike Velleman's, this model of love allows love to be felt for objects other than persons, since it can be aimed at any object whose value to an individual cannot be captured under a closed description. It seems plausible that one might feel demands made by inanimate objects: for example, perceiving a beautiful landscape might involve seeing it as something calling for protection or preservation. The idea that the object of love cannot be captured under a closed description also introduces into this account an ineliminable particularity. This is because it disallows the possibilities of substituting the object of love for another with the same qualities or of 'trading-up' for a more valuable object that would be possible and rational according to an account of love that based it solely upon properties of the beloved perceived from an impersonal perspective.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, on Hopwood's account love plays both moral and epistemic roles, since it is understood as a form of desire that brings with it an awareness of normative demands upon the agent.

However, Hopwood's account does not do full justice to the epistemic role Murdoch assigns to love. Murdoch contends that love is important not only in the perception of normative demands that loving awareness of objects places on the lover, but in the perception of objects themselves. Love, for Murdoch, *primarily* reveals objects themselves, rather than normative demands that agents face.<sup>17</sup> She claims that "love is knowledge of the individual" (Murdoch 1970: 28): loving attention is necessary for any truly adequate perception of a person, object or situation itself.<sup>18</sup> Murdoch suggests that love's epistemic role is not reducible to an understanding of how that object imposes constraints on one's response to it, but rather primarily involves increasing knowledge or understanding of the object itself. Hopwood's account of Murdochian love is therefore, like Velleman's, too narrow to account for the fullness of the epistemic role Murdoch assigns to it.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See Jollimore (2011) for an in-depth discussion of 'substitution' and 'trading-up' problems.

<sup>17</sup> This is fitting given Murdoch's insistence that perception itself can be morally significant; in her schema love does not need to be related to public actions to be morally significant.

<sup>18</sup> Of course, there is a connection between being properly aware of objects themselves, and being aware of the demands they place on us, and Murdoch herself frequently emphasises the idea that true vision occasions right conduct. She does suggest that fully grasping an object will entail awareness of its normative significance and demands. Nonetheless, Hopwood's emphasis here differs significantly from Murdoch's. In his account love primarily reveals normative demands, whereas in Murdoch's love primarily reveals objects themselves.

<sup>19</sup> Jollimore (2011) also offers a conception of love that is in many ways similar to Murdoch's, but does not account for the full epistemic significance of Murdochian love. Like Murdoch, he is committed to the idea that love is (at least in part) an epistemic state. On his account, love involves epistemic tendencies which make certain (positive or endearing) features of an object salient but thereby obscure other (negative) features. As such, he suggests that it can be an epistemic asset, enabling one to discern positive qualities that are really present, but also a hindrance. By contrast, for Murdoch, love is necessarily of positive epistemic value.

### 3. Love and Realism

One possible way of affording love the broad epistemic role Murdoch insists upon would be to understand moral reality as constitutively dependent upon the subject. This is suggested by Hopwood's claim that it is in virtue of loving the object that one sees it as making demands on oneself. One way of reading this would be as suggesting that there is no fixed moral reality for the observer to respond to that exists apart from the observer's perception and their love: the beloved *as such* places demands on the observer. On Hopwood's account, the reality that places demands upon the observer does so, at least in part, *because* it is loved, not vice versa. He thus suggests that Murdoch should not be read as subscribing to a robust form of realism. If the claim that love enables us to get to the objective truth about the beloved is relinquished, the apparent tension between love (a seemingly personal and particular state) and objectivity will disappear.<sup>20</sup> If the objectivity of moral reality is given up, then there can be no tension between it and the epistemic role Murdoch assigns to love: love reveals moral reality because that reality is (at least partly) constituted by its being loved.

Such a view of love is of course not limited to discussions of Murdoch: Frankfurt (2004), for example, argues that love generates value, and thereby *generates* reasons. However, Murdoch is insistent that moral claims are factual claims about the world and that their truth is constitutively dependent on reality *outside* the observer's perceptions and beliefs. M, for example, is described as 'discovering' D's moral qualities, suggesting that such features do not depend on her. Murdoch also describes M's loving re-evaluation of D as revealing her "as she really is" (Murdoch 1970: 37), suggesting that the moral evaluation depends on D's characteristics, rather than on M.

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<sup>20</sup> Hopwood particularly focuses on Murdoch's discussion of the 'privacy' of moral concepts, which seems to lead to his reluctance to read Murdoch as believing in an objective moral reality. She maintains that deeper understanding of moral concepts leads towards ever more private concepts, which may well be incommunicable. However, she also describes moral concepts as making features of reality salient or visible to observers, rather than as creating or constituting that reality: "All one can do [in making a moral argument] is appeal to certain areas of experience pointing out certain features, and using suitable metaphors and inventing suitable concepts where necessary to make those features visible. No more, and no less, than this is done by the most empirically minded of linguistic philosophers" (Murdoch 1970: 74). Her suggestion that concepts and metaphors make pre-existent features of reality *visible* suggests an objective understanding of that reality.

Pervasive throughout *The Sovereignty of Good* is the image of the moral life as an exercise of vision. Importantly, Murdoch claims that this kind of vision reveals what is there independently of the perceiver's conception of it or attitude towards it. In her discussion of the arts as introductions to, and indeed initial participations in, the moral life Murdoch claims that what is required of both is "unsentimental, detached, unselfish, *objective* attention" (Murdoch 1970: 64). She thus affirms that what is perceived is what is objectively there. Elsewhere, she focuses upon the connection between the real and the true: "the realism (ability to perceive reality) required for goodness is a kind of intellectual ability to perceive what is true" (Murdoch 1970: 64). What is perceived by the good person, she suggests, is objective reality. In fact, in her criticism of the 'current view' of persons she states that "we have lost the vision of a reality separate from ourselves" (Murdoch 1970: 46). Love, she suggests, helps us to discern this reality that is *separate* from ourselves. Murdoch therefore cannot be suggesting that love reveals moral reality in virtue of moral reality being dependent upon the particular perceptions and the perceiver's loving stance.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, Murdoch suggests that 'fantasy', the projections of one's own self in one's view of the world, is the "chief enemy of excellence in morality" (Murdoch 1970: 59). For her, projections of the self in one's vision of the world are fundamentally distorting. It is directing one's attention away from the self and the distorting fantasies generated by the selfish ego that reveals moral reality. On her account, moral reality thus cannot constitutively depend on the subject, but is rather an objective matter: "the ordinary person does not, unless corrupted by philosophy, believe that he creates value by his choices" (Murdoch 1970: 97).

How, then, can we make sense of the idea that *loving* attention reveals a reality that is separate from the observer? I want to suggest that Murdoch's claim is best understood in the context of her repudiation of the idea that objective reality is that which is revealed by value-neutral perception. Rather, she claims that all perception itself is morally imbued.<sup>22</sup> The moral realist, Murdoch argues, ought therefore not to attempt to strive to demonstrate the objectivity of morality through its assimilation into the 'hard' world of impersonal or scientific facts that

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<sup>21</sup> For more on Murdoch's metaethics, see Jordan (2014). He understands her as a realist committed to cognitivism, success theory, and objectivism.

<sup>22</sup> Mulhall (2000) argues that, for Murdoch, we are continuously engaged with moral value, and that this is a core tenet in her rejection of the existence of a distinction between fact and value. Recent discussions of moral perception have tended to take moral perception to be a subset of perception as a whole. Murdoch's discussion therefore strikingly differs from these in that she takes *all* perception to require exercise of the virtues and all perception to be morally significant.

purport to be 'neutral', but instead to reject such a model of objectivity altogether. Murdoch writes:

[G]oodness is connected with knowledge: not with impersonal quasi-scientific knowledge of the ordinary world, whatever that may be, but with a refined and honest perception of what is really the case (Murdoch 1970: 38)

Murdoch's suggestion here is that purportedly 'impersonal quasi-scientific knowledge' is not all there is to knowledge. Indeed, she claims that the knowledge that is morally significant (to which 'goodness is connected') and that reveals 'what is really the case' is not such value-neutral knowledge at all. In saying this, she rejects the idea that something like Williams' absolute conception will reveal all truths that are available to be known.

Murdoch parodies the idea that all morally significant facts will be revealed by value-neutral perception by suggesting that it models morality on something like a simple shopping trip:

On this view one might say that morality is assimilated to a visit to a shop. I enter the shop in a condition of totally responsible freedom, I objectively estimate the features of the goods, and I choose. The greater my objectivity and discrimination the larger the number of products from which I can select ... I find the image of man which I have sketched above both alien and implausible (Murdoch 1970: 8-9)

Again, Murdoch's suggestion here is that value-neutral perception will not reveal all that is of moral significance.<sup>23</sup> On her account, the moral life is not reducible to a set of choices made between the same discrete and neutrally evaluable objects in the way that shopping might be. Rather, the very objects and features one picks out are morally significant.<sup>24</sup>

On Murdoch's account, many objectively real objects and qualities can be understood only from within the perspective of a human, value-laden conceptual scheme, a conceptual scheme that is morally evaluable. Broackes (2012) describes this as Murdoch asserting that "we should allow the world to contain all that meets the gaze of a just and loving moral perceiver"

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<sup>23</sup> This is not the only way that Murdoch uses this image. She also uses the shopping trip image of the moral life as part of her rejection of the idea that the moral life consists in discrete publicly observable actions.

<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Murdoch is sceptical of the thought that this model adequately captures even shopping: "[a] Marxist critique of this conception of bourgeois capitalist morals would be apt enough. Should we want many goods in the shop or just 'the right goods'?" (Murdoch 1970: 8).

(Broackes 2012: 47); according to Murdoch the objectively real includes that which is perceived from a personal perspective. Murdoch's claim is that a human moral scheme is necessary to fully perceive reality, so the loving observer will get to (or at least move towards) objective truth. For example, the qualities that M comes to see in D are real qualities that D possesses, but could not be assimilated into an impersonal or unloving account of D. There is no more basic description that might capture what it means for D to be 'delightfully youthful', and certainly no non-evaluative equivalent.<sup>25</sup> Murdoch therefore states: "moral concepts do not move about *within* a hard world set up by science and logic" (Murdoch 1970: 28).<sup>26</sup> For Murdoch, the applicability of moral concepts cannot be understood from outside the moral schema itself. The very concepts necessary for understanding the world themselves can themselves be understood only 'in depth', from the perspective of an agent embedded in moral practices who is to some extent virtuous.<sup>27</sup>

#### 4. Love as a Virtue and a Perceptual Sensitivity

Murdoch claims, then, that love has an irreducible epistemic role: it involves knowledge or perception of reality. This reality is to be understood as *existing* independently of being loved, but *perceptible* only to the person who lovingly attends to it. I have suggested that neither Velleman's nor Hopwood's interpretations of Murdochian love do justice to this epistemic role it plays, since neither does justice to both the broad scope of love's epistemic role in her thinking and to her realism about what is to be perceived.

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<sup>25</sup> Murdoch thus claims that moral philosophers' task is "the provision of rich and fertile conceptual schemes" (Murdoch 1970: 45): had M possessed only concepts such as 'juvenile' and 'vulgar', she would have been unable to recognise that D is in fact 'refreshingly simple' and 'gay', and would forfeit the epistemic and moral improvements that such concepts enable for her.

<sup>26</sup> Murdoch's view is similar to that defended by McDowell (1979: 2011). He argues that the perceiving of some properties depends upon one's involvement in a 'whirl of organism', but that this does not render those properties 'merely subjective'. In 'Aesthetic Value, Objectivity and the Fabric of the World' (1998) he sets forward a conception of objectivity along the same lines as Murdoch, explicitly rejecting Williams' absolute conception of objectivity.

<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Murdoch suggests something broader than this: proper knowledge of most – or perhaps all – concepts requires a kind of 'depth' in one's grasp of the concept, and this depth cannot be gained from a wholly impersonal perspective. However, I am primarily focusing here on the connection Murdoch makes between love and moral knowledge. Setiya (2013) discusses the idea that for Murdoch our grasp of all concepts is infinitely perfectible, and such a grasp brings with it motivation to act in the appropriate ways.

A seldom remarked-upon but significant feature of Murdoch's conception of love is that she repeatedly refers to love as a *virtue*, and includes it amongst lists of the virtues in discussions of the moral life. This, I want to suggest, is central to understanding how Murdoch retains her commitment to moral realism whilst claiming that love involves knowledge. In this section, I will suggest that Murdoch thinks of love as a virtue, and I will outline the conception of virtue that she has in mind. On her account, the virtues in general are *epistemic* and *hierarchically ordered* traits, and love occupies a unique position at the pinnacle of this hierarchy.

As I have discussed, Murdoch considers love to be a morally desirable quality. Further, she suggests that it is not merely desirable or pleasant, but that it is morally necessary: it is 'commanded'. As such, she thinks of it as a virtue:

All just vision, even in the strictest problems of the intellect, and a fortiori when suffering or wickedness have to be perceived, is a moral matter. The same virtues, in the end the same virtue (love), are required throughout, and fantasy (self) can prevent us from seeing a blade of grass just as it can prevent us from seeing another person. (Murdoch 1970: 70)

As we deepen our notions of the virtues we introduce relationship and hierarchy. Courage, which seemed at first to be something on its own, a sort of specialised daring of the spirit, is now seen to be a particular operation of wisdom and love... It would be impossible to have only one virtue unless it were a very trivial one such as thrift (Murdoch 1970: 95)

Here, Murdoch refers to love as a virtue and lists it among more commonly recognised virtues such as courage and wisdom.<sup>28</sup>

On this conception of love, it is not simply an episodic attitude, but a deeply important character trait. The virtues are often thought of as traits that involve certain dispositions: dispositions to think, act, perceive and feel in certain ways. In the first quotation above, Murdoch suggests that love is required for 'just vision'. Extrapolating from this, and from

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<sup>28</sup> For the purposes of this chapter I am leaving open exactly what kind of virtue ethicist Murdoch is, as well as the role of the virtues in her overarching account of ethics. My argument depends only on the uncontroversial ideas that she is deeply impressed by the importance of the virtues and that she regards them as having a crucial role in the moral life. McLean (2000) offers an argument against identifying Murdoch as a virtue ethicist, but it proceeds by noting that she is more influenced by Plato than Aristotle and therefore is at odds with specifically neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. In particular, McLean argues that Murdoch's focus on 'the Good' can be difficult to accommodate within a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethical framework. This, however, is no reason to think that she is not *some* form of virtue ethicist.



cases such as M and D, we come to a conception of the kind of virtue that Murdoch has in mind. Murdoch conceives of love as a virtue that entails the disposition to know, grasp, or understand an object of attention ever more adequately. On the Murdochian account, then, love involves a disposition to see truly, to perceive individuals as they really are. The connection between love and knowledge is thus intimate: love is necessarily truthful because love is at least partly *constituted* by progression towards proper knowledge of its object.

We can shed light on the connection between love and moral knowledge by considering the general role of the virtues in Murdoch's thinking. For Murdoch, the virtues are reliable sensitivities to certain features of the world, and as a virtue, love involves such a perceptual sensitivity. On this account, the virtues in general therefore look as much like epistemic dispositions as affective or motivational dispositions. For Murdoch, virtues are fundamentally a matter of perception, knowledge or attention. She states: "virtue is the attempt to pierce the veil of selfish consciousness and join the world as it really is" (Murdoch 1970: 93). Elsewhere she writes that "anything which alters consciousness in the direction of unselfishness, objectivity and realism is to be connected with virtue" (Murdoch 1970: 84). Many examples of virtues that she gives clearly have an epistemic dimension: accuracy, truthfulness, realism, wisdom. Among these she lists courage, a virtue that seems less amenable to such epistemically focused interpretation, but that she nonetheless describes as "the ability to sustain clear vision" (Murdoch 1970: 89). For Murdoch virtues are thus highly epistemically significant traits: they are traits that enable a kind of perception that arises only from a human and normatively rich standpoint. Given this conception of virtue, love is necessarily truth-conducive: one can only *perceive* or be *sensitive* to real features of the world.<sup>29</sup>

This knowledge or perception is connected with action; the perceptual sensitivities that constitute the virtues are manifested in dispositions to act in certain ways. Murdoch suggests that to perceive the world as it really is entails perceiving the demands it makes on one as such. The person who perceives the true extent of these demands, she suggests, will act accordingly, in 'obedience' to reality. She states:

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<sup>29</sup> A similar conception of virtue is proposed by McDowell (1979), who also understands the virtues as perceptual sensitivities, and argues for the claim that 'virtue is knowledge'. In his account, virtues are reliable sensitivities to the weight of certain kinds of consideration in given situations, enabling one to reliably see and act upon the features of situations which count as reasons. McDowell states: "a kind person has a reliable sensitivity to a certain sort of requirement which situations can impose on behaviour... the sensitivity is, we might say, a sort of perceptual capacity" (McDowell 1979: 332).

[T]he idea of a patient, loving regard, directed upon a person, a thing, a situation, presents the will not as unimpeded movement but as something very much more like ‘obedience’. (Murdoch 1970: 40)

In other words, Murdoch suggests that the agent who perceives a scenario in its full complexity is often not left with an open choice about how to respond.<sup>30</sup> In order to discern the true contours of a situation in the first place, the agent must attend in a way that is loving. Attending lovingly is motivationally and affectively laden; it eventuates in ‘obedience’ to the moral demands of what is perceived.<sup>31</sup>

Murdochian love is not, however, simply a form of clinical precision. In relation to the example of M and D, Murdoch notes that “what M is *ex hypothesi* attempting to do is not just to see D accurately but to see her justly or lovingly” (Murdoch 1970: 23). The ‘just’ in this quote is significant: seeing lovingly is not *opposed* to accuracy, but is nonetheless a far richer form of vision, a form of vision reaching *beyond* simple accuracy.<sup>32</sup> In approaching the object of love from the loving perspective, one approaches it from an affectively significant position, a position into which is built a commitment to understanding the object justly and in its full complexity. Moreover, the affective richness of the loving perspective allows for a depth in one’s grasp of one’s concepts that is *transformative* of them. The loving perceiver does not take the same concepts that could be grasped from a detached perspective and apply them to a scenario, but rather has conceptual resources that differ from those of the unloving perceiver.<sup>33</sup>

Murdoch is clear that lovingly attending to the world is not easy: “it is a *task* to come to see the world as it is” (Murdoch 1970: 91).<sup>34</sup> Attention involves stripping away one’s

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<sup>30</sup> This is again opposed to the shopping model of morality. Having perceived the value of our options, we are not usually left with an open choice about what to do, as the customer at a shop, having estimated the value of the goods, might then face an open choice about which goods to pick. Rather, perception, or at least loving attention, usually eventuates in ‘obedience’ to what is perceived.

<sup>31</sup> It seems plausible that there will be degrees of love, so not all love will entail complete moral motivation. But insofar as one is loving, one will be motivated to act in accordance with what is perceived.

<sup>32</sup> Later, Murdoch similarly writes: “the authority of morals is the authority of truth, that is of reality. We can see the length, the extension, of these [value] concepts as patient attention transforms accuracy without interval into just discernment” (Murdoch 1970: 91). I take it that the ‘without interval’ here similarly suggests that just discernment is not opposed to accuracy, but is a far richer concept.

<sup>33</sup> Murdoch writes “[k]nowledge of a value concept is to be understood... in depth, and not in terms of switching on to some given impersonal network... We do not simply, through being rational and knowing ordinary language, ‘know’ the meaning of all necessary moral words” (Murdoch 1970: 29).

<sup>34</sup> Wolf (2015) similarly emphasises the idea that seeing clearly or accurately is a difficult task, and suggests that the motivation to do so comes from love.

selfishness and egocentric preoccupations, an active opening of oneself to seeing the object as it really is and thereby responding appropriately to the thing itself. Loving attention does not simply involve searching for ever more trivial details about something. Rather, as Christopher Cordner (2016) argues, it involves a certain orientation to the other whereby one actively opens oneself to truly seeing the other. In the activity of stripping away one's convenient fantasies, Cordner argues, one becomes vulnerable to the other and responsive to the reality that is seen. Love is thus epistemic and affective for Murdoch, involving a certain perspective on the objects of one's perception which alters perception itself in the direction of truer vision.

For Murdoch, love is necessary to counter 'fantasy'. On her view – largely inspired by Freudian psychology – the human psyche is profoundly selfish and is continually involved in the production of fantasy to shield the fragile ego from the need to confront reality.<sup>35</sup> Fantasy, she claims, motivates and enables one to ignore or distort the object with which one is confronted, whereas love involves a recognition of its full reality. Fantasy is thus dangerous in that it prevents us from seeing the world truly, thus also obstructing our capacity to respond appropriately.

To love, for Murdoch, therefore entails attending to particular objects from a virtuous perspective which involves an affective component. This affective component includes generosity and an appreciative understanding of the object of love. By viewing the object from this perspective, the good qualities that it genuinely possesses become visible. Viewing others in this way enables one to perceive real qualities that they genuinely possess, but which, without attending lovingly, one will not be sensitive to. For example, in *Othello*, were one to view Othello from a detached, impersonal standpoint, his character would undoubtedly be unappealing. However, the play derives its power and its tragedy from enabling one to perceive him from a loving perspective, from which he can be seen as partially noble, yet at the same time deeply mistaken and cruelly blind. These qualities are a genuine part of the object of perception, but they are not visible from a perspective external to love.

This account of love as a virtue that is a reliable perceptual sensitivity enables Murdoch to maintain that love is epistemically beneficial. However, this on its own does not entail that love is *necessary* for true vision, nor that it is *uniquely* epistemically significant. In the following

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<sup>35</sup> Although inspired by Freudian psychology, the tenability of Murdoch's claim is not dependent on the truth of Freudian psychology, or any particular claim therein. Indeed, she takes Freudian psychology's image of the selfish psyche to offer an insight analogous to the Christian concept of original sin.

sections, I shall suggest that these features of love can be understood as a result of Murdoch's acceptance of the unity and hierarchy of the virtues respectively.

#### 4.1 The Unity of the Virtues

Many virtue ethicists have been tempted by the thought that the virtues are somehow unified.<sup>36</sup> Murdoch too understands the perceptual sensitivities constituting the virtues in this way. She recognises that this can seem obscure, commenting: “[w]hy should all be one here? The madhouses of the world are filled with people who are convinced that all is one” (Murdoch 1970; 56). Insistence upon the unity of the virtues, she suggests, can seem an optimistic fantasy given human nature, which can be all too successful at achieving only fragmentary virtue. However, Murdoch nonetheless claims that an examination of everyday moral virtues nonetheless reveals ways in which they are deeply intertwined and ordered:

As we deepen our notions of the virtues we introduce relationship and hierarchy. Courage, which seemed at first to be something on its own, a sort of specialised daring of the spirit, is now seen to be a particular operation of wisdom and love... It would be impossible to have only one virtue unless it were a very trivial one such as thrift. (Murdoch 1970: 95)

If we reflect upon the nature of the virtues we are constantly led to consider their relation to each other. The idea of an ‘order’ of virtues suggests itself, although it might of course be difficult to state this in any systematic form. (Murdoch 1970: 57)

Murdoch's claim is thus that no single virtue can be understood, let alone possessed, in isolation.<sup>37</sup> On her conception, the virtues are perceptual sensitivities to certain features of the world. But the features that call for kindness, for example, must be understood in relation to those that call for justice, and so on: the fullest form of kindness will be sensitive to the

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<sup>36</sup> For more recent defences of the unity of virtue, see Badhwar (1996), and Wolf (2007), and Toner (2014). Badhwar and Wolf defend qualified versions of the thesis. For scepticism about the unity of the virtues, see Sreenivasan (2009).

<sup>37</sup> She adds the caveat “unless it were a very trivial one such as thrift” (Murdoch 1970: 95). However, one might think that the kind of thrift that is plausibly virtuous would involve other virtues such as prudence and a proper appreciation of goods (in order to distinguish appreciative thrift from mere stinginess).

demands of justice. In attempting to understand any one virtue, one necessarily turns to other virtues; without this, it would be impossible to see what made it a virtue, since there would always be circumstances in which a character trait defined in wholly non-normative terms could be harmful or wrong. Since the virtues are always good, and what makes something good cannot be fully captured in non-normative terms, the virtues themselves are not definable in wholly non-normative terms, but understood only in relation to one another.<sup>38</sup>

Murdoch argues not only that the virtues cannot be defined in isolation but that they cannot be possessed in isolation: one cannot be truly courageous, for example, without also having the wisdom to know how and when to act courageously. This does not entail that one cannot possess any virtue to *any* degree without possessing the other virtues with which they are conceptually interconnected, but that the virtues cannot be possessed in isolation insofar as one could not *fully* possess any virtue without possessing the virtues with which it is interconnected. Murdoch writes, for instance:

[T]he *best* kind of courage (that which would make a man act unselfishly in a concentration camp) is steadfast, calm, temperate, intelligent, loving” (Murdoch 1970: 57).

Lack of one virtue can impose a limitation on the extent to which one can possess another, and the fullest form of any virtue will involve further virtues.<sup>39</sup>

For Murdoch, love, as a virtue, is therefore interrelated with every other virtue: to be loving, in the fullest and truest sense, involves being just, wise, honest etc. Love, on this account, is therefore necessary for the full possession of any virtues. This yields a sense in which love is always epistemically required: it is a perceptual sensitivity, and full possession of the perceptual sensitivities that are the other virtues also requires love. Love is not therefore required only on odd occasions in order to perceive a narrow set of features of the world, but necessary for all adequate perception. Insofar as the virtues are unified, love allows one to

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<sup>38</sup> The word ‘introduce’ might suggest the view that such hierarchy is imposed on the virtues, rather than discovered within them. However, this is more than offset by the fact she notes that the virtues are *seen to* stand in such relations, that we are *led* to consider such an order, and that the idea of an order *suggests itself*. Elsewhere, she notes that “increasing moral sophistication reveals increasing unity [among the virtues]” (Murdoch 1970: 57), which again suggests that such hierarchy is discovered rather than introduced.

<sup>39</sup> McDowell (1979) similarly suggests that “no one virtue can be fully possessed except by a possessor of all of them, that is, a possessor of virtue in general. Thus the particular virtues are not a batch of independent sensitivities” (McDowell 1979: 333).

perceive the world justly, courageously, and compassionately, and is therefore epistemically valuable in enabling all of these sensitivities.

#### 4.2 The Unique Significance of Love

Love, on Murdoch's view, is thus deeply intertwined with all other virtues. However, for Murdoch love occupies a *unique* position among the virtues: it is love in particular that is identified as "a central concept in morals" (Murdoch 1970: 2).<sup>40</sup> It is by presenting a loving gaze to the world, Murdoch insists, that we get things right morally. The thesis of the unity of the virtues alone does not provide reason to set love apart from any other virtue. It suggests that love is bound up with every other virtue but that the same is true of all virtues, since they are *all* interconnected. Nonetheless, in the previous quotation, Murdoch claims that deepening our concepts of the virtues introduces not only relationship between the virtues but also 'hierarchy'. The idea of hierarchy suggests that some virtues are more fundamental than others and play a more significant unifying role within the realm of the virtues. In Murdoch's scheme, love occupies a special position because it is at the apex of the hierarchy of the virtues: Murdoch contends that "there is a single supreme principle in the united world of the virtues" (Murdoch 1970: 57), and that this single supreme principle is love.

Murdoch's suggestion is that love occupies a position at the top of the hierarchy of the virtues because the formal object of love is simply the real. For Murdoch, love is a form of perception whose object is simply the real, that which exists outside of oneself and constrains one's will: she writes "love... is the discovery of reality" (Murdoch 1959: 52). As such, all virtues are forms of love, for all virtues involve perception of the real. Perception of objectively existent features of the world is always perception of the real, and therefore all virtues are forms of love.<sup>41</sup> One can attend lovingly to any object in the world, and for any object, loving attention will be morally and epistemically appropriate, allowing one to see it as it truly is and thus respond in a suitable way.

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<sup>40</sup> Elsewhere, she writes that "[w]e need a moral philosophy in which the concept of love... can once again be made central" (Murdoch 1970: 46).

<sup>41</sup> Murdoch notes that this also has the effect of expanding the domain of morality (or perhaps ethics) from a corner of human life to the whole of it: "The area of morals, and ergo of moral philosophy, can now be seen, not as a hole-and-corner matter of debts and promises, but as covering the whole of our mode of living and the quality of our relations with the world" (Murdoch 1970: 97).

According to Murdoch, the method whereby all the virtues are enacted is love: loving attention is necessary for all true vision. On her account, love is therefore a necessary component of any virtue since it is the truthful vision that allows perception of the particular features of the world sensitivity to which constitutes the particular virtues. The hierarchy of the virtues implies that since love is necessary for and an integral constituent of every other virtue, love is at the top of the hierarchy, uniquely bound up with 'the Good' itself.

Murdoch thus states: "'Good': 'Real': 'Love'. These words are closely connected" (Murdoch 1970: 42). On her account, love is a form of attention to and perception of the real, and the good is to be found in the deep configurations of the real. Love, for Murdoch, is a form of attention to particulars, and as such, it is the method of all the virtues. According to Murdoch, to be loving is to attend virtuously to the real, and loving attention to the real reveals entities that make moral demands on the perceiver.<sup>42</sup> Murdoch's justification of love's epistemic and moral significance is therefore dependent on her account of love as the virtue at the peak of a hierarchy of virtues.

## **5. The Everyday Concept of Love: A Defence of Murdoch**

Murdoch thus presents an epistemically weighty account of love, understanding it as a form of perception of the real, and conceiving of the loving perceiver as progressing towards a deepened understanding of the object of perception. However, one might question whether what she is discussing is genuinely love. Setiya (2013), for instance, raises the question of whether Murdoch's use of 'love' is 'quixotic', and leaves this unanswered, and Schaubert (2001: 482) more explicitly claims that "Murdoch's official, cognitive conception of love is unfamiliar".<sup>43</sup> I shall address two particular sceptical questions that might arise in this regard: firstly, can this account of love allow for love's affective dimension? Secondly, can this account

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<sup>42</sup> Murdoch therefore states "is there not nevertheless something about the conception of a refined love which is practically identical with goodness? Will not 'Act lovingly' translate 'Act perfectly', whereas 'Act rationally' will not?" (Murdoch 1970: 102).

<sup>43</sup> If Murdoch's conception of love were indeed divorced from the everyday conception it would be a particular problem for her given her complaint that love's centrality has been "forgotten or 'theorised away'" (Murdoch 1970: 1). That is, she assumes that there is an everyday conception of love that is pre-theoretically regarded as being morally significant, and wishes to accommodate such a conception rather than construct it.

explain love's selectivity, and particularly the problem that evil objects of attention seem to pose? I shall suggest that Murdoch has the resources to respond to each of these concerns.

Firstly, the affective dimension to love: one might worry that in understanding love as a perceptual sensitivity, Murdoch affirms its epistemic significance at the expense of its affective role. However, love's epistemic role does not entail that it lacks an affective dimension. Indeed, Murdoch suggests that an account on which cognition or perception is severed from evaluation and affect is "both alien and implausible" (Murdoch 1970: p. 9).<sup>44</sup> Identifying love with perception does not imply that it is not an emotion, nor that it is not affectively significant; rather, perception itself, or the knowledge thus gained, might be affective. Döring (2007) and De Sousa (1987, 2002), for instance, argue that emotions are perceptions of value, Roberts (1988) understands emotions as concern-based construals of value, and Nussbaum (2001) argues that emotions are forms of evaluative judgement. If emotions are understood on models such as these that unite the epistemic and the affective, love can be both a form of perception and an emotion. More generally, if judgement internalism is accepted, then beliefs about value, or perceptions of value, could be understood as necessarily generating affective states. The phenomenal, affective, or 'emotional' character of love is not therefore denied by understanding love as involving knowledge; conceiving of love as an emotion, or closely related to an emotion, is compatible with thinking of it as being a kind of perception.<sup>45</sup>

Murdoch's conception of love as an epistemic state, then, is at least compatible with the ordinary conception of love as an affective state. She is, however, committed to the claim that one cannot truly love another *without* being in the concomitant epistemic state, whereas it might seem that the ordinary conception of love is only or primarily of an affective state. Although Murdoch's account is consistent with the ordinary conception of love, one might therefore worry that it has a significantly different emphasis. In fact, however, we do ordinarily think of love as importantly involving knowledge. It seems plausible that if someone were utterly unmotivated to understand another, then however warm one's feelings towards them, this would fall far short of love: they would be failing to relate to the intended object of love.

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<sup>44</sup> Indeed, Murdoch speaks of "obedience to reality as an exercise of love" (Murdoch 1970: 42), suggesting a close connection between love and action, a connection that plausibly goes via the affective.

<sup>45</sup> Understanding love as an emotion involving knowledge also elucidates how love motivates action, since it is an affectively significant way of knowing. For example, Döring (2007) argues that emotions are affective perceptions, and involve a sense of how a situation 'ought-to-be'. If love is affective in this way, then Murdoch's claim that "true vision occasions right conduct" seems plausible (Murdoch 1978: 66).



Moreover, as Badhwar (2005) notes, “to the extent that others are deceived about us we fail to be the actual objects of their love” (Badhwar 2005: 60). Othello’s professed love for Iago, for instance, seems to be based upon too pervasive a misunderstanding of whom Iago is to count as loving him. Othello’s profoundly mistaken beliefs about Iago prevent him from truly knowing Iago, and thus form a barrier preventing him from loving Iago. It is thus plausible that love is a state that at least has the *aim* of knowing or understanding the other, and it would seem right to question a love that did not involve any personal knowledge of or insights about the beloved.

Further, although the everyday conception of love is closely related to an affective state, there is reason to think that it is not reducible to this. Naar (2013), for instance, argues that considerations such as the historical nature of love, its ability to permeate one’s identity, and its persistence across both time and temporal disruptions suggest that it is not reducible to an occurrent affective state. As he notes, love is not a state that one could be in for only five minutes, and is instead ordinarily conceived of as persisting throughout disruptions such as depression or doubt. The ordinary concept of love is therefore not reducible to its affective dimension.

Moreover, some significant elements of paradigmatic instances of interpersonal love are straightforwardly epistemic. As a friend or lover, one discerns features in another beyond those which would be available to an unloving observer, revealing a deeper knowledge of who the person is. One might discern anxiety in a friend’s brusque remark, for instance, and see it as calling for reassurance. Or one might be able to discern an endearing clumsiness in the way a friend delivers anecdotes. These seem like common features of interpersonal relationships that are well accounted for by perceptual accounts of love, but less well explained by affective accounts.<sup>46</sup>

Murdoch’s conception of love is also consistent with some commonplace non-philosophical descriptions of love. Jane Austen’s description of Darcy’s growing love for Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance, focuses upon his perception of her:

Mr Darcy had at first scarcely allowed her to be pretty; he had looked at her without admiration at the ball; and when they next met, he looked at her only to criticise. But no sooner had he made it clear to himself and his friends that

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<sup>46</sup> Again, Murdoch is not alone in offering an epistemically laden account of love: Jollimore (2011) also understands attending to the beloved in certain way as central to love.

she had hardly a good feature in her face, than he began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes... he was forced to acknowledge her figure to be light and pleasing; and in spite of his asserting that her manners were not those of the fashionable world, he was caught by their easy playfulness.

In this passage, Austen reveals Darcy's emerging love for Elizabeth by describing his increasing disposition to perceive her good qualities. The reader is aware of the injustice of Darcy's initial impressions, and his recognition of her positive qualities is depicted as not only indicating Darcy's developing love for Elizabeth, but also as at least in part constituting it. The everyday conception of love does not therefore seem to identify it solely as an affective state, but to involve perception.

Secondly, a critic might claim that the ordinary conception of love involves selectivity: we do not love all equally, and we feel justified in limiting loving relationships to particular people. For Murdoch, on the other hand, love is morally 'commanded' for every object of attention. She states that the virtuous agent, like the artist, sees their objects lovingly "whether they are sad, absurd, repulsive or even evil" (Murdoch 1970: 66). However, lovingly attending to all of reality does not imply that one must express love in the same way towards all objects of attention, or that the love need always take the same form. Loving one's friends and one's children, for example, will involve very different relationships, and one can love a novel without 'sharing its concerns' at all. It seems plausible that the everyday conception of love covers a variety of phenomena, and that romantic and sexual love, for example, involve far more than the basic moral case. In these cases, the aspects of love that Murdoch identifies might be necessary but not sufficient conditions for love. Thus, that selectivity is part of the everyday conception of romantic love need not be in tension with loving attention being 'commanded' for every object of attention.

Moreover, love's selectivity is at least in part explained by the differing relationships that we have with others. The beloved's attitude towards the lover plausibly affects the agent's capacity to lovingly perceive them. The ways in which the beloved behaves, and the attitudes that they hold towards the lover can enable or make difficult loving perception of them.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> This goes some way to combat the worry that accounts of love which do not necessarily involve reciprocity are inherently flawed. Brewer-Davis (2013), for instance, argues that 'special perception' accounts of love are "startlingly one-sided" (Brewer-Davis 2013: 363). Similarly, John (2013) emphasises the idea that love is a second-person

Certain ways of acting open one up to others, express one's identity, and encourage engagement, whilst other ways of acting (indifference, taciturnity, aloofness) discourage the perceiver from attending lovingly. Although love is morally and epistemically necessary, there is therefore an explanation for the selective way most people love: the way another person acts can assist or hinder the lover from attaining the form of perception that would constitute love.

Nonetheless, an objector might urge that this does not account for evil objects of attention, objects that seem unworthy of love. The idea that such evil objects morally and epistemically ought also to be lovingly perceived seems to be far less obviously attractive than the idea that one's friends and partners ought to be lovingly perceived; such objects do not seem to be *lovable*.<sup>48</sup>

One response to this is that as well as identifying love with knowledge of the real, Murdoch seems to identify 'the real' with 'the Good': "'Good': 'Real': 'Love'. These words are closely connected" (Murdoch 1970: 42). Underlying Murdoch's work runs a deep optimism in the reality and magnetic power of 'the Good' which might justify the idea that loving attention reveals objects that are ultimately worthy of love. However, I shall set aside this option, since it involves obscure theoretical commitments which many would be hesitant in accepting, and instead focus upon whether, if the real and the good are extricable, one might still conceive of love as knowledge of the real.<sup>49</sup>

Crucially, this objection depends upon an un-Murdochian model of love. Understanding love as a reliable sensitivity to the real does not entail that one must find the object of one's love to be 'lovable' or attractive. For instance, in the M and D example, Murdoch allows that attending lovingly to D might lead M to conclude that her daughter-in-law is indeed unworthy.<sup>50</sup> In the same way that virtues such as justice might require negative appraisals and emotions, so too a properly loving response might include ultimately negative

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relation, and Kolodny (2003) describes love as 'valuing a relationship', whereas Murdoch's account refers only to the lover as an agent. Lovingly attending to a person may be facilitated by their own attitudes. In any case, the idea that unrequited love is possible is far from particular to Murdoch.

<sup>48</sup> Chappell (2018) takes such objections to be reason to think that Murdoch does not, after all, identify love with knowledge, or take love to be necessary for knowledge.

<sup>49</sup> Chappell (2014), however, notes that such a view is not historically uncommon, and expresses sympathy with a similar view: "[t]he reason why everything that exists is worth (at least some) contemplative attention is because there is a sense in which everything that exists is good" (Chappell 2014: 306).

<sup>50</sup> Although perhaps not in the sexist or classist ways in which she first suspected that she was unworthy.

evaluations.<sup>51</sup> Attending lovingly does not entail that one will ultimately conclude with a positive appraisal of the object of attention, but that the genuinely positive features of the object that are there to be seen will be increasingly fully perceived and one will be responsive to them: the ultimate appraisal of the object will be just and truthful – but not necessarily positive. Indeed, the connection to virtues such as honesty and justice suggests that loving necessarily involves possible negative evaluations as well as positive ones. However, these will be situated within a vision of the other that does justice to the complex whole. It does not seem implausible that it is right to perceive even things that are overall unpleasant or evil in this way.

The idea that no-one is an inappropriate object of love is far from peculiar to Murdoch.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps the most famous ethical advice in the Gospels is found in Jesus' injunction: "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44, NRSV), which is surely a case of morally commanded love for evil objects of attention.<sup>53</sup> In this context, it seems that Murdoch's account of love coheres with features of the familiar concept of it. If it is embedded in our ordinary concept that love for one's enemies is possible, then Murdoch's account seems like a natural development of the everyday conception of love.

## Conclusion

I have argued that Murdoch's claims about love's epistemic role can thus be understood in relation to her conception of virtue. On her account, love is a virtue, and as such involves a perceptual sensitivity to objective features of reality. Moreover, Murdoch conceives of the virtues as unified, and of love as situated at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of the virtues, which explains her contention that love is of unique moral and epistemic significance. However, Murdoch does not suggest that virtues attune one to features of reality that could be discerned

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<sup>51</sup> Wolf (2015) notes that to love, and to lovingly attend to another, need not entail finding them wholly lovable or admirable. Indeed, she suggests that the best kind of love involves a clear-eyed awareness of the flaws and failings of the beloved.

<sup>52</sup> Preston-Roedder (2013) describes 'faith in humanity' as a virtue, an ability to see the 'decency' in others that is itself likely to prompt and support such moral decency. This seems to involve something like the kind of unselective love for others that Murdoch is proposing.

<sup>53</sup> This congruence between Murdochian love and Christian love is unsurprising given that Murdoch's conception of loving attention was influenced by Simone Weil, a deeply religious thinker.

by any neutral or impersonal perceiver; for her, there are objective features of reality that will be perceptible only from within a human moral schema. The loving agent does not work with the very same concepts that the neutral observer might. Rather, their conceptual resources themselves are transformed by loving attention. The apparent tension between love's epistemic role and objectivity is thus resolved, since on Murdoch's account love is personal, but nonetheless involves an openness to the real. Although this account of love can seem novel and surprising, it is nonetheless a rich and interesting account that is consistent with core components of the everyday conception of love.



## Chapter Two

# The Epistemic Demands of Friendship

In the recent literature on friendship, various philosophers have suggested that ethical norms and epistemic norms conflict. In particular, the suggestion has been that ethical norms deriving from valuable relationships such as friendship sometimes demand things that conflict with epistemic demands on us.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I will be discussing the thought that friendship sometimes constitutively requires of us that we form, or be disposed to form, beliefs about our friends in ways that conflict with epistemic norms on belief-formation. In particular, I will explore the ‘epistemic partialist’s’ contention that being a good friend is partly constituted by forming, or being disposed to form, beliefs about one’s friends that paint them in a good light.

It would be disconcerting if there were the kind of conflict between friendship and epistemic norms that the epistemic partialist claims there to be. Such conflict would imply that in acting well in one regard (as a friend or else as an epistemic agent) we can be systematically

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<sup>1</sup> This is most explicitly discussed by Keller (2004, 2018) and Stroud (2006). Keller claims that “sometimes, the norms of friendship clash with epistemic norms” (Keller 2004: 330). Stroud makes the more cautious claim that friendship can make demands on us that conflict with the norms proposed by *mainstream epistemological theories*. This leaves open the possibility that mainstream epistemological theories fail to capture the true epistemic norms, and that the norms of friendship might not conflict with these true norms. Harman (2011) suggests that people can be blameworthy for holding beliefs about their friends that are nonetheless epistemically justified. Hazlett (2013) similarly argues that “(a disposition towards) partiality bias is partially constitutive of some friendships” (Hazlett 2013: 95).

precluded from being a good agent in another respect (as an epistemic agent or else as a friend). There would be no way of getting it right overall: it would be impossible to be both a good friend and a responsible epistemic agent.<sup>2</sup>

In response to this pessimistic thought many philosophers sceptical about epistemic partiality have sought to find ways of understanding the demands of friendship and epistemic agency such that they are consistent. Usually, they have sought to suggest both that epistemic norms are less restrictive than epistemic partialists assume, and that friendship is less demanding than epistemic partialists assume. Such sceptics conclude that epistemic norms permit the doxastic states or actions characteristic of friendship, and that friendship fortuitously turns out not to require anything epistemically dubious after all.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, I will be exploring an alternative response to epistemic partialism inspired by Iris Murdoch's work on love and knowledge.<sup>4</sup> On Murdoch's view, love is (or at least involves) knowledge of the individual, such that to fail to see the beloved truly is not only an epistemic failure but also a failure of love. On her view, insofar as one's knowledge of the other is lacking, so is one's love of them. Given the plausible assumption that friendship involves love, then a Murdochian view of friendship will imply that the person who fails to see their friend as they truly are, far from being a good friend, necessarily falls short of the intrinsic demands of friendship.

A Murdochian view of friendship thus undermines a key assumption of epistemic partialism that has been accepted by proponents and sceptics alike. The assumption is that friendship is entirely *independent* of epistemic good such as knowledge and truth, such that

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that on this view, one would fall short either as an epistemic agent or a friend, whether or not one *encounters* an actual clash between the demands of friendship and those of epistemology. One might be fortunate enough to have friends who truly are wonderful, and thus it might require no false beliefs to think good things of them. Nonetheless, one kind of norm ('believe what the evidence points to' or 'believe good things of one's friends', for example) will in fact guide one's belief-formation, since the two could come apart, and in that case one would be forced to choose which norm to follow. This is sufficient to think that whether or not one encounters an actual clash, one falls short with regard to one kind of norm.

<sup>3</sup> Hawley (2014), for example, suggests that given background commitments to epistemic permissivism (the denial of the claim that given one's total evidence, there is a unique rational doxastic attitude that one can take to any proposition) and the thought that friendship requires less of us than some assume, the norms of friendship will conflict with those of epistemic agency rarely, if ever. Kawall (2013) similarly suggests that friendship does not require bias, drawing on epistemic permissivism and pragmatic encroachment to justify this (roughly, the idea that differences in pragmatic factors can constitute a difference in knowledge). Morton and Paul (2018) also assume epistemic permissivism and pragmatic encroachment in arguing that it is epistemically permissible for friendship to affect one's belief-formation.

<sup>4</sup> In particular, see Murdoch (1959, 1970). In doing this, I will be drawing on the conception of Murdochian love discussed in the previous chapter.



friendship is not itself an epistemically rich state. Keller (2018) explicitly makes this claim, and it is an assumption that epistemic partialists must make if the norms of friendship and epistemic norms are to constitutively conflict, as they claim. On the Murdochian account, the concerns that underlie the norms of friendship are at least in part epistemic concerns, thus ruling out the possibility of deep or constitutive tension between the two kinds of demand. I will therefore be suggesting that a Murdochian view of friendship provides a novel way of responding to epistemic partialism.

A Murdochian account of friendship and epistemology is not, however, merely of exegetical interest; I will also be suggesting that it casts light on some common intuitions about friendship. It makes sense of intuitions regarding the impact of mistaken beliefs on apparent friendships – for instance, that deep mistakes about our friends seem to undermine friendship. It also makes sense of the ways in which we would expect good friends to behave – for instance, we expect them to be responsive to the actual character and needs of their friends. I will thus be arguing that there is therefore reason to take the Murdochian view of friendship seriously.

In §1 of this chapter I will further outline why it has been thought that ethical norms concerning friendship are taken by epistemic partialists to conflict with epistemic norms. In §2 I will then argue that underlying the appeal of this thought is the assumption that good friendship is independent of epistemic goods such as knowledge and truth, and the consequent assumption that good friendship and good epistemic agency are unrelated. In §3 I will argue that Murdoch's work suggests a novel way of responding to this apparent problem by insisting that friendship involves knowledge, thus ruling out the possibility of constitutive conflict between the norms of friendship and epistemology. In §4 I will argue that the Murdoch-inspired response best makes sense of some important intuitions we have about friendship. In §5 I will compare this with a superficially similar but epistemically weaker account of friendship offered by Crawford (2019) in order to bring out why the strong epistemic constraints on friendship suggested by the Murdochian view are necessary in order to explain our intuitions about friendship and provide a satisfactory response to epistemic partialism. Finally, I will conclude with some general considerations about the nature of friendship, and suggest that there is good reason to think that many discussions of epistemic partiality go awry in taking for granted a substantive and questionable conception of it.

## 1. Partiality and Epistemic Responsibility

At any one point, humans are subject to various different kinds of norm: epistemic norms, prudential norms, moral norms, and social norms, for example. These norms sometimes come into conflict. Some conflicts between two kinds of norm are merely coincidental – they arise simply because of the particular circumstances in which one finds oneself. For example, if someone promises to greatly financially reward you for believing something utterly trivial but patently untrue, then in that particular instance what I prudentially ought to do and what I epistemically ought to do come into conflict. Such a conflict of demands is of course unfortunate. However, it does not indicate any deep-seated, inherent conflict between the two kinds of norm; it does not indicate that there is any constitutive conflict between prudence and good epistemic agency. Epistemic demands and those of friendship can clearly conflict in this coincidental sense. For example, you might have epistemic reason to take time to clear up your confusion on some issue, since doing so would maximise your true beliefs, but also a reason of friendship to instead take the time to go for a drink with a friend. Such conflict, however, does not indicate that there is a constitutive conflict between the norms of friendship and epistemology.

The controversial claim put forward by epistemic partialists is that there is *inherent* or *constitutive* conflict between the norms of friendship and epistemology. Their claim is that being a good friend is partially constituted by forming positive beliefs about one's friends or by adopting belief-forming strategies that are likely to lead to such positive beliefs.<sup>5</sup> In other words, they suggest that being a good friend can be partially constituted by biased beliefs, or biased belief-forming mechanisms. On the other hand, epistemic norms entail that one should form beliefs only on the basis of considerations that bear on epistemic goals: the *truth* of the claim in question, or one's *knowledge*.<sup>6</sup> Such beliefs, or belief-forming mechanisms, will by definition be unbiased. Epistemic norms thus demand that one form beliefs or belief-forming dispositions that are unbiased. The potential conflict between the demands of friendship and

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<sup>5</sup> There are important differences between these two ways that biases can enter. I discuss these at the end of this section.

<sup>6</sup> Quite what kinds of reason make for good epistemic reasons is disputed, but it seems that on any plausible account of epistemic reasons, the fact that someone is one's friend will not count as a good epistemic reason. Hazlett (2016) notes that 'epistemic' can be used in two distinct senses, one meaning relating to *belief*, and the other meaning relating to *knowledge*. I am using the term in the latter sense.

epistemic demands is thus no mere coincidence, but inherent to the nature of those norms themselves.<sup>7</sup> Not only do the actions that the two sets of norms prescribe occasionally conflict when they are practically applied, but the norms themselves, epistemic partialists suggest, conflict: they prescribe things that are incompatible, since one norm demands bias, whereas the other prohibits it. Sarah Stroud (2006) thus claims that “[f]riendship constitutively involves belief-forming practises which are irrational or otherwise objectionable by the light of mainstream epistemologies” (Stroud 2006: 500).

On Stroud’s view, being a good friend involves believing, or being disposed to believe, good things about one’s friends: “the good friend is prepared to take her friend’s part both publicly and, as it were, internally” (Stroud 2006: 505). Stroud notes that friendship is often thought to be in some sense based on one’s view of one’s friend’s character and merits, and thus that “it makes sense that we need, as it were, to maintain a favorable opinion of our friend’s character” (Stroud 2006: 511). The suggestion is that it is a norm of friendship, inherent to friendship itself, that one believe good things about one’s friends, or be disposed to form such beliefs. And this, she suggests, is the case simply because they are one’s friends rather than because there is some epistemic explanation (such as that one is likely to know one’s friends well and therefore have plenty of evidence about their good qualities).<sup>8</sup> On her account, the connection between friendship and belief is not simply that we form friendships with those we like or admire. Rather, friendship itself can also require of us that we form positive beliefs, or be disposed to form such beliefs, about the other person. The norm that one should believe good things of one’s friends, she suggests, thus clashes with epistemic norms, since epistemic norms require that one should be responsive only to epistemic considerations, considerations that bear on epistemic goods such as knowledge or truth.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Kawall (2013) makes this point, suggesting that epistemic partialists’ claim implies that a “pervasive clash” between friendship and epistemic norms is at stake, rather than occasional particular conflicts which would be “hardly surprising” (Kawall 2013: 350).

<sup>8</sup> Of course, it is true that one is likely to know one’s friends well, and (hopefully) to therefore have plenty of evidence about their good qualities. But forming one’s beliefs on the basis of such evidence would be epistemically unproblematic. Epistemic partialists claim that even setting aside such evidence, one can have reason to form certain beliefs on the basis of the friendship itself. Hawley (2014) suggests that in large part this gets it the wrong way around, at least in the case of trust; we often form friendships with those we consider trustworthy, rather than considering people trustworthy because they are our friends (Hawley 2014: 2038).

<sup>9</sup> Keller offers a slightly different argument, though he arrives at a similar conclusion. He writes “when good friends form beliefs about each other, they sometimes respond to considerations that have to do with the needs and interests of their friends, not with aiming at the truth, and that’s part of what makes them good friends” (Keller 2004: 330). One such interest, he claims, is the interest we have in being well thought of by our friends. That is, he thinks that our friends’ interests in being thought well of by us give us reason to form positive beliefs about them.

Stroud thus suggests that epistemic norms thus require lack of bias, whereas friendship demands bias.

To illustrate what epistemic partiality might require, Simon Keller (2004) puts forward an example: Rebecca is scheduled to give a poetry reading at a café and has invited her friend Eric along. Having attended many such poetry readings at the café, Eric has accumulated strong reasons to believe that the poetry that is read there is never more than mediocre, and often positively bad. Keller suggests that prior to knowing who will be performing Eric would have “good evidence” for the belief that their poetry will be unimpressive (Keller 2004: 332). Were Eric assessing the likelihood that a stranger would give a good poetry reading at the café, Keller claims that he ought to believe that they won’t give a good reading, since he has plenty of evidence for this conclusion. However, Keller suggests that Eric *ought not* to form such a belief about Rebecca’s poetry, despite having no extra knowledge of her general competence, aesthetic capacities, or anything similar that might count as evidence for that belief:

[S]eeing as he’s Rebecca’s good friend, though, and seeing as he is there to offer her support, he ought not [to]... have those beliefs about her” (Keller 2004: 332)

That is, despite the fact that *all* of the evidence available to Eric points strongly towards the conclusion that the poetry will be bad, Keller thinks that simply as a friend Eric ought not to believe that Rebecca’s poetry will be bad.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Stroud suggests that friendship gives us reason to disbelieve plausible testimony about the bad behaviour of our friends, even if the friendship does not provide evidence for the falsity of the testimony.

### 1.1 Two Kinds of Epistemic Partiality

Epistemic partialists, then, hold that the demands of friendship constitutively conflict with epistemic demands. There are two distinct claims, however, that epistemic partialists make about the kind of partiality that friendship demands: one claim is that friendship demands partiality on the level of belief, and another claim is that it demands partiality on the level of dispositions to believe. These suggest two different kinds of conflict between epistemic

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<sup>10</sup> One might think that friendship demands that Eric behave *as if* he does not have the belief that Rebecca’s poetry will be awful. This would, however, be compatible with rejecting epistemic partialism.

reasons and those of friendship. Epistemic partialists have tended to accept that friendship gives us reason to be epistemically partial in both of these ways, although it would be possible for them to come apart.

The first claim made by epistemic partialists (I shall call it ‘*direct* epistemic partialism’) is that friendship provides direct reasons for belief. Epistemic partialists sometimes claim that the fact that someone is one’s friend can be a direct reason to form a belief about them that is more positive than the belief the evidence points to. As a result, these friendship-based reasons for belief sometimes *directly* conflict with epistemic reasons for belief, reasons to believe what the evidence points to. Direct epistemic partialism is suggested, for instance, by Keller:

[W]hen good friends form beliefs about each other, they sometimes respond to considerations that have to do with the needs and interests of their friends, not with aiming at the truth, and that’s part of what makes them good friends.  
(Keller 2004: 330)

On this account, friendship directly provides a reason to believe positive things about one’s friends, and it is constitutive of good friendship that one is responsive to such reasons.

The second claim made by epistemic partialists (I shall call it ‘*indirect* epistemic partialism’) is that friendship provides reason to cultivate doxastic dispositions that will in turn yield beliefs about one’s friends that are positively biased.<sup>11</sup> In this case, the conflict between epistemic and friendship-based reasons occurs at the level of epistemic agency; on this conception of epistemic partiality, the epistemic reasons we have to cultivate unbiased doxastic dispositions conflict with the friendship-based reasons to form biased doxastic dispositions. Stroud, for instance, suggests indirect epistemic partialism when she claims:

Friendship positively demands epistemic bias, understood as an epistemically unjustified departure from epistemic objectivity. Doxastic dispositions which violate the standards promulgated by mainstream epistemological theories are a constitutive feature of friendship. (Stroud 2006: 518)

Keller also discusses this possibility when he talks about “belief-forming strategies” as being constitutive of friendship (Keller 2018: 32).<sup>12</sup> Here, both Stroud and Keller speak about

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<sup>11</sup> Arpaly and Brinkerhoff (2018) call this ‘epistemic partialism-light’, and note that it is strictly compatible with the claim that there are no practical reasons for belief.

<sup>12</sup> Keller writes that as a good friend “you choose a belief-forming strategy motivated partly by your concern for my interests” (Keller 2018: 32).

friendship as if it gives us a reason to cultivate doxastic dispositions, rather than a direct reason to form beliefs.

The core of epistemic partialism is thus the claim that the norms of friendship and epistemology constitutively conflict in one (or both) of the above ways. Epistemic partialists claim that good friendship is in part constituted either by forming positive beliefs about one's friends, or by developing doxastic dispositions to form positive beliefs about one's friends. On either version, such reasons will clash with epistemic reasons, which have only to do with epistemic goods such as evidence, truth or knowledge, and which require forming unbiased beliefs and doxastic dispositions.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. The Independence Assumption

The idea that the norms of friendship could constitutively conflict with epistemic norms in either of these ways depends upon the assumption that norms of friendship are inherently *independent* of epistemic norms. This assumption is necessary if there is to be the possibility of constitutive tension between the two. That is, friendship can only constitutively demand things that are inconsistent with epistemic demands if friendship is not itself knowledge-involving. If good friendship does involve knowledge, or a propensity towards knowledge, then the demands of friendship would themselves involve epistemic demands, and thus could not constitutively conflict with epistemic demands.<sup>14</sup>

Keller (2018), for instance, explicitly notes this, and argues for the independence of friendship from epistemic considerations:

Considering the very different respective sources of epistemic norms and the norms of friendship, there is no reason to presume that you will always be able to meet both kinds of norms at the same time. My needs for support and acknowledgment (and so on) are products of my changing human moods,

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<sup>13</sup> Both Stroud and Keller suggest that this conflict gives us reason to sometimes disregard epistemic norms. For example, Stroud writes “[w]e have no realistic option but to pay the price of admission to friendship, however high that price might be from some other evaluative point of view. If there is a fight here, friendship must – and will – win.” (Stroud 2006: 518).

<sup>14</sup> It does not seem, for example, like there could be constitutive tension between being a good friend and being a good person, since being a good friend is a part of being a good person. Similarly, if friendship is partly constituted by epistemic goods, then the norms of friendship *could not* conflict with those of epistemology.

insecurities, anxieties, and circumstances. Your epistemic reasons are products of facts about the evidence before you and about which belief-forming strategies are most likely to lead you to the truth. Whether my needs are nicely coordinated with the evidence in front of you appears to be an utterly contingent matter. Suppose that you are at the grocery store deciding what food to buy. Some choices would allow you to eat healthier food; some would allow you to eat tastier food. Suppose that I tell you that you do not need to decide between healthy food and tasty food, because whatever turns out to be the tastiest diet is guaranteed also to be healthy. There are many ways to eat healthily, I tell you, so considerations of health do not restrict you to one specified diet... The problem is that the considerations that determine whether food is healthy are deeply different from the considerations that determine whether food is tasty. Healthiness and tastiness in food have very different sources. As a result, there can be no guarantee that the tastiest diet for you will also be the healthiest diet for you, even if there are many different ways to eat healthily. (Keller 2018: 32)

Keller here notes that foods are not tasty in virtue of their healthiness, nor healthy in virtue of their tastiness. Healthiness as such does not contribute to tastiness. So, it is possible for the two considerations to pull apart in inconsistent directions.

Keller's suggestion here is that, like the tastiness and healthiness of food, epistemic norms and those of friendship are unconnected, and it is thus unsurprising that they should pull apart. The two kinds of norm, like those deriving from health and tastiness, are independent of one another, and thus any coincidence between the two would be wholly fortuitous (as in cases where healthy foods are also tasty). His suggestion is that knowledge as such does not contribute to friendship, so there is no reason to expect epistemic demands to coincide with those of friendship. That the two are distinct is thus a necessary condition for constitutive conflict between the two kinds of demand.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> This is also suggested by a methodological note in Stroud's paper. She states: "I propose that we put blinkers on now and take a close look at friendship, postponing any worries about the epistemological (or moral) status of what we may find." (Stroud 2006: 500). This will be a good methodology to pursue in thinking about friendship *only* if the norms of friendship and epistemology are in fact distinct (and indeed, only if the norms of friendship and morality are in fact distinct). Otherwise, bracketing such considerations might lead to a skewed account of the demands of friendship.

The claim that friendship is independent of epistemic goods has generally gone unquestioned. Even philosophers who are sceptical about the idea that we should be epistemically partial to our friends have raised no challenge to the idea that the norms of friendship are inherently independent of epistemic norms, nor to the idea that friendship itself is independent of knowledge as such. As I noted above, they have rather suggested that friendship does not require us to be as partial as epistemic partialists assume, or that epistemic norms are less restrictive than might be thought (and often both of these things). I will now give a fuller overview of these approaches.

Some philosophers sceptical about epistemic partiality take a piecemeal approach to making the demands of friendship consistent with epistemic demands. They suggest that since many particular goods of friendship depend on negative or accurate beliefs about the other, friendship cannot require general bias. For example, some note that friendship often requires one to break hard truths to the other, and that this can allow for increased self-knowledge and self-improvement, among other considerations. Others similarly note that friendship can require giving advice and support to another, and that such advice and support will be better insofar as it is accurate.<sup>16</sup> That is, they identify particular goods that can arise in friendship and suggest that they are such that the norms of friendship are consistent with those of epistemology. On this approach, the norms of friendship and epistemology are demonstrated to be consistent in a piecemeal fashion: norms arising from particular goods of friendship are identified, and those norms are each then shown to be individually consistent with our epistemic obligations, since knowledge is necessary for the realisation of those goods. The greater the number of norms that are consistent, the less likely it is that friendship and epistemic obligations will conflict, but the possibility of such conflict remains, and the assumption that friendship is not itself an epistemically rich state is unquestioned (in much the same way that one might find that eating tasty food is consistent with eating healthily, since lots of individual healthy foods are tasty, despite tastiness and healthiness being wholly independent considerations).

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<sup>16</sup> See Kawall (2013), Arpaly and Brinkerhoff (2018), and Morton and Paul (2018). Arpaly and Brinkerhoff argue that although in some cases epistemic partiality might help friendship, many particular goods of friendship depend on accuracy. They suggest that overall we are better off not developing epistemically partial doxastic dispositions given that they would bring significant risks with them, and be a significant loss epistemically: “there is no safe dose of irrationality” (Arpaly and Brinkerhoff 2018: 47).



Other philosophers suggest that reconceiving of the nature of epistemic norms allows us to see that they are consistent with the demands of friendship. They thus suggest that the norms of epistemology are not necessarily as demanding or restrictive as partialists assume. Such sceptics about epistemic partialism turn to theories such as epistemic permissivism and pragmatic encroachment to suggest that our epistemic duties are not as stringent or as wholly divorced from our ethical duties as partialists assume.<sup>17</sup> This approach depends upon accepting substantive epistemic commitments in order to render the two sets of demands consistent, and thus speaks to a narrow potential audience.<sup>18,19</sup> Proponents of this approach too have not questioned the assumption that friendship is inherently independent of one's epistemic standing regarding one's friends.

I will be suggesting that the norms of friendship are not independent of those of epistemology, but this does not entail rejecting the above approaches. Rather, the account of friendship I will offer provides an explanation of *why* the particular demands of friendship so fortuitously turn out not to require bias. The Murdochian response I shall offer is also consistent with epistemic theories such as permissivism and pragmatic encroachment, but does not require them. It thus speaks to a wider potential audience than the above approaches.

### 3. Friendship as an Epistemically Rich State

Although the assumption that the norms of friendship are inherently independent of epistemic norms is widely taken for granted, there is reason to be hesitant about accepting it. On some plausible conceptions of friendship, the norms of friendship and epistemic agency are *not* entirely independent. Given that friendship involves and is partially constituted by love,

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<sup>17</sup> See Kawall (2013), Hawley (2014), Piller (2016) and Morton and Paul (2018). For a general defence of the idea that epistemic norms are not distinct from moral and prudential norms, see Rinard (2018, 2019).

<sup>18</sup> Such responses also speak to a narrow range of the cases. For example, Morton and Paul suggest that the first constraint on evidential policies will be truth or accuracy, and it is *only* when evidential policies are equally rational in this respect that other practical and ethical considerations can come in: “on our view, it will not be the case that we should ever trade accuracy for advantage.” (Morton and Paul 2018: 79-80). Keller's example of Eric's biased belief-formation, for example, is explicitly ruled out by this stipulation.

<sup>19</sup> Goldberg (2018) suggests that an account which explains away the apparent clash between sets of norms without committing to a controversial epistemological doctrine is thereby to be preferred.

the Murdochian conception is one such.<sup>20,21</sup> On Murdoch's account of love, love is not something whose demands or norms *could* be in constitutive conflict with epistemic demands or norms. And this is because love, as she conceives of it, is an epistemically rich state: love is partly constituted by certain epistemic goods such as knowledge. Thus, given that friendship is partially constituted by love, a Murdochian conception of friendship will entail that friendship, too, is partly constituted by epistemic goods such as knowledge.

In §2 I argued that Keller's claim that the norms of friendship and epistemology are entirely independent is underpinned by the idea that epistemic goods are unrelated to the goods of friendship. Friendship, he states, fundamentally involves goods such as "support, openness, encouragement, and the assurance that someone is on my side" (Keller 2018: 32).<sup>22</sup> None of these goods, he claims, inherently involve any epistemic goods. As such, the norms relating to these goods would plausibly be independent of norms relating to epistemic goods. Murdoch, on the other hand, conceives of love (and hence plausibly friendship) as having an inherent epistemic dimension:

Love is the perception of individuals. Love is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real. Love ... is the discovery of reality.  
(Murdoch 1959: 51)

Love is knowledge of the individual (Murdoch 1970: 28)

These suggest that on Murdoch's account, love is not simply a matter of realising goods such as assurance, support and encouragement. Rather, love involves a kind of knowledge or perception, where these are meant to be *factive* states. On Murdoch's account, then, love is not simply a matter of acting in a certain way or feeling a certain way, but an epistemically rich state; she suggests that loving is partly constituted by epistemic goods.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> This is plausible at least in the best and fullest sense of friendship, the sense in which it indicates a normatively significant relationship. The notion of 'normative significance' is intended to set such friends apart from those such as mere acquaintances, or those with whom one shares a hobby but nothing deeper. The kind of friendship that is in mind in these discussions is a kind of bond that makes a deep difference to one's life, and could make a significant difference to one's wider ethical obligations.

<sup>21</sup> Another such conception is proposed by Crawford (2019), and I will examine this in §5.

<sup>22</sup> He also gestures toward such considerations in an earlier paper: "[o]ne of the distinctive goods of friendship is the knowledge that someone is on your side" (Keller 2004: 338).

<sup>23</sup> Murdoch is not the only proponent of this conception of friendship. Aristotle seems to have thought of friendship as involving knowledge of the friend, and to have taken this to be a part of what makes friendship valuable, since such knowledge aids self-knowledge. See Cooper (1977), Kraut (1989), and Veltman (2004) on the Aristotelian conception of friendship.

Murdoch associates love with a certain kind of open-endedness in one's vision of an object. Love, as she understands it, involves not only a static set of something like true beliefs about the other, but a movement towards deeper, truer knowledge of the other. The lover, she states, is confronted with an "endless task", an "ideal limit of love or knowledge which always recedes" (Murdoch 1970: 28). The person who attends to some object with love, on Murdoch's conception, is continuously involved in a progression towards an understanding of the object that does greater justice to its full complexity.<sup>24</sup>

Murdoch discusses love in general rather than friendship in particular, and she conceives of it in a broad sense. For instance, as she conceives of it, one can direct loving attention towards not only people but also inanimate objects and even concepts.<sup>25</sup> Her general view of love, then, may not tell us *all* that there is to know about the more specific phenomenon of friendship. However, it is plausible that love is necessary for, and a central aspect of, friendship – at least for the kinds of friendship that are deep and important. Any feature of love will thereby be a feature of friendship, even if it does not tell us all there is to know about friendship. The feature of her account of love that is significant for this discussion of friendship is her suggestion that to love someone entails having knowledge of them, and progressing towards deeper and fuller knowledge. This, she suggests, is a constitutive feature of love.

The assumption that norms of friendship and epistemic norms are inherently independent of one another is thus precluded by a Murdochian account of love. The Murdochian account of love implies that the demands of love (and thereby of friendship) could not constitutively conflict with epistemic demands, because knowledge – and the deepening of such knowledge – is an integral aspect of friendship. On the Murdochian account, friendship is an epistemically involved, knowledge-involving, state, so the norms of friendship *could not* constitutively conflict with epistemic norms.<sup>26</sup> If the Murdochian view is right, the parallel Keller draws concerning the independence of considerations of tastiness and

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<sup>24</sup> Chappell (2014) suggests that this is true of all 'objectual knowledge': "one striking characteristic of objectual knowledge is its *exploratory* nature" (Chappell 2014: 287). Knowing a friend seems to fit well within her conception of objectual knowledge (in that, for example, it essentially involves *acquaintance* with the friend).

<sup>25</sup> Murdoch writes "why not consider red as an ideal end-point, as a concept infinitely to be learned, as an individual object of love" (Murdoch 1970: 29).

<sup>26</sup> Jollimore (2011) also suggests that love is an epistemically rich state, and draws on Murdoch's work. However, his conception of the epistemic role of love invokes the idea of success less strongly than Murdoch seems to. Jollimore suggests that love involves and is (at least partially) constituted by a kind of vision that is generally epistemically advantageous, but seems to allow scope for it to go awry.

healthiness is mistaken. Rather, friendship and epistemic considerations would be related in a way that is closer to considerations such as tastiness and textural variety: whilst tastiness is not identical to texture, good texture contributes to tastiness.

On Murdoch's conception, love is not a state one can be in regardless of one's epistemic standing. It is not merely some kind of feeling that one can experience regardless of one's relations to reality. Love, as she conceives of it, involves knowledge of the object of love, which in the context of friendship is another person, the friend. To love someone involves knowing *who they are* as a person. Not all knowledge *about* another person will matter for friendship: for example, knowing the exact time that a friend's bus leaves for work or their dog's birth date seem irrelevant to the quality of one's friendship. But on the Murdochian account, knowledge of a friend's character traits, deeply held beliefs, and values is essential to love.<sup>27</sup> Such knowledge plausibly contributes to one's knowledge of them as a person. On this account, forming unjustified or inaccurate beliefs about a friend's character would thus detract from one's attempts to be a good friend. Since forming epistemically unjustified beliefs about who they are is a bad way to try to gain knowledge of the other person, and since on the Murdochian account friendship involves such knowledge, it would also be a bad way to try to be a good friend. On such a view, it could not possibly therefore be a requirement of love or friendship that one form beliefs, or be disposed to form beliefs, about the character of one's friends in an epistemically questionable manner. The Murdochian conception of friendship thus rules out both direct and indirect epistemic partiality.

#### 4. Motivating the Murdochian Account

Should we accept the Murdochian conception of friendship? The view gains intuitive support from the idea that if one has sufficiently mistaken beliefs about another, one fails to relate to *them*. If I claim to love you and care for you as a person, and yet I find that my beliefs

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<sup>27</sup> That friendship requires knowledge of the other suggests that we can be limited in our capacity to be a good friend by our wider conceptual capacities and our wider knowledge. For example, someone with no understanding of poetry might be limited in their capacity to be a friend to someone whose whole life is wrapped up in poetry. They would be unable to fully understand an important aspect of the other person, and thereby limited in their friendship. It might also lend support to the much-discussed claim that friendship requires good moral character, since moral ignorance plausibly also limits one's knowledge of others.

about you are radically mistaken, it seems plausible to think that I was not really loving *you* at all. Rather, I was loving an illusion, a person whom I thought existed, but who was never really real.<sup>28</sup> I therefore seem to fail to relate to you in the way that would be required for true friendship. Insofar as the person I believe myself to love does not correspond to the actual person I am confronted with, then I am not loving them – or at least, not as well as I could.<sup>29</sup>

To illustrate this, think of Dorothea Brooke's feelings of love for Edward Casaubon in *Middlemarch*. At the beginning of the novel, Dorothea believes herself to love Edward Casaubon. She trusts him, makes plans with him, and holds him in very high esteem. But despite this it would be odd to say that she ever truly loves Edward, and in large part this is because she is so radically mistaken about who he is.<sup>30</sup> Dorothea conceives of Edward as a genius and loves him as such. But he turns out to be utterly unlike her vision of him, and she later comes to realise that he is a dry and narrow-minded pedant with pitifully little to show for his life's work. In the early period Dorothea fails to see Edward as he truly is, instead creating a stereotyped image of a solitary male 'genius' with little correlation to reality. In loving this mere fantasy, Dorothea fails to love Edward himself. Her failure to truly know him (a failure for which he is himself partly responsible) seems to indicate a failure to love *him*.<sup>31,32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Kawall also suggests in passing a similar idea: "to the extent that the biased beliefs do play a significant role in sustaining the current friendship, to that same extent we do not seem to love our friend and her merits, and instead love her based on the traits we attribute to her in an epistemically unjustified fashion. We love the rose-colored image of the friend we have created" (Kawall 2013: 359). However, this plays no significant role in his rejection of epistemic partialism.

<sup>29</sup> Lackey (unpublished) makes a similar point. She suggests that the model of 'clearsighted friendship' need not be inferior to that of 'blind spot friendship'. Indeed, she suggests that if a friend formed inaccurate biased beliefs about one's behaviour or talents, one might well feel *alienated* from them.

<sup>30</sup> This makes sense of the commonplace platitude that one can be in love with an 'idea of someone' rather than the person themselves (and that one thereby fails to love the person themselves).

<sup>31</sup> To put it in Keller's terms, it seems plausible that she offers Edward support, encouragement, and the assurance that someone is 'on his side'. On Keller's account they thus realise the goods of friendship. But I think that we want to say that either the friendship is deeply lacking or even that it's not really a friendship at all: Dorothea is too deeply mistaken about who Edward is for it to be a true friendship.

<sup>32</sup> Arpaly and Brinkerhoff (2018) raise a similar line of thinking: "Consider a husband who puts his wife on a pedestal, so to speak: he sees her as an angelic doll who could do no wrong even if she tried. We judge the husband negatively for overestimating the wife in this way and for taking steps to maintain such a sterile view of her. The husband's take on the wife objectifies her. He fails to see her for what she is: a person who flails and mistakes and acts as people do, sometimes with bad intentions" (Arpaly and Brinkerhoff 2018: 44). It seems no coincidence that in both examples, the agents who fail to properly love their partners depend on heavily stereotyped images of the individuals with whom they are confronted. Murdoch herself states: "[t]he enemies of art and of morals, the enemies that is of love, are the same: social convention and neurosis" (Murdoch 1959: 52). Stereotypes seem like prime examples of this 'social convention' that can prevent clear vision and thereby stand as a barrier to love.

The Murdochian conception of friendship enables us to say that Dorothea's love for Edward is deeply deficient, as well as to explain why that is. Dorothea's feelings, hopes and beliefs about Edward are not guided by the person that he really is. The Murdochian account of friendship vindicates the intuitive connection between Dorothea's lack of knowledge and her lack of love: it allows us to say that her love is lacking because she is failing to relate to Edward as he really is.<sup>33</sup>

That a failure to truly know the other person is a failure of friendship also makes sense of our intuitions about how a good friend typically behaves. Consider the ways that the person with mistaken beliefs about the other will act towards the person about whom they are mistaken. Since they lack an accurate vision of the other person, they lack a good sense of who the other person is and their complex constellation of merits and flaws. As such, they are likely to end up behaving in ways that are uncharacteristic of friendship, since they will not be responsive to the actual features of the friend. For example, the good friend typically perceives one's failures as such, sympathises with them, and is likely to help one in the things with which one struggles. These actions require in-depth knowledge of a person's limitations. Similarly, someone who is a good friend would be unlikely to saddle their friends with responsibilities they are unable to meet and would typically be well placed to offer advice on which responsibilities they should accept. Again, these require an accurate conception of the friend's flaws and failings. Keller suggests that goods of friendship such as support and encouragement can be served by bias. But on this account, knowledge is necessary for such goods, at least in their best forms.<sup>34</sup>

Take the above case of Dorothea and Edward as an example: what would friendship demand here? Edward is wholly wrapped up in his work, but highly (miserably) insecure about it. Given this, it might initially seem that he is in need of support, encouragement, and reassurance.<sup>35</sup> But it is clear that he does not in fact have the capacity to write the monumental work that he dreams of. A true friend to Edward, it seems, would encourage him to let go of

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<sup>33</sup> Were Dorothea's vision of Edward at this point to nonetheless be progressing towards a more adequate knowledge of him, it perhaps would involve some element of love on the Murdochian conception. However, it is notable that at this point in the novel, Dorothea's conception of him is resistant to such progression. It is not a deepening of her initial knowledge that is needed in order to truly know Casaubon, but a rejection of her initial illusions about him.

<sup>34</sup> After all, one would not take 'encouragement' or 'support' from someone one knew to have no discernment in the relevant domain or no knowledge of one's capacities to be very encouraging at all.

<sup>35</sup> Indeed, it is along these lines that Dorothea initially conceives of her role: she initially thinks that she will provide Edward with help and support in his writing.

his increasingly desperate – and futile – wish to write a work of genius and instead focus on other goods that he might realise. Or they might try to assist him in building up a sense of self-worth that does not reside wholly in his work, so that his insecurity would no longer drive him to see the value of his life as only redeemable through his writing. What the good friend would not do is to express a high opinion of Edward’s work and genius, for doing so would clearly be contrary to his interests, feeding a deep insecurity in him that cannot be satisfied. Acting in this way would require great insight into his character, and especially into his shortcomings. True acts of friendship, it seems, thus require a deep knowledge of one’s friends.<sup>36</sup>

Taken together, these provide good reason to think that a Murdochian account of friendship is plausible. It can explain why deep mistakes about one’s friends can detract from one’s friendship. It can also explain why certain actions are characteristic manifestations of friendship, whilst others are contrary to friendship. Unlike the piecemeal approach, it thus provides a unified explanation of why the particular actions and goods characteristic of friendship do not require epistemic bias.

## 5. A Comparison with Crawford

To explain why mistakes about the other and undermine friendship and why we have certain expectations about how a good friend would behave, do we need to accept epistemic constraints as strong as those suggested by the Murdochian account? Crawford (2019) offers a response to epistemic partialism that is in some ways parallel to the Murdochian response but which suggests weaker epistemic constraints on friendship.

As with the Murdochian response, Crawford suggests that the nature of friendship rules out epistemic partiality: “there is something about friendship itself that explains why friendship cannot generate its own reasons for doxastic partiality” (Crawford 2019: 1586). And she also suggests that friendship is an epistemically rich state. However, the epistemic

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<sup>36</sup> If friendship constitutively involves knowledge, why might anyone find epistemic partiality appealing? Arpaly and Brinkerhoff’s (2018) offer a diagnosis that is compatible with my account. They note that we may well observe a *causal* relationship between love and epistemic partiality, and from this conclude that there is a constitutive connection between the two. They compare this to being overly anxious about one’s children: parental love is often manifested in over-anxiousness about their children, but such anxiousness is not constitutive of love. Insofar as we might take such a lack of anxiety to be worrying, it is because it might serve as an indicator of lack of love or concern, rather than because it is itself constitutive of loving parenthood.

component of friendship suggested by Crawford's account is considerably weaker than that suggested by the Murdochian account. Crawford suggests only that one's beliefs about one's friends must relate to one's prior beliefs in certain ways, whereas Murdoch suggests that they must relate to reality, to one's friends themselves, in a certain way (or to progress towards doing so). Murdoch therefore has a far more externalist conception of the epistemic goods involved in friendship. I shall argue that the weaker epistemic constraint on friendship suggested by Crawford fails to yield intuitive results about the cases discussed in §4. Moreover, whereas the Murdochian view has the resources to reject both direct and indirect epistemic partiality, Crawford offers a response only to direct epistemic partiality, leaving open the possibility that friendship requires indirect partiality.

Like Murdoch, Crawford suggests that friendship is an epistemically rich state. On her account, it is constitutive of good friendship that one adopts attitudes (including beliefs) toward one's friends that are responsive to one's beliefs about or perceptions (veridical or otherwise) of them. Crawford writes:

It is partly constitutive of being a good friend, I want to suggest, that one's attitudes toward one's friends are, in a sense to be defined, appropriately responsive to the perceived features of one's friends. (Crawford 2019: 1587)

She then characterises what it is to be 'appropriately responsive' as follows:

When these attitudes are "appropriately responsive," they are responsive to what one takes to be "object-given reasons" for those attitudes, rather than what one takes to be reasons that are "state-given" for those attitudes. Broadly speaking, a reason for an attitude is object-given when its status as a reason is grounded in some relation it bears to a property of the object of the attitude ... A reason for an attitude is state-given when its status as a reason is grounded in some relation it bears to a property of having that attitude in one's circumstances. (Crawford 2019: 1587)

On Crawford's account, then, it is constitutive of good friendship that one adopts attitudes towards one's friends on the basis of 'object-given' reasons (roughly, the reasons one counts as evidence) rather than 'state-given' reasons (reasons for the attitude itself). For example, she notes that a good friend would admire the other person because they believe the other person to have positive attributes (an object-given reason), not because having positive beliefs about them is pleasant and reassuring (a state-given reason). On Crawford's account, the person who



regards state-given reasons as considerations in favour of having certain beliefs (or non-doxastic attitudes) is thereby worse as a friend because their friendship is '*inauthentic*' (Crawford 2019: 1589). There would, she suggests, be a kind of insincerity in their beliefs that would undermine the friendship.

Crucially, Crawford conceives of the 'perceived features of one's friends' to which the good friend ought to be epistemically responsive in a non-factive way. That is, the object-given reasons on the basis of which the good friend adopts attitudes towards their friends need not be actual features of one's friends, but rather features one merely conceives of them as having. Crawford is explicit about this:

[I]t is possible to be susceptible to forms of wishful thinking that involve coming to have attitudes caused by the presence of state-given considerations that tell in favor of having those attitudes, without your thereby becoming necessarily worse as a friend for being so susceptible. (Crawford 2019: 1588)

The doxastically partial friend has a view of his friends that is slanted or biased in their favor, but that view of his friends can still be appropriately responsive, in the sense I have in mind, to what he takes to be the reasons for having those attitudes. (Crawford 2019: 1590)

On her account, as long as state-given reasons do not appear to the believer *as* considerations in favour of having a biased belief, then their friendship is not the worse for the fact that the beliefs are in fact inaccurate and biased. Crawford's suggestion is that *taking* state-given considerations as reasons to adopt beliefs or belief-forming practises is undermining of friendship, but that this is consistent with actually adopting biased beliefs or belief-forming practises.

Crawford argues that insofar as one adopts partial beliefs or belief-forming practises in order to be a good friend, or to bolster any of the particular goods of friendship, one is thereby worse as a friend. By giving an account of friendship on which it involves responsiveness to what one takes to be evidence, she rejects epistemic partialists' claim that friendship itself can *give us a reason* to adopt biased belief-forming practises. Crawford's response is therefore superficially similar to Murdoch's, but it depends on a very different conception of the epistemic demands that are constitutive of friendship. The Murdochian suggestion is that friendship entails knowledge (and progression towards deepening knowledge). On the Murdochian account, friendship thus involves getting it right about one's friends and

epistemically relating to them in a knowledge-conducive way. The Murdochian view is therefore significantly externalist in that being a good friend depends on factors outside the agent: it depends not only on forming one's beliefs based on certain evidence, but on things actually being the way one believes them to be. By contrast, on Crawford's account friendship merely requires forming one's beliefs on the basis of features one *regards* one's friends as having.

An initial problem with the weaker epistemic conditions in Crawford's account is that although it seems effective as a response to *direct* epistemic partiality, it is far from clear that it is effective as a response to *indirect* epistemic partiality. Whilst believing good things of one's friends as a direct response to state-given reasons plausibly does render the friendship inauthentic, it is not obvious that adopting belief-forming dispositions as a result of such reasons is similarly inauthentic. The actions and beliefs of the friend who believes as a direct result of such state-given reasons will jar with her actual perception of the evidence, her other actions, and her other beliefs. It is this disunity that seems to underpin the thought that her friendship would be 'inauthentic'. On the other hand, the friend who cultivates certain doxastic dispositions in order to be a good friend or strengthen a friendship need not exhibit any such disunity. After all, the most stable and therefore effective doxastic dispositions might also involve broad perceptual and affective dispositions. As such, Crawford's response, unlike the Murdochian response, seems to have the resources to respond only to direct epistemic partialism.

Moreover, Crawford's account cannot explain the features of friendship that the Murdochian account sheds light on. It wrongly seems to allow that one might be a good friend whilst being deeply mistaken about one's friend, and does not rule out the possibility that one might be a good friend *because* one is thus mistaken. The example of Edward Casaubon calls into question the idea that responding to apparent evidence is epistemically sufficient for friendship. In that case, Dorothea responds to things that she regards as evidence of Casaubon's genius, but her claim to love him nonetheless seems undermined by her lack of knowledge. Crawford's weakened conception of the epistemic goods involved in friendship cannot allow for the intuitive thought that Dorothea's love is lacking in virtue of her lack of knowledge.

Since Crawford's account does not require that the good friend actually have knowledge of the other, it also struggles to explain our expectation of the ways that good

friends act. It allows that good friends could *systematically* fail to act on the other person's interests due to a lack of knowledge. For example, according to Crawford the true friend could be radically mistaken about Casaubon and continue to regard him as a genius. As such, according to her account, expressing admiration for Casaubon's genius and thereby encouraging his destructive self-conception could count as a true act of friendship. This seems highly counter-intuitive. The Murdochian account of friendship thus seems better placed to explain why we instead regard acts that are responsive to a person's actual character and needs as acts of true friendship.

The weaker epistemic component of friendship suggested by Crawford's account of friendship thus seems to be inadequate to explain the features of friendship discussed in §4, such as that we take lack of knowledge to rule out love, and that certain acts of friendship require knowledge. It is also far less plausible as a response to indirect epistemic partiality than it is as a response to direct epistemic partiality, whereas the Murdochian response speaks to both direct and indirect partiality. Moreover, the appeal of the thought that inauthenticity is undermining of friendship can itself be explained by reference to the value of knowledge in friendship; if friendship involves knowledge, then there is no space for the kind of inauthenticity that Crawford seeks to exclude. It seems, then, that the strong epistemic constraints on friendship suggested by the Murdochian account cannot be weakened (at least in the way Crawford suggests) without rendering the account significantly less plausible, as well as less effective as a refutation of epistemic partiality.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

In §1 I noted that epistemic partiality has sometimes been motivated by an overarching conception of friendship. As Stroud puts it, on that conception friendship is "in some important sense based on your friend's character and merits" (Stroud 2006: 511). The general line of thinking is that since friendship is based on one's friend's character and merit, good friendship requires maintaining a positive view of the friend, and that bias can thus contribute to being a good friend.<sup>37</sup> In some sense, this overarching conception of friendship seems right:

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<sup>37</sup> Stroud, for example, describes this account of friendship as the 'background theory' on which epistemic partiality 'makes sense' (Stroud 2006: 511).

friendship with someone in whom one could see no redeeming or redeemable qualities seems impossible. I have rejected the idea that good friendship requires bias, suggesting that good friendship instead requires knowledge of the other. However, this overarching conception of friendship is compatible with the rejection of epistemic partiality. We can accept that friendship is in an important sense based on one's friend's character and merits, so long as we accept that it would be impossible to be friends with someone in whom there were no good qualities.<sup>38,39</sup> After all, given this conception of friendship the only way to be friends with them would be to form biased or mistaken beliefs, but I have suggested that such beliefs undermine friendship.

However, that friendship is in some sense based on the friend's character or merits need not lead to the thought that friendship requires an overall positive evaluation of the other, nor that the best friendships will be friendships with those in whom one perceives the most good qualities, or the best qualities. It is presumably something like one of these thoughts that would be necessary to bridge the gap from the thought that friendship is in some sense based on the friend's character and merits, to the thought that epistemic partiality can strengthen friendship. It is plausibly constitutive of friendship that one sees *something* good in one's friends, but this can coexist with awareness of negative qualities about them. A friend might be kind and caring, which could form the basis of a good friendship, whilst still having a terrible lack of humour and a tendency to complain. Seeing a good quality in one's friend does not preclude also seeing their negative qualities, even overall negative qualities.<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, that friendship is based on a friend's character or merits need not suggest that the more good qualities one perceives, or the better those qualities, the better the friendship. One can recognise that someone possesses some positive qualities without particularly *appreciating* those qualities, in which case such qualities would not be a good basis

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<sup>38</sup> In the previous chapter I argued that Murdoch believes *love* is appropriate for all objects of attention, even those objects that are unpleasant or evil. This is compatible with the thought that we can be *friends* only with those in whom we can discern some positive qualities, since friendship is plausibly narrower than love. That is, something like Murdochian love seems necessary for friendship, but is not sufficient for it.

<sup>39</sup> Elder (2014) defends the related view that bad people cannot be good friends.

<sup>40</sup> There are plausibly reasons not to *express* one's beliefs about one's friends' flaws (or at least, not to express them too often). And we would also be sceptical of the claim that someone who attended closely and critically to all potential flaws and failings in another person was a good friend. But this is because we would take their attention to reveal something about what they *care* about, rather than because such knowledge itself precludes friendship.

for friendship.<sup>41</sup> I can recognise, for example, that someone is a talented musician, but unless I enjoy and care about their music, this cannot be a basis for friendship. Friendship thus seems to be based on something more specific than simple belief that another person has positive qualities, something like appreciative awareness of another's positive qualities. Importantly, such appreciativeness need not correspond to the number or the extent of the good qualities that one perceives.<sup>42</sup> Rejecting epistemic partiality for the Murdochian reasons I have offered is thus compatible with accepting the idea that a friend's character and merits do matter for friendship, and indeed that friendship is in some respect based on such features.

The Murdochian conception of friendship that I have outlined thus entails a rejection of an assumption about friendship that has gone unquestioned in most of the literature on epistemic partiality. The Murdochian conception suggests that the norms of epistemology and friendship are not independent of one another, since friendship involves knowledge of the other person. As such, the norms of friendship are informed by those of epistemology, so there could not be constitutive conflict between them. I have not offered a full defence of the Murdochian conception of friendship, but I have suggested that it makes sense of our intuitions regarding the impact of importantly mistaken beliefs on friendships: we would regard such friendships as the poorer for the mistaken beliefs, or perhaps even as not counting as friendships at all. It also makes sense of the ways in which we would expect the good friend to behave: the behaviour characteristic of the good friend is responsive to the friend as they truly are. There is thus good reason to think that friendship is an epistemically rich state, and thus that discussions of epistemic partiality go awry in ignoring one of its core features.

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<sup>41</sup> Bommarito (2018) notes that we can judge things to be valuable without truly caring about them in this way; we can judge things to be valuable without them mattering much to us. Our relations to our friends seem to be marked by the fact that their good qualities do matter to us.

<sup>42</sup> Of course, friendship typically involves more than an appreciative understanding of the other: it typically involves shared activities, shared interests, and a meaningful shared history. It also typically involves an openness to having one character and interests shaped by the other (to some extent). However, for the purposes of this discussion I am not offering a full account of everything that is involved in friendship, but only of those elements that seem relevant to epistemic partiality.



## Chapter 3

# Hoping and Intending

*Man's Search for Meaning*, Victor Frankl's (1946) autobiographical account of life in concentration camps, vividly describes the extreme deprivations that the prisoners who were detained there endured. But Frankl maintains that the most terrible trial that the prisoners faced was the loss of hope. At the limit of hopelessness, Frankl describes prisoners who ceased to strive for anything or act at all, feeling that there was no possible future for them. Instead, they simply awaited their seemingly inevitable deaths:

The prisoner who had lost faith in the future – his future – was doomed. With his loss of belief in the future, he also lost his spiritual hold; he let himself decline and became subject to mental and physical decay. Usually this happened quite suddenly, in the form of a crisis, the symptoms of which were familiar to the experienced camp inmate. We all feared this moment – not for ourselves, which would have been pointless, but for our friends. Usually it began with the prisoner refusing one morning to get dressed and wash or to go out on the parade grounds. No entreaties, no blows, no threats had any effect. He just lay there, hardly moving. If this crisis was brought about by an illness, he refused to be taken to the sick-bay or to do anything to help himself. He simply gave up. There he remained, lying in his own excreta, and nothing bothered him any more. (Frankl 1946: 71)

Such loss of hope is truly tragic, Frankl suggests, because the prisoners who lost hope ‘simply gave up’, ceasing to act meaningfully any longer.<sup>1</sup>

Frankl suggests that having hope involves ‘looking towards the future’ in a way which life in the camps rendered increasingly difficult. He writes:

A man who could not see the end of his “provisional existence” was not able to aim at an ultimate goal in life. He ceased living for the future, in contrast to a man in normal life. Therefore the whole structure of his inner life changed; signs of decay set in ... his existence has become provisional and in a certain sense he cannot live for the future or aim at a goal. (Frankl 1946: 57)

Hope, he suggests, was connected with the prisoners’ ability to ‘live for the future’; the prisoners with hope were able to set goals for themselves and to live in ways that were shaped by these goals. Conversely, Frankl depicts loss of hope as entailing an utter lack of direction that suggests a form of ‘decay’.

Rebecca Solnit’s *Hope in the Dark* (2004) similarly presents hope as having a crucial connection to action, ascribing it the utmost importance in our specifically political lives. Solnit offers a meditation on many powerful yet little-noticed political changes and victories wrought by political activism, and argues that such activism is essentially built on hope:

Hope just means another world might be possible, not promised, not guaranteed. Hope calls for action; action is impossible without hope. (Solnit 2004: 4)

[H]ope and action feed each other. (Solnit 2004: 11)

In the book, Solnit describes many political protests and campaigns that required significant personal sacrifices, and she suggests that they were essentially sustained by hope. She concludes that hope is essential for political progress.

In this chapter I will attempt to shed light on why hope fulfils the role that Frankl and Solnit ascribe to it, and to illuminate why it can shape our action in the ways they describe. I

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<sup>1</sup> In the passage just quoted, Frankl describes this as loss of ‘faith’ or ‘belief’ in the future rather than ‘hope’. However, he appears to use these terms interchangeably with ‘hope’, and this passage occurs in the midst of a general discussion of the role of hope in the prisoners’ lives.



aim to offer an account of hope that does justice to the fact that hope can deeply affect the shape that our lives take, and that the loss of hope can be devastating.<sup>2</sup>

I will start in §1 by examining Margaret Urban Walker's (2006) discussion of hope. Walker argues that hope has a distinctive connection to action and that this distinguishes hoping from wishing. I will accept these insights, but resist the further conclusions she draws from them. In particular, I will reject her claim that no psychologically unified account of hope can be given, as well as her claim that hope necessarily involves active striving for the realisation of the object of hope. In §2 I will set forward what I call the 'Value-Intention' account of hope, which I will suggest best explains hope's connection to action. In §3 I will consider how the various states that can manifest hope can be illuminated by this characterisation. In §4 I will further examine hope's connection to action, and the varied ways in which hope can be manifested. In §5 I will show how this sheds light on the distinction between hoping and wishing, and in particular on the different rational constraints that apply to each. I will conclude that the Value-Intention account is well placed to capture a distinctive and important phenomenon.

## 1. Walker on Hope

Walker (2006) offers an influential account of hope which emphasises hope's connection to agency. Like Frankl and Solnit, her discussion takes as central hope's potential to motivate and shape our actions.<sup>3</sup> This, Walker suggests, is what is distinctive about hope, and it is in this respect that she believes hoping should be contrasted with mere wishing. She also emphasises that hope can be manifested in diverse kinds of action, from which she draws the conclusion that there can be no unified psychology of hope, no analysis in terms of psychological states that captures all paradigmatic instances of hope. I will accept her observation that hope manifests in and has a distinctive connection to action, but I will resist

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<sup>2</sup> Ratcliffe (2013) suggests that absence of hope is different from hopelessness. However, I shall be taking the absence of all particular hopes to be equivalent to hopelessness. If one lacks even the vague hope 'that life will get better' or the limited hope 'to die painlessly and peacefully' for example, then this seems equivalent to being hopeless.

<sup>3</sup> McGeer's (2004) discussion of hope also focuses on hope's relation to action. Martin (2014) describes Walker and McGeer's accounts as "variants of the same view" (Martin 2014: 65), but as McGeer primarily discusses ways we can hope well or badly, I shall focus on Walker's discussion.

the conclusion that there is no unified psychology of hope. In §2 I will offer an account of hope in terms of psychological characterising states which can account for its connection to action. In §4 I will reject Walker's own suggestion that hopeful actions are unified by the fact that they involve active striving for the realisation of the object of hope, and I will instead suggest that the objects of hope figure in intentions in diverse ways.

The starting point for Walker's discussion of hope is the observation that hope is manifested in action. She notes that hope shapes the way we act, motivating us to act in distinctive ways:

[H]ope involves perception, feelings, and dispositions to feel, think, and act in some ways that move the one who hopes in the direction of having what is hoped for come about. (Walker 2006: 50)

[H]ope somehow engages, encourages or propels agency; it bends us toward "making it so". (Walker 2006: 46)

Hope, in particular, is an emotion that directly takes the possible realisation of a future state of affairs as its object, and that naturally expresses itself in displays that either seek that state of affairs or imaginatively represent it as a spur to thoughts, feelings, and actions that might allow for its attainment. (Walker 2006: 62)

Hope, Walker suggests, has a distinctive motivating potential: it moves those who hope to act in the light of positive possibilities. Walker thus describes hope as involving agency. Hope, she suggests, shapes and guides our actions: "its nature is to engage our desire and agency" (Walker 2006: 45).<sup>4</sup>

Taking hope's connection to action as the starting point for an account of hope makes sense given the examples with which we began. The hopeful prisoners Frankl describes acted in strikingly different ways to those who had lost hope: the hopeful prisoners persevered in their efforts for survival and meaningful existence, whereas the prisoners who gave up hope ceased acting at all. Similarly, Solnit describes the hopeful political campaigners as continuing to act despite long-lasting struggles. Only their hope for political change, she suggests, can explain why they were willing to make large personal sacrifices in order to campaign. Walker

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<sup>4</sup> McGeer also discusses hope in terms of agency: "hope ... is a unifying and grounding force of human agency" (McGeer 2004: 101).

takes hope's connection to action, which she terms its 'efficacy', to be the feature of hope most warranting our 'moral attention'. She thus places hope's motivating potential at the core of what characterises it as a state.<sup>5</sup>

In this connection to action Walker suggests that hoping contrasts with wishing. She claims that unlike hoping, wishing is a characteristically passive state.<sup>6</sup> The boundary between hoping and wishing may be imprecise and our ordinary language may not always sharply distinguish between the two. However, Walker's claim is that the two are characteristically different:

[W]hen we wish or long or fantasize, it can be entirely a spectator sport, while hope somehow engages, encourages, or propels agency; it bends us toward "making it so". (Walker 2006: 46)

The prisoners Frankl describes presumably all wished to be reunited with their loved ones, but only some of them had any hope that they would be. Their wish seemingly failed to affect their behaviour at all, whereas having hope powerfully shaped their lives: the hopeful prisoners strove to survive and to build a meaningful existence.

This distinctive connection to action leads Walker to reject the standard account of hope, a psychologically unified account in which hope is understood to be constituted by a certain combination of belief and desire.<sup>7</sup> JP Day (1969), for example, proposes a basic belief-desire account: "hope involves (1) desiring [some state of affairs] and (2) estimating [its] probability" (Day 1969: 89).<sup>8</sup> This kind of account has widely been found wanting. Walker argues that it cannot do justice to hope's motivational role: "something is missing in Day's

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<sup>5</sup> Calhoun (2018) also focuses her discussion of hope on hopes that are motivationally significant, 'practical hopes'. She does not regard *all* hope as being motivationally significant, but she suggests that hope that is motivationally significant is the most important kind: "the hope that matters most is what I call *practical hope*—hope for success in the pursuit of ends we value" (Calhoun 2018: 69).

<sup>6</sup> Walker is not the only one to distinguish the two. Van Hooft (2011) also regards the two as distinct, and Radford (1970) contrasts wishing, which he claims is characteristically 'idle', with hoping, claiming that "behaviour that makes what the actor hopes for more likely is not just expressive of his hope but logically and indeed rationally connected with it and constitutive of it" (Radford 1970: 64). The account I offer suggests that there is a close connection between hoping and acting in certain ways, a connection not shared by wishing. However, I will not endorse this stronger claim that certain behaviours are constitutive of hoping. In §5 I will further explore the differences between hoping and wishing.

<sup>7</sup> Martin refers to this account as the 'orthodox definition' of hope (Martin 2014: 11), and Meirav (2009) refers to it as the 'standard account' (Meirav 2009: 217).

<sup>8</sup> Downie (1963) offers the same account of hope, describing the belief that a state of affairs is possible and desire that it obtain as "independently necessary and jointly sufficient for 'hope that'" (Downie 1963: 248).

desire plus possibility account. What's missing is precisely the commonplace but protean and often powerful *efficacy* of hope" (Walker 2006: 47). Adrienne Martin (2014) similarly claims that the belief-desire model "fall[s] short when it comes to explicating hope's sustaining power" (Martin 2014: 6).<sup>9</sup> The belief-desire model implies that hope's motivational role is fully explained by the constituent desire, but Walker, Martin and others suggest that this is inadequate to fully explain the ways in which hope can influence our action.<sup>10</sup>

These philosophers are led to think that belief-desire accounts cannot explain hope's motivational role because the relevant belief and desire can also be found in many instances in which one *fails* to hope, and in which one fails to act hopefully.<sup>11</sup> For example, Solnit's political campaigners might have desired change and believed it to be possible, but despaired of it happening, and thus given up on action. They might have regarded the desired outcomes as possible but as simply too unlikely to make it worth acting, and thus given up hope, despite continuing to desire change. Or they might have desired change and believed it to be possible, but regarded it as insufficiently valuable for protesting to be worth their time.<sup>12</sup> The beliefs and desires involved in the belief-desire account alone thus seem inadequate to explain why the hopeful person characteristically acts in times when the hopeless person would not.<sup>13</sup> Walker therefore argues that the account fails to capture the feature of hope that is of most moral significance.

Some recent accounts of hope have built upon the belief-desire model, adding a third condition. Luc Bovens (1999) suggests that in addition to having the relevant belief and desire, one must engage in 'mental imaging' in order to count as hoping, an activity of vividly imagining the realisation of the hoped-for state of affairs. Ariel Meirav (2009) suggests that in

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<sup>9</sup> Calhoun (2018) also makes the similar claim that the belief-desire model "is not well equipped to explain the special motivational role practical hope plays in buoying us against setbacks or low odds of success" (Calhoun 2018: 69).

<sup>10</sup> Pettit (2004) suggests that this kind of belief-desire account (or 'lowest common denominator account', as he puts it) does capture *something* about hope: these kinds of belief and desire may be the only necessary conditions for hope. However, he claims that such an account is too minimal and ignores the more substantial structure that characterises hope, thus ignoring the real interest that hope has for us.

<sup>11</sup> Meirav (2009) argues that the account is unable to distinguish between hope and despair and thus should be rejected.

<sup>12</sup> On the belief-desire account, hope is not only compatible with inaction, but also with action that *precludes* the hoped-for outcome, which seems highly counterintuitive. If I claim to hope to win a competition but buy a ticket to come home before the final round (and cannot afford to buy a new ticket), there would seem to be something insincere or confused about my claim.

<sup>13</sup> Segal and Textor (2015) also suggest that individuals with and without can have the same desire for and belief about an outcome, but that a hopeful individual will act in situations where the individual without hope would not.

hope one recognises that one does not have full control over the realisation of the hoped-for state of affairs but that one views as good the external factor which controls whether the state of affairs is realised. However, these accounts seem unable to resolve the problems faced by the original belief-desire account. Neither seems to adequately explain hope's connection to action, since the third conditions they identify do not seem closely connected to motivation. For example, it seems that one might vividly imagine the realisation of a desired, possible state of affairs without hoping for its realisation. The problem remains that desire need not be efficacious in the way we think hope is.

Walker thus makes two core claims about hope that I shall also take as providing core criteria for an adequate account: she claims that hope is intimately connected with action, and she claims that in this respect hoping differs from wishing. Having suggested that what is distinctive of hope is its connection with action, Walker notes that hope is not only manifested in action, but can be manifested in diverse ways:

When we are hoping for a certain state of affairs, our thoughts, imaginings, and feelings about the desired situation are stirred, and these can prompt actions, as well as spur further thoughts, imaginings, and feelings. (Walker 2006: 50)

[T]here are patterns of ingredient perceptions, expressions, feelings, and dispositions to think, feel, and act that are part of the repertory of hopefulness. (Walker 2006: 48)

Walker suggests that hoping can involve a number of different states; she describes hope as a 'syndrome' that can involve different combinations of perception, imagination, thought, and feelings as well as action. The political campaigners' hope described by Solnit, for example, is manifested in their attending protests, but also in their being alert to factors influencing the outcomes they sought, as well as their feeling a certain way towards the prospect of political change.<sup>14</sup>

Walker thus suggests that the failure of the belief-desire account is not specific to its substantive conception of hope: she argues that no psychologically unified analysis will capture

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<sup>14</sup> McGeer makes a similar observation: "My claim will be that hope at the individual level presents itself in myriad psychological guises (attitude, emotion, activity, disposition), not just because of ordinary language looseness with the term, though undoubtedly there is much of that. Hope involves a complex dynamic of all of these things" (McGeer 2004: 101).

all paradigmatic instances of hope.<sup>15</sup> Instead, she suggests that the plurality of hope's manifestations is best captured by understanding it as a 'syndrome':

What is "added" to the necessary desire and the perception or belief in possibility that seems characteristic of hope? ... I don't suggest that we try to detect a peculiar mental ingredient, but rather that we look at our concept of "hoping" as ascribing an emotional stance or "affective attitude," a recognizable syndrome that is characterized by certain desires and perceptions, but also by certain forms of attention, expression, feeling, and activity. (Walker 2006: 48)

Walker thus takes the variety of the psychological states with which hope is connected to suggest that hope has no core characterising psychological states; she claims that it is psychologically disunified. Insofar as this is a successful criticism of belief-desire accounts, it is also a reason to reject accounts that add a third condition, since the proposed third conditions are insufficiently interconnected with the full variety of ways in which hope is manifested.

Walker does, however, suggest that there is *something* unifying the varied manifestations of hope. She claims that the particular activities at the core of the syndrome composing hope are activities oriented towards the realisation of the object of hope. She argues that hope is motivationally significant in that hopeful agents *strive to realise* the object of their hope:

Hoping goes beyond mere wishing – hope involves perception, feelings, and dispositions to feel, think, and act in some ways that move the one who hopes in the direction of having what is hoped for come about. (Walker 2006: 50)

[H]ope clearly can dispose us in a variety of ways to seek out, plan for, strive for, take heart about, concentrate on, put renewed energy into getting the outcome we want. (Walker 2006: 50)

She thus denies that the syndrome of states composing hope is characterised by any particular psychological components. But she suggests that it is characterised by the overarching direction in which it moves the hopeful agent: hopeful states, she suggests, are oriented towards the realisation of the hoped-for state of affairs.

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<sup>15</sup> By 'psychologically unified analysis' I mean 'analysis in terms of core psychological states', rather than 'analysis in terms of a single psychological state'. Such analysis is unified in attempting to capture all instances under a single account, rather than necessarily identifying hope with a single psychological state.

Walker's identification of hope's power to guide and shape action seems crucial to understanding hope, and particularly to understanding its relation to wishing. I will thus accept this as an important constraint on an account of hope, and in the next section I will explore the implications of this for how hope should be understood. I will suggest, however, that this is compatible with psychologically unified accounts of hope, and will myself offer such an account. In doing so, I will also reject Walker's assumption that hope's action-guiding role implies that manifestations of hope are primarily oriented towards the *realisation* of the hoped-for state of affairs.

## 2. Hoping, Planning, and Intentions: The Value-Intention Account

As Walker has noted, hope has a distinctive capacity to influence us. We are not always moved by the prospect of possible but uncertain, desirable states of affairs: we can recognise that states of affairs are possible and desire their realisation without them having any influence upon us. However, when one hopes, the object of hope characteristically shapes and guides what one does. For example, the prisoners Frankl describes who had hope acted in distinctive ways, continuing to strive to survive. This thought can be used to draw out an initial characterisation of hope:

Value-Intention Account: To hope that *x* obtains is to value *x*, to regard *x*'s being realised as uncertain, and as a result to shape one's intentions in accordance with *x*

In this section, I will first defend thinking of hope as a propositional state. I will then explore the components of this characterisation in turn, drawing out the underlying psychological structure of hope. There are a wide variety of cases under the general umbrella of hope. I will argue, however, that the nature of hope is best illuminated by understanding valuing, regarding the outcome as uncertain, and appropriately shaping one's intentions as forming the core of hope and thus as *characterising* the state as a whole. Meeting these conditions, I will argue, is *sufficient* for hope. The account is therefore psychologically unified, since it defines hope in terms of these core psychological states. Nonetheless, I will suggest that it still accounts for the diverse manifestations of hope that Walker identifies.

The Value-Intention account takes hope to be a primarily propositional state: the paradigmatic case of hope is hope *that* some state of affairs obtains. In ordinary language, hope seems to take various possible complements. We can hope that something will happen, hope for something and hope to do something. In all of these cases, the hope is aimed at an end, and can be understood in terms of hope *that* the end will be realised. We can also take hope *from* something or someone, but here the hope itself remains propositional. Taking hope from something simply indicates that we come to hope *that* something will be the case (or are affirmed in having such hope) in response to someone's action, some event, or some state of affairs.

"Hope" can also be used as a more general term without a complement: 'don't give up hope'; 'I'm feeling hopeful' etc. These less obviously involve 'hopes that'. However, these kinds of statements depend on a conversational context to have meaning and in such contexts an appropriate 'hope that' complement is provided. If I say that I'm feeling hopeful in a conversation about a competition I have entered, for instance, then although the hope is not phrased in terms of a propositional complement, there is an implicit one: I am hoping that I win or do well in the competition. Absent the necessary context, the question 'what are you hoping for?' would seem appropriate: hopes are directed towards possibilities in the world, and thus have objects. Hopes in general thus seem to be best understood as hopes *that* their objects will be realised.<sup>16</sup>

The first condition of the Value-Intention account states that hopes aim at states of affairs whose realisation is considered valuable. One can of course hope for something that fails to actually be valuable (think of Jeanette's mother's hope for evil to fall upon her many "enemies" in *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*). But such a hope would not be inherently defective; the evaluation of such an object would be defective rather than the hope itself. Further, as I understand it, valuing a state of affairs is more reflectively stable than simple desiring. Desires

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<sup>16</sup> Ratcliffe (2013) suggests that some kinds of hope do not have an object. He argues that 'radical hopes' are rather a kind of 'pre-intentional' state, an "experiential backdrop that determines which kinds of intentional state are intelligible possibilities for a person" (Ratcliffe 2013: 600). If this is right, then not all hopes could be understood as hopes that some state of affairs will be realised. However, hopes without an object would seem to be unintelligible, and to be something more like a mood rather than hope proper. Rather than understanding radical hopes as having no object, I would therefore suggest that it can be difficult (or perhaps even impossible) to adequately conceptualise the object of radical hopes: the hope may simply be 'that everything will turn out ok' or 'that something might be gained from this'. Kadlac (2017) offers a more detailed defence of the view that hopefulness is simply a matter of having the specific hope that the future will be good.



can, for example, be unendorsed, but one cannot wholly fail to endorse what one values. By the same token, no hope can be fully unendorsed.<sup>17</sup>

The second condition of the Value-Intention account states that the realisation of the object of hope must be regarded as uncertain. One can rationally *desire* something that one knows to be certain or impossible, but one cannot rationally *hope* for such things. Hope does not combine with knowledge in felicitous ways; consider the oddness of saying ‘I know and hope she’ll come to dinner’ or ‘I know she can’t make it, but I hope she comes’. If one regards an outcome as certain to happen or as impossible, it calls for expectation or outright belief that it will happen rather than hope.<sup>18,19</sup> Further, I cannot coherently hope for things that I know are wholly within my power to realise: the state of affairs must be something whose realisation I regard as uncertain even assuming that I take the appropriate steps to secure it.<sup>20</sup> If I claimed to hope to sit with my arms crossed for thirty seconds, it would in normal circumstances sound extremely confused at best. Although my doing so may be a mere possibility, it is a possibility that is fully within my power to realise. Hopes, by contrast, take as their objects things whose realisation is uncertain regardless of how one acts. This is why hopes typically involve a feeling of tension.<sup>21,22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Although valuing involves somewhat more than desiring, there is a close connection between the two. Valuing something entails desiring that thing, although this leaves open the possibility that one might desire something that one does not value. One might desire some more of a delicious cake without valuing having it, for example.

<sup>18</sup> I am taking ‘*believing* that x’s being realised is uncertain’ to entail ‘*regarding* x’s realisation as uncertain’. However, ‘*regarding*’ emphasises that the belief need not be conscious. Moreover, an agent need not have any positive belief about the possibility of the hoped-for state of affairs at all in order to hope. As Claudia Blöser (2019) observes, hope is consistent with simply suspending belief about the possibility of the outcome – for example, because one has insufficient evidence to tell whether it is possible. However, importantly, regarding X’s realisation as uncertain rules out outright belief that the outcome will be realised (or fail to be realised). This is consistent with Gordon’s (1987) description of hope that p as an emotion that one can experience only if one does not know that p.

<sup>19</sup> Chignell (2013) suggests that one can hope for things which are certain, and that only the metaphysically impossible is an inappropriate object of hope. However, it seems highly counterintuitive to think of hope as appropriate here: one would expect belief to replace hope. Chignell attempts to avoid the counter-intuitiveness of this by suggesting that one ought to *assert* one’s belief rather than one’s hope, but this is not an adequate solution to the problem, since hope seems to be rendered obsolete by belief. The attitude one takes toward something certain is plausibly sufficiently dissimilar to that which one takes towards something less than certain to merit different treatment. For example, caution is apt if one is merely hopeful about an outcome, but not if an outcome is certain.

<sup>20</sup> Meirav (2009) thus states: “When I hope for a prospect, I desire it while viewing it as beyond the reach of my causal or epistemic powers” (Meirav 2009: 228). Bobier (2017), by contrast, assumes that we can hope for things that are within our power to bring about. In this, I am siding with Meirav.

<sup>21</sup> Walker thus claims that hope requires ‘half belief’ that the object of hope will be realised. This seems akin to what Holton (2008) calls ‘partial belief’.

<sup>22</sup> Wheatley (1958) and Radford (1970) suggest something stronger than this, claiming that one must view the object of hope not as simply possible, but as probable. Waterworth’s (2004) description of hope as ‘expectant’ also suggests

The kind of uncertainty required in order to hope is epistemic; the object of hope must be uncertain given what the agent knows or believes. The fact that whether or not the object is realised is already fixed by external factors thus need not render hope irrational, as long as one is unaware of these factors (or of the fact that they determine the outcome). One can thus rationally hope for things such as good weather tomorrow despite the fact that meteorological conditions today may already fix that it will rain, as long as one is unaware of the current conditions or the fact that they determine that it will rain.

The third condition of the Value-Intention account of hope is that hoped-for states of affairs shape one's intentions. This captures Walker's insight: hope has a distinctive motivational role, and affects how we act.<sup>23</sup> Both the fact that we act and the particular things we do are influenced by the object of hope through its affecting one's intentions.

In spelling out how intentions figure in this account of hope, I shall work with Michael Bratman's (1987) influential account of intentions as practical attitudes which play a planning role. On his account, intentions are "conduct-controlling pro-attitudes, ones which we are disposed to retain without reconsideration, and which play a significant role as inputs to [means-end] reasoning" (Bratman 1987: 20). Intentions, on Bratman's account, have two core features: they are *controlling* and they are *stable*. That intentions are inherently controlling means that it is their role to guide action and that (all things being equal) possessing an intention will lead the agent to perform the action intended. This action guidance occurs, on Bratman's account, because intentions are kinds of plans that we form.<sup>24</sup> Bratman argues that intentions are also stable; they are relatively resistant to reconsideration. They have this stability because

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that the hoper regards the object of hope as probable. However, this significantly diverges from our ordinary conception of it. In ordinary situations, it seems that we can hope for many things that we do not expect to be realised: I can hope in cases where expectation of the outcome would be unwarranted. One might, for instance, hope that a friend recovers from an illness whilst recognising that the chances are not high, and hope precisely because the chances are not high enough to warrant expectation. Indeed, it is often in these kinds of cases that hope has a distinctive role to play. Frankl and Solnit's initial cases of hope are important cases that do not seem to involve viewing the object of hope as probable, for example.

<sup>23</sup> I take this to give the account greater explanatory power than Walker's; the inclusion of intentions in the account explains *why* and *how* hope is connected with action.

<sup>24</sup> Pettit also draws a connection between hoping and planning, although in a different way. He suggests that hope can be helpfully compared to planning, and claims that "hope is a cognitive counterpart of planning" (Pettit 2004: 159). However, on his account hope involves adopting "a strategy that consists in acting as if the desired prospect is going to obtain or has a good chance of obtaining" (Pettit 2004: 158). Unlike Pettit's account, the plans involved in hope on the Value-Intention account need not assume that the prospect is likely to be realised. On this account, one can therefore hope whilst retaining a realistic view of the prospect of the object of hope being realised.

not every new piece of information is sufficient to motivate reconsideration of an intention. Overall, Bratman suggests that intentions are valuable because they enable us to effectively manage the decisions involved in attaining a goal. They do this by ruling out possibilities incompatible with the plan from consideration and by making salient features of one's situation that are relevant to the intention.<sup>25</sup>

The inclusion of intentions in the Value-Intention account of hope thus explains how hope motivates, shapes and sustains action. Hope manifests in and shapes action because intentions are a conduct-controlling state. The stability of intentions also explains hope's capacity to *sustain* action: once one hopes for a state of affairs, it will take a significant amount of new evidence to reconsider the concomitant action (though, of course, intentions can be overturned, and one can give up hope). This connection with intention is suggested by Frankl's initial description of the hopeful prisoners. The prisoners with hope, he claims, were *able to aim for goals*. Having goals suggests that the hopeful prisoners had plans for their futures, that they formed and were acting in accordance with intentions.

Finally, the hopeful person does not merely happen to treat the object of their hope as a live possibility but does so *as a result* of regarding it as such and valuing it. The stipulation that the hopeful person treats the object of hope as a live possibility 'as a result' of seeing it as uncertain and valuable allows the present account to distinguish between wishful and hopeful actions. Wishful thinking is thinking that is unresponsive to evidence one has about how things are, and wishful action is action that is similarly unresponsive to one's evidence. Hopeful action, by contrast, can be responsive to one's evidence. Hoping is not simply wilful: in hoping, one shapes one's intentions in accordance with the fact that one regards something as a valuable live possibility.<sup>26</sup> Adoption of the attitude of hope is explained by reference to the fact that the subject believes certain outcomes to be possible, and values those outcomes.

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<sup>25</sup> Cobb (2015) and Kadlac (2015) both use the idea of hope making certain features salient to suggest that hope might be a kind of epistemic virtue that disposes us to attentiveness to reality. Kadlac claims that the hopeful person "is more fully attentive to the evidence than optimists and pessimists typically are" (Kadlac 2015: 343), and Cobb writes that hope "can train perception and imagination, giving greater salience to the object of hope, the pathways by which it may be secured, and the evidence pointing towards its realization" (Cobb 2015: 270).

<sup>26</sup> This is consistent with sometimes hoping in ways that are unresponsive to evidence of the likelihood of an outcome's realisation. That hope is *characteristically* responsive to evidence sheds light on it as an overall state despite this possibility: one would, for instance, expect someone to reconsider their hopes if it was pointed out to them that an outcome was not valuable, or far less likely than they had thought.

In *Man's Search for Meaning* Frankl describes his attempts to combat the sense of hopelessness that life in the concentration camps induced in many prisoners. His strategies in doing so make sense in the light of the Value-Intention account. He writes:

Any attempt at fighting the camp's psychopathological influence on the prisoner... had to aim at giving him inner strength by pointing out to him a future goal to which he could look forward. (Frankl 1946: 59)

In order to encourage and reinforce the hopes of those around him, Frankl drew their attention to future events they might yet look towards and in the light of which they might yet orient their lives. This was plausibly a way of encouraging them to form goals and shape their intentions in the light of those possible goals. Although Frankl is not offering a philosophical account of hope, this description of his method of raising his fellow prisoners' hopes is well explained by the Value-Intention account.

Hope that  $x$  obtains, then, characteristically involves valuing  $x$ , regarding  $x$  as possible but uncertain, and shaping one's intentions in accordance with  $x$ . Such conditions are sufficient for hope; an agent who meets these conditions is properly describable as hopeful. This account clearly explains why Walker takes planning and striving to be manifestations of hope. It also explains the direction that hope can give us: possessing an intention will, all else being equal, lead to one acting in accordance with it. Can it also explain the other manifestation of hope that Walker mentions? I will now turn to consider these.

### **3. Hope's Heterogeneous Manifestations**

Walker identifies a number of heterogeneous states as manifesting hope. She writes: "hope involves perception, feelings, and dispositions to feel, think, and act in some ways that move the one who hopes in the direction of having what is hoped for come about (Walker 2006: 50), and elsewhere she mentions hope involving "thoughts, feelings, and actions" (Walker 2006: 62). I have suggested that the Value-Intention account explains hope's manifestation in action. In this section I will be looking at the further states she describes as manifesting hope, which fall into two broad categories. Firstly, hope manifests in *epistemic* states such as perception, attention, and concentration. Secondly, it manifests in particular *affective*

states such as feelings or emotions. I will argue that the Value-Intention account sheds light on both of these.

Firstly, hope manifests in epistemic states such as perception, attention, and concentration.<sup>27</sup> We can understand why hope involves these epistemic states by considering the role of values and intentions in our mental lives. We generally attend to and concentrate on those things that we value or care about more closely than we do to those things we are indifferent to. Moreover, what we intend also guides what we attend to and notice. In Bratman's terms, intentions provide a framework to determine which options are relevant and admissible: which information is deemed relevant to one is (at least partly) determined by what one intends to do. Intentions change the direction of one's attention, rendering information relevant to realising the intentions more salient. Bratman writes:

Frequently the stability of my plans will be connected with underlying tendencies to *attend* to certain sorts of things and not others – to see certain features of my environment as *salient*. (Bratman 1987: 66)

That is, on Bratman's account, intentions are associated with tendencies to attend to and notice information relevant to the realisation of the intention, and to see certain information as relevant or salient. The hopeful person will therefore be characteristically alert to factors relevant to the success of their concomitant intention. Hope's effects on perception, attention, and concentration therefore result from valuing the object of hope and the possession of an intention or intentions that are shaped by the hope.

What about hopeful affective states? We ordinarily associate hope with a distinctive emotional profile: a feeling of tension when we do not know if the hoped-for end will be realised, disappointment if it is not realised, and relief or happiness if it is.<sup>28</sup> Both valuing and intending contribute to hope's emotional profile. Valuing the object of hope is likely to entail experiencing negative feelings and emotions if the object does not come about, and conversely, positive feelings and emotions if the valued end is realised. But avoiding hoping for something is commonly thought of as a way of avoiding emotional vulnerability. Were hope's connection

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<sup>27</sup> Martin (2011) notes that in a survey of undergraduates, a student stated that the most frequent manifestation of their hope regarding an election was that they "[r]ead all media coverage religiously, and sent on relevant articles to friends and family" (Martin 2011: 159).

<sup>28</sup> Govier (2011) thus notes that hope is an 'involved' state, standing opposed to distant aloofness, and suggests that it contrasts with states such as cynicism in this regard.

to emotion wholly a matter of valuing the object, this would not explain this commonplace thought, since one would presumably value the object whether or not one hopes for it.

Hope's distinctive affective aspect is thus also partially explained by the involvement of intentions in hope. These distinctive affective phenomena arise when the valued object shapes one's intentions because intentions involve a kind of commitment to the end in question, a commitment to making it the case. Bratman states: "intention... involves a characteristic kind of commitment" (Bratman 1987: 15); "as a conduct-controlling pro-attitude my intention involves a special commitment to action" (Bratman 1987: 16). Intending plausibly often brings about a sense of emotional investment in or commitment to the intended end. This investment or commitment plausibly increases one's sense of emotional vulnerability to the hoped-for end compared to the person who merely desires the end. As such, if a hope fails to be realised it is likely to be more deeply disappointing than if something one valued but did not hope for were to fail to come about.<sup>29,30</sup>

The Value-Intention account of hope thus explains not only hope's connection to action, but also its connection to characteristic epistemic and affective states. Although this account is psychologically unified, then, it is therefore well placed to explain hope's connection to the variety of states and activities that Walker identifies as manifestations of hope.

#### 4. Intentions and Ends

In §1 I suggested that hope plays an important role in guiding and shaping actions, as Walker has argued. Hope, I have suggested, is importantly connected with action, and this

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<sup>29</sup> On one account of the emotions, they are perceptions or judgements of value, ways of seeing things as valuable (eg Döring (2007), De Sousa (1987, 2002), and Nussbaum (2001). If the emotions are understood in this way, then on the account I propose, hope might be partly comprised of an emotion. However, I have suggested that hope also involves further components, and that these are necessary for a full characterisation of it.

<sup>30</sup> Milona and Stockdale (2018) model hope on the emotions, conceiving of the emotions as involving something akin to perceptual assessments. They suggest that "in hoping we see the desired outcome that is possible but not certain as *encouraging*". They take the possibility of recalcitrant hopes to be a key consideration in favour of their account. However, recalcitrant hopes can be explained on the account I offer, since intentions can also display recalcitrance: we can find ourselves forming certain intentions despite thinking that such intentions are unwarranted. Moreover, Milona and Stockdale take hope to be an emotion, but I have not understood hope in terms of a characteristic affect. This is because there seem to be a wide range of affects associated with hope: hope can be tense and anxious, for example, as well as positive or enthusiastic, and long-term hopes may have no discernible associated affect at all. The account I offer can therefore explain the features of hope they take to be central, whilst doing greater justice to the wider manifestations of hope.

connection is elucidated by the fact that hoping involves shaping one's intentions in certain ways. In this section I will further explore the connection between hope and action by considering the variety of ways in which the object of hope can figure in intentions. I will then consider a worry that arises from the diversity of the ways an object of hope can shape our intentions. The worry is that the Value-Intention account overgenerates instances of hope. In response I will suggest that the account does not overgenerate instances of hope but rather captures a distinctive and interesting phenomenon, and that the phenomenon it captures coheres with our everyday conception of hope.

Walker suggests that given the connection between hope and action, the activities at the core of hope are best understood as unified in virtue of having a certain 'direction'. She claims that the activities at the core of hope are all oriented towards the realisation of the object of hope: they "move the one who hopes in the direction of having what is hoped for come about" (Walker 2006: 50). However, there is reason to be sceptical about this claim. As Martin (2011, 2014) points out, such an account of hope fails to capture many everyday hopes. Martin notes that hopes for ends we cannot influence are ubiquitous, and offers three examples: "the hope for good weather for one's picnic tomorrow, the hope that a long-lost relative is flourishing, or the hope that Hitler was miserable when he died" (Martin 2014: 66). Many important and morally significant hopes are of such a kind; for example, the prisoners Frankl describes could not bring it about that they were freed but they nonetheless hoped for freedom. Martin also suggests a second class of cases that Walker's account is unable to cover: cases where one hopes but is simply not motivated to influence an outcome that is within one's power to influence. Here she gives as an example her hope for who is chosen as the Republican party candidate, despite doing nothing to influence it.<sup>31,32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Martin takes Walker to be representative of approaches to hope that take its connection to action to be important. She therefore takes Walker's conclusions to give reason to reject this approach as a whole. Her own response to cases of hoping for things whose realisation we cannot influence is to limit the motivational component of hope. On her account, merely fantasising about a possibility, and viewing such fantasising as justified, is sufficient for hope. But this seems to ignore the important distinctions between wishing and hoping, ignoring the distinctive motivational role that hoping fulfils. By contrast, Walker's response to these cases is to suggest that in such cases we "borrow on the *futurity* of hope... all is not decided *for us*" (Walker 2006: 45). I will suggest some senses in which hope can shape intentions without understanding the hopeful agent in terms of actions taken to bring about the hoped-for end.

<sup>32</sup> McGeer also considers a similar problem for her own account. She responds: "hope in the limit case is still about taking an agential interest in the future and in the opportunities it may afford. It is about saying the following: although there may be nothing we can do now to bring about what we desire, our energy is still oriented toward the future, limitations notwithstanding" (McGeer 2004: 104).

Some instances of the first kind of example Martin discusses, hopes for ends we cannot influence, do seem like core cases of hoping. The capacity of such hopes to importantly shape our lives gives reason to want to capture them in the basic characterisation of hope. It seems important to understand the prisoners Frankl describes as hopeful, for example, because this sheds light on how they act. I will suggest that they can be accommodated by the Value-Intention account of hope. Because hoped-for ends can shape one's intentions in a variety of different ways, the inclusion of intentions in the Value-Intention account of hope enables it to preserve hope's strong connection to action whilst avoiding ruling out such intuitive instances of hope. This account can thus avoid the conclusion that hope centrally involves striving for the realisation of the object of hope. However, I will argue that we need not strain the account to cover all of the examples Martin provides. In particular, I will argue that the latter kinds of hope Martin mentions, hopes where one is not motivated to influence the outcome in question, are rightly ruled out by the account.<sup>33</sup>

Directly pursuing a hoped-for end is one way in which we can shape our intentions in accordance with an object of hope: when we hope, we frequently form *instrumental* plans aiming at the realisation of the end in question. Solnit's hopeful campaigners form such instrumental intentions; their actions are intended to bring about the outcomes that they hope for. Hoping for ends whose realisation is to some extent dependent upon oneself will generally involve intentions to act so as to help bring about the end in question. This is the kind of activity that Walker views as central to hope.<sup>34</sup> However, our plans can be shaped by the objects of hope without figuring in them as ends. The object of hope can figure in plans that are conditional, and it can also function as an overarching constraint on intentions, ruling out certain intentions and rationalising others.

The objects of hope can figure in plans that are *conditional*: in hoping, we sometimes form intentions that are conditional on the realisation of a hoped-for state of affairs. In hoping for a state of affairs, we often form plans that rely upon its realisation. For instance, in Martin's

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<sup>33</sup> Another benefit of the varied connection to action that I suggest is that hope's connection to action is not made to entail that a hopeful agent could not act cautiously, or try to minimise the risks they are open to. One's intentions can be shaped by a number of factors, and it seems plausible that since hope involves recognition of the uncertainty of a valued outcome, it will often be accompanied by fear that the outcome will not be realised. Intentions that are conditional on the realisation of a state of affairs, for example, are likely to be accompanied by intentions for the scenario in which the hope is not realised. Hope is compatible with risk-averse measures; it rules out only courses of action incompatible with the realisation of the hoped-for end.

<sup>34</sup> Segal and Textor (2015) also assume this simple connection between hope and motivation.



example of hoping for good weather tomorrow, one might make picnic plans that are dependent upon the weather being pleasant, or just intend to enjoy being in the sun. Here, the object of hope shapes one's intentions by opening an area of possibilities (possibilities where the object of hope is realised) for which plans are appropriate, which one can do by forming conditional plans.<sup>35</sup>

Our intentions can also be shaped and guided by the objects of hope in less direct ways, where the objects of hope function as an *overarching constraint* on the intentions that we form. That is, hoping can rule out certain courses of action and rationalise others, making an area of possibilities appropriate to plan for. Hoped-for states of affairs can function as an overarching constraint on one's intentions by ruling out actions that will prevent the realisation of the hoped-for end, but also by rendering less salient possible actions that one would only pursue given the non-realisation of the end. For example, in Martin's second case, hoping that a long-lost relative is flourishing might rule out actions that would undermine their wellbeing, such as sharing an unflattering anecdote about them.

For the prisoners Frankl describes who smoked the last of their cigarettes rather than keeping them to trade for food, and who simply lay awaiting death, the hope for survival and release from the concentration camps had ceased to have this organising role in their intentions. They no longer hoped to survive, and thus hope no longer ruled out their acting in ways that were incompatible with survival. As such, they no longer formed plans at all: no options were ruled out for them and thus, as Frankl puts it, they were no longer aiming at a goal.

The objects of hope can also figure in plans as an overarching constraint by *rationalising* certain possible courses of action: hoping can involve making plans that only make sense in the light of the hoped-for state of affairs. That is, one can form plans that depend on the realisation of the hoped-for possibility in order to be reasonable as a whole. Frankl describes a fellow prisoner who felt as if life could hold nothing more for him and contemplated suicide. He dissuaded the man from suicide by raising the possibility that he might yet see his child again. For this man striving to live made sense in the light of the possibility of seeing his child: the plan to strive for survival was comprehensible or attractive in the light of the possibility

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<sup>35</sup> Gravlee (2000) suggests something similar: "If we have mere hope in what we believe is possible but completely out of our control, this kind of hope will not set me to deliberating about how to attain the thing hoped for, but it may set me to deliberating about how I will act if my hopes are fulfilled" (Gravlee 2000: 473).

that the hoped-for meeting would come about. The object of hope can thus figure in one's intentions in indirect ways as an overarching rationale for particular intentions.

The Value-Intention account therefore covers many instances of hope that do not eventuate in attempts to bring about the object of hope. It also covers a more esoteric kind of hope explored by Jonathan Lear (2006), 'radical hope'. These are hopes that are too open-ended to allow for instrumental plans to realise the object of hope, hopes where what is hoped for is itself significantly unimaginable for the hoper.<sup>36</sup> In *Radical Hope* Lear explores the example of Plenty Coups' hopes for the survival of the Crow Nation as such despite the devastation of their way of life, which was central to their identity. In the face of such devastation, Plenty Coups was unable to envision what such survival would look like. It therefore seems plausible that he would be unable to directly strive towards the hoped-for end, since he was unable to envisage or imagine what the hoped-for end would consist in. However, Plenty Coups' intentions could nonetheless have been shaped by the possibility of survival, for instance, by ruling out despair or plans incompatible with survival. The Value-Intention account therefore provides a way of straightforwardly understanding such cases as genuine instances of hope.

The objects of hope, then, can figure in intentions in a variety of ways. As such, hope importantly shapes our actions, though there is no single direction in which it always moves us. Some of the putative cases of hoping Martin mentions are nonetheless ruled out by this account. Firstly, it rules out cases in which the agent knows that they could influence the realisation of a possible state of affairs but is *entirely unmoved* to do so. Such agents' intentions are not shaped in accordance with the object of hope at all. However, it seems right that these are not hopes: if one is entirely unmotivated to bring about an end that one recognises is within one's power to realise, then there is no important sense in which one hopes for it. If Martin lacked all motivation to affect who is chosen as the Republican party candidate, then there seems to be no reason to regard her as hoping that a particular candidate be elected.

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<sup>36</sup> Kwong (2018) explicitly rules out such hopes, arguing that a hopeful person must be able to *see* a way in which the desired outcome can come about. However, hopes where one cannot envisage how the hoped-for outcome might come about seem intuitively possible and are referred to as such in ordinary language: 'I hope that something good can come of this'; 'I hope it all works out for the best'. More importantly, such hopes can have the same impact on a person's life, and involve the same psychological states and actions as ordinary instances of hope, which gives reason to think they are a part of the same phenomenon.

The Value-Intention account also rules out cases such as ‘the hope that Hitler was miserable when he died’, insofar as such an agent’s intentions are not shaped by that possibility. However, it seems right to think that this is at best a peripheral case of hope, and not one that need be accounted for in characterising hope, since it lacks many of the central features of hope. The more limited the shaping of one’s intentions, the less likely we are to think of such instances as hope proper, and the more they instead look like instances of mere valuing, desiring or wishing.

This account of hope captures an important and distinctive phenomenon. It captures and explains the distinctive ways in which hopeful people act, as well as shedding light on the distinctive epistemic and affective manifestations of hope. I will later suggest that this account also explains the rational constraints on hoping, which further set it apart from states such as wishing. These all give reason to think that the account is capturing a distinctive phenomenon that is a genuine feature of our lives. Moreover, the psychological structure outlined above provides a characterisation of hope, and thus not every case of hope will fully fit this structure. Though it does not fully accommodate every case of what might be called ‘hope’, it picks out the distinctive and important features of hope, and sheds light on the more peripheral cases. In such cases we can understand the sense in which agents hope by reference to the characterising psychology of hope.

The Value-Intention account of hope puts no qualifier on the kind of object that we can hope for. So long as the agent regards the object in a certain way and shapes their intentions in accordance with it, it counts as a hope.<sup>37</sup> This might give rise to a worry equal and opposite to that discussed above: is the account too permissive? Does it end up counting too many cases as hope?

Intentions involving uncertain, valued outcomes are ubiquitous given that so many of the things we value are beyond our power to realise. On the Value-Intention account hopes would therefore proliferate, becoming nearly constant features of our lives. For example, if I go to a shop which occasionally has delicious ice cream with the intention of buying some if it is there, this account would suggest that I hope that there will be ice cream. Yet it seems right that this should count as a case of hope, even if it is a very ordinary and trivial hope: it is natural

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<sup>37</sup> Though of course, it might be *irrational* to hope for highly unlikely ends that are of extremely low value. In such scenarios, the ends would not warrant any significant role in shaping one’s intentions, but might nonetheless play such a role.

to describe me as hoping to get some ice cream, or going in the hope of buying ice cream. Some hopes are profound and gripping, but many are commonplace and everyday. There is nothing problematic about the existence of trivial hopes. At any one time, it is likely that one hopes for many things: trivial hopes for short queues and tasty dinners, as well as profound hopes for loved ones' wellbeing and the realisation of important future goals. Not all hopes are deep and character-involving, and the loss of some hopes can simply result in an alteration of our plans rather than our being crushed.

Hopes can cover both trivial and profound cases because we can value both deeply significant and trivial things. However, these differ notably not only in strength but also in the kind of value we assign them: I instrumentally value ice cream, whereas other goods may well be constitutive of the ends I value, intrinsically valued for their own sake. Although the Value-Intention account classifies both as proper cases of hope, it does not thereby entail that hopes are uniformly significant.

## **5. Hoping and Wishing**

The Value-Intention account can thus accommodate hope's varied connections to action. The second claim about hope that I took from Walker is that hoping differs from wishing, particularly with regard to its connection to action. The inclusion of intentions in the account serves to vindicate the idea that there are significant differences between the two. Hoping and wishing differ because hoping involves shaping one's intentions in accordance with something one regards as a possible but uncertain and valuable state of affairs, whereas wishing entails only valuing or desiring a state of affairs. In the above I suggested that the object of hope can shape our intentions in increasingly minimal ways. The more minimal the ways in which an object of hope influences one's intentions, the closer to wishing a given case will appear. But there are nonetheless important differences between the two. In this section, I will explore how this sheds light on two important differences between hoping and wishing.

Firstly, there are different rational constraints on each. Secondly, hoping and wishing have different emotional profiles.<sup>38</sup>

Firstly, because hopes, unlike wishes, are characteristically motivating states, there are rational constraints that apply to hopes but not to wishes. I earlier noted that both hopes and wishes are aimed at states of affairs that are less than certain. However, hope cannot be directed towards *any* outcome that is less than certain. One cannot hope for ends that one knows to be impossible: one could not, for example, *hope* to meet someone one knew to be dead, or hope to witness the first shot fired in World War One.<sup>39</sup> This is not true of wishing: one could wish to meet a dead person or to witness here and now the first shot fired in World War One.<sup>40</sup> To wish that one could meet a figure from the past says little more than that one would regard meeting them as a good thing, whereas hoping to do so would call for criticism. The Value-Intention account explains why this is: one cannot hope for impossible things because hoping characteristically involves one's actions or intentions being guided by that possibility. As such, hoping inherits the rational constraints on intentions.<sup>41</sup> Shaping one's intentions in accordance with a state of affairs is appropriate (and indeed coherent) only if the state is possible. Hoping thus involves belief that the object of hope is possible, whereas wishing need not.<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, hopes need not be aimed at states of affairs that are outright impossible in order to be defective. Hopes that require inconsistent things of us also seems to be rationally ruled out. For example, it would be irrational to hope that one can picnic in the sun tomorrow afternoon whilst also hoping to watch a good film at the cinema then. Both might be possibilities, but hoping for *both* things would be irrational. This constraint falls out of the

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<sup>38</sup> Martin suggests that we do not generally mark the distinction between hoping and wishing at all, writing: "do we generally mark the difference between wishing and *hoping* in this way? Indeed, do we generally "mark the difference between" wishing and hoping at all? The old trope of "wishin' and hopin' and 'prayin'" suggests not. I find I cannot imagine a remotely realistic scenario where I would feel moved to correct a description of someone's attitude, "she doesn't really *wish* for it; she *hopes*," or vice versa." (Martin 2011: 155). She thus seems to reject the idea that wishes are characteristically more passive than hopes.

<sup>39</sup> Assuming, that is, that such outcomes are regarded as impossible.

<sup>40</sup> Van Hooft (2011) thus notes that we call some situations 'hopeless', but not 'wishless'. There are many circumstances that rule out (rationally) hoping for a good outcome without ruling out the possibility of (rationally) wishing for that outcome.

<sup>41</sup> The intention condition of my account thus motivates the belief condition. To the extent that one can rationally intend only what is conceived of as good or desirable (in some sense), then the intention condition motivates both other conditions.

<sup>42</sup> Martin regards wishing as paradigmatically involving a state of affairs that is highly unlikely or impossible (Martin 2011: 155). Though I think it is possible to wish for possible or even likely outcomes, it is striking that they are so often aimed at highly unlikely or impossible ones. My account explains this with regard to the passivity of wishing.

rational demands on intentions, which are inherited by hopes. Bratman argues that there are strong consistency requirements on intentions; he claims that it must be possible for all of one's intentions to be successfully executed, and that this must be possible given one's beliefs. He suggests that such a constraint is necessary if hopes are to successfully fulfil their conduct-controlling role: "their [consistency demands] satisfaction is normally required for plans to serve well their role in coordinating and controlling conduct" (Bratman 1987: 33).<sup>43</sup> As such, hopes that involve incompatible intentions are thereby defective. However, wishes for states of affairs requiring incompatible things of us seem to be rationally acceptable. Again, this is well explained by the thought that hopes, but not wishes, involve intentions.<sup>44</sup>

Secondly, hoping, unlike wishing, can make us particularly vulnerable to disappointment. Hoping generally involves a sense of emotional investment in the hoped-for end and an underlying sense of tension, whereas wishing need involve no such investment and tension. This contrast is brought out in the characteristic responses to unfulfilled hopes and wishes. Unfulfilled wishes might well cause no distress, and at most tend to cause frustration. Unfulfilled hopes, on the other hand, often have a more significant impact upon us. We tend to feel a deeper kind of investment in a hope than in a wish, and to respond with disappointment if it fails to be realised. This is well explained by the involvement of intentions in hopes but not wishes.

There are therefore important characteristic differences between hoping and wishing. The distinction is not sharp, but hope is distinctive and interesting in ways which merit our attention, and which the contrast with wishing brings out.<sup>45</sup> The characteristic passivity of wishing can be highlighted in contrast to hope's characteristic activity when we consider what we would *expect* of wishful and hopeful agents. For example, if I express my wish that I were a better tennis player, this need not be inconsistent with doing nothing to improve my playing: I might merely wish that I were more naturally talented. On the other hand, if I express a hope to be a better tennis player, it would make sense to ask what I am doing to pursue this end:

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<sup>43</sup> Although Bratman argues that there is a strong consistency requirement on intentions, this has been questioned by, for example, McCann (1991) and Holton (2008).

<sup>44</sup> In particular, this account is well placed to explain why some hopes for incompatible states of affairs are rationally ruled out, whilst others are rationally acceptable. I cannot hope to get each of two jobs, if the hope involves forming plans for the future that are incompatible. But it seems that I can hope to get each of two jobs if I form merely conditional plans, plans that are conditional on different circumstances.

<sup>45</sup> At one end of the spectrum of activity (hope) and passivity (wishing), think of 'making a wish'. In making a wish, one simply attends to the wished-for possibility. There is no analogue of this for hope.

‘how are you trying to become better?’. One might doubt that I truly hope to be a better player if I am doing nothing to attempt to become better, whereas the wish that I were a better player does not seem to be cast into doubt in this way. I can passively wish that something were the case without acting in any distinctive way, whereas hopes are far more closely linked with action. That we can distinguish wishing and hoping on the Value-Intention account is therefore an advantage of understanding hope in this way.

## Conclusion

The account of hope I have offered illuminates and explains the phenomena described by Solnit and Frankl in the examples with which I began. In Frankl’s account, he emphasises the centrality of hope to human existence, and its high value in our lives: he regards the loss of all hope as a devastating loss for individuals to suffer. Solnit similarly suggests that the loss of hope is a devastating loss for political communities. The Value-Intention account sheds some light on these features: hope is so central to human life because there are large swathes of our existence which we are unable to completely control, and yet where acting in the light of positive possibilities is crucially important for us. Frankl observes that the prisoner’s complete uncertainty over their future and powerlessness to influence it closed off the possibility of hope. This is explained by the connection between hoping and intending: the hopeless prisoners were those whose agential capacities have been undermined, whose ability to form intentions about the future has been impaired by their inability to influence their own life.

There are therefore significant advantages to the Value-Intention account of hope. Firstly, it fits well with our pre-theoretical intuitions about hope: it accommodates many intuitive instances of hope that extant theories struggle to account for. It also sheds light on the heterogeneous states associated with hope, since intentions are importantly interlinked with epistemic and affective states, as well as with actions. It enables hoping to be distinguished from wishing in a way that sheds light on both states, explaining why wishing can be rational where hope is not, and casting light on their differing affective profiles. Finally, and most importantly, it captures a distinctive and interesting phenomenon that is ubiquitous in our everyday lives.





## Chapter 4

# Hope as a Virtue

What role does hope play in a good human life? On the one hand, it can be a powerful force for personal and political good. On the other, we can hope for bad or evil things, and hoping for such things can seem to be part of what constitutes vicious character. These thoughts seem to pull us in opposite directions when considering hope's ethical standing: the former toward thinking that hope might be a state with ethical value, and the latter toward considering it a state without ethical value.

In this chapter I argue that hope is a virtue. I will argue that hope is necessary for engaging in a broad kind of project which is essential in order to live a meaningful human life ('vulnerable projects'), and that this gives us reason to think that it is non-instrumentally valuable in our lives. Specifically, I will suggest that it is well understood as a structural virtue, a virtue of self-governance. However, I will allow that the above-mentioned scepticism about hope's ethical value is not groundless. Though hope is ethically valuable, it will contribute to one's life going well as a whole only in the presence of moral knowledge.

In §1 of this chapter I will examine two kinds of argument that have been used to ascribe two kinds of ethical value to hope. I will show that such arguments, although significant, do not answer the question of whether hope is a virtue, which I am taking as my question. In §2 I will argue that the value of hope is best understood by examining the role of hopeful *action* in our lives and I will then outline some key features of hopeful action. In §3 I

will argue that hope is valuable because many of the projects required for living a good life are essentially hopeful projects, and I will suggest that this gives us reason to think that hope is a virtue. In §4 I will suggest some ways in which hopeful actions contribute not only to an individual life, but to a wider community. Finally, in §5 I will conclude by answering the above objection to the thought that hope is a virtue – namely, that hope does not necessarily contribute to a life going well overall. I will argue that this objection demonstrates at most that hope’s contributing to one’s life going well overall depends on one’s possession of moral knowledge, but that this is consistent with it being a structural virtue.

## 1. Standard Arguments for Hope’s Value

There are some traits whose role in life going well seems to be fairly straightforward. Kindness and justice, for example, seem to be valuable both in an individual life and for the good functioning of society as a whole. They are thus commonly thought of as inherently valuable traits and considered to be virtues. The place of other traits, however, is more ambiguous: cautiousness is often a good policy, but a life without moments of uncalculated spontaneity would be lacking. Cautiousness plausibly has only instrumental value and thus does not seem to be a good candidate to be a virtue.

At first, it is not completely clear where we should place hope in comparison to such traits. Hope can seem, perhaps, too thin and easily misused a trait to quite count as a virtue. But though it is not traditionally recognised as an ethical virtue,<sup>1</sup> a number of philosophers have thought that it has a natural place amongst them, as a trait that contributes something significant to a life and whose mere presence contributes to a life going well.<sup>2</sup> I will argue that hope is an ethical virtue. And I will suggest that it has a natural place amongst the traditionally

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<sup>1</sup> Hope has of course traditionally been conceived of as a *theological* virtue. However, I am only talking about hope from a non-theological standpoint. I will not examine theological conceptions of hope, nor seek to determine whether it has value in such terms.

<sup>2</sup> Foot (2001), Kadlac (2015), and van Hooft (2011) explicitly make the claim that hope is a virtue. There are important differences between the specific claims they make, however: Foot and van Hooft suggest that hope itself is a virtue, whereas Kadlac writes that some hopes are “plausible candidates for virtues” (Kadlac 2015: 341), suggesting that it is particular instances of it that can be virtuous, rather than the trait generally. Bovens (1999) does not explicitly make the claim that hope is a virtue, but does argue that it is valuable; his discussion of it with reference to the Aristotelian mean suggests that he is thinking of it along similar lines. I will discuss some of their views further in what follows.

recognised virtues. In this section, I begin by outlining and evaluating extant considerations that have been raised to explain hope's value. I will argue that such considerations fail to reveal the full extent of its worth, since they do not answer the question of whether hope is a virtue. I will thus be setting them aside, and in §2 I will outline an alternative way of approaching the question of whether hope is a virtue.

In asking whether hope is a virtue, I will rely on a conception of virtues as states or traits that make their possessor good as a human being in some respect, where this relation is constitutive rather than merely causal. Such traits, that is, are non-instrumentally valuable. More specifically, I will depend on the idea that virtues constitutively contribute to a life going well in some regard, the idea that virtues constitutively contribute to flourishing. There are of course alternative accounts of virtue available. But it should at least be highly significant if hope has the above kind of value, independently of one's overarching conception of virtue.<sup>3</sup>

Extant reasons for thinking that hope is valuable tend to rest on two kinds of consideration. The first is that hope is valuable insofar as it produces good consequences. The second is that hope is valuable because hope moderates harmful extremes. I will take these considerations in turn.

Firstly, the good consequences that hope can bring about have impressed various philosophers. Adam Kadlac (2015), for example, identifies three characteristics of hope that he believes contribute to its capacity to be a virtue, and all three are stated in terms of the consequences of hoping.<sup>4</sup> Firstly, he states, hope "facilitates a more realistic view of the future

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<sup>3</sup> The claim that virtues are *non-instrumentally* valuable is accepted by the majority of virtue ethicists, barring consequentialist virtue ethicists such as Driver (2001). Driver claims that "a virtue is a character trait that systematically produces a preponderance of good" (Driver 2001: xvii). Swanton (2003) describes the virtues as traits that are good or excellent, writing "[o]n my account, virtue by definition makes for goodness in human beings" (Swanton 2003: 56). However, she does not regard *all* virtues as constitutively contributing to one's life going well. The claim that virtues constitutively contribute to one's life going well in some respect is commonly accepted by neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists. Annas (2007), for example, writes "living virtuously will constitute my living my life as a whole in a way that lives it *well*, in a way that it is valuable to live" (Annas 2007: 520). Foot (2002) also claims that "virtues are, in some general way, beneficial. Human beings do not get on well without them" (Foot 2002: 2). I am working with a conception of virtue such that virtue constitutively contribute to life going well in some respect, although I note in §5 that going well in one respect will not always contribute to one's life going well overall.

<sup>4</sup> He is far from the only proponent of this line of vindication of hope's value: the purported benefits to individuals of hope are also discussed by Bovens (1999) and van Hooft (2011), among others. Moellendorf (2006), Andre (2013) and Snow (2018) discuss the political benefits of hoping. Walker (2006) suggests that trust, which she regards as deeply important for the possibility of living well, depends on hope. Snow (2013) suggests that hope has epistemic benefits. In the psychological literature, too, there are suggestions that hope is important in enabling us to avoid despair, causing decreased levels of mutually harmful aggression, and in leading to increased levels of general wellbeing: see, for example, Lazarus (1999), Miceli and Castelfranchi (2010), Barilan (2012) and Halevy (2017).

than dispositions like optimism and pessimism”. Secondly, he claims that hope promotes courage.<sup>5</sup> Thirdly, he claims that hope “encourages an important kind of solidarity with others” (Kadlac 2015: 338). Importantly, he does not claim that these three valuable characteristics are internal to hope: hoping does not essentially involve these. Rather, he understands them as consequences of hoping that are distinct from hope itself. He concludes that “hope is therefore valuable insofar as it contributes to other characteristics that we believe to be human excellences” (Kadlac 2015: 342). He thus suggests that hope is not necessarily a virtue, but rather that it is a virtue insofar as it tends to bring about certain good consequences.<sup>6</sup>

This line of thinking does point to a kind of value that hope might have. But this value is merely instrumental and dependent on the value of its consequences. Whether hope is valuable overall on such accounts will thus depend on whether its good consequences outweigh its bad consequences, such as the hopeful person’s increased vulnerability to disappointment. As such, not only does it suggest that hope’s value is wholly instrumental, but it also suggests that only some instances of hope will be valuable. It is thus unclear whether this gives reason to think that the general state of hope itself is valuable. This line of thinking does suggest that some instances of hope are valuable, but the value of hope simpliciter remains in question.<sup>7</sup>

Another popular argument for considering hope to be valuable is that it plays a role in moderating harmful extremes. In particular, the suggestion is often made that the *right amount* of hope is necessary to live well as it enables one to overcome problematic temptations to which humans are subject. Foot, for example, writes:

Hope is a virtue because despair too is a temptation; it might have been that no one cried that all was lost except where he could really see it to be so, and in this case there would have been no virtue of hope. (Foot 2002: 9)

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<sup>5</sup> Although I do not think that this suffices to justify the claim that hope is a virtue, this nonetheless seems like an important connection to draw. The general suggestion is that responding courageously to a situation requires that one regard there as being some possible good to be attained by that response, and acting in the light of that possible good. That is, it seems to require hope that a good outcome might be attained. Gravlee (2000) explores this connection in greater detail.

<sup>6</sup> Luc Bovens (1999) also suggests a similar line of thinking: “[h]ope is instrumentally valuable in that it has an enabling function, in that it counteracts risk aversion, and in that it spawns more attainable constitutive hopes” (Bovens 1999: 670). He also suggests that the mental imaging involved in hope can be pleasurable, and that hoping can be conducive to self-understanding as it can spur one to critically reflect on what one values.

<sup>7</sup> If, following Driver, one accepts a consequentialist conception of virtue, this might suffice to suggest that hope qualifies as a virtue. But it is far from obvious that hope’s consequences are always or even reliably positive.

On this account, hope's value is grounded in its role as a *corrective* to other influences. Hope is valuable, the explanation runs, because despair is a destructive human temptation, and hope enables us to avoid that temptation.<sup>8</sup>

Luc Bovens (1999) proposes a similar line of argument, which also depends on the idea that hope moderates harmful extremes. He states:

Hope seems to obey Aristotle's doctrine of the mean. To live one's life well one should not hope too much and not hope too little. (Bovens 1999: 669)

[I]t is easy to succumb to myopia and to resist the more than fair gambles in life, because we are too fixated on the possible losses in each single gamble. Now the value of hope is that it makes us focus on the possible gains in more than fair gambles. It helps us overcome our myopic fixation on the possible losses in more than fair gambles. The resolution of accepting more than fair gambles will tend to be a winning strategy in the game of life at large. (Bovens 1999: 672)

On this account, too, hope is valuable because it functions as a corrective to human temptations. But whereas Foot identifies the key temptation that hope counteracts as despair, Bovens identifies it as excessive risk aversion, the disproportionate focus on possible loss in decision-making. On his account, hope thus has an important role in enabling us to lead good lives, lives where we attain the goods available from 'more than fair gambles'.<sup>9</sup>

This line of thinking suggests that hope is valuable because it helps to counteract certain temptations and extremes to which human beings are subject and which we therefore need to actively resist. This seems to give hope a more important place in a human life than the first line of thinking (Kadlac's), since it suggests that hope is *necessary* to live well given the temptations that we face. Needing some amount of a trait to counter extremes is, however, insufficient to secure any non-instrumental value for hope. For example, we plausibly need a certain amount of fearfulness to avoid recklessness, but fearfulness seems to be merely

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<sup>8</sup> Foot does of course have far more to say about what makes for virtue. But this is the only consideration that she explicitly raises with regard to hope. My explanation of hope's value is consistent with her general account of virtue.

<sup>9</sup> Bovens conceives of hope as involving a belief that the hoped-for outcome is possible, a desire that it should obtain, and also 'mental imaging', imagining the realisation of the hoped-for state of affairs. He thus suggests that the 'mental imaging' involved in hope is what can counteract our tendency to focus on possible loss. Whether humans in fact have such a tendency seems unobvious. It is unclear what would show that humans were subject to such a temptation, since we might be tempted but frequently manage to overcome such temptation. This line of argument rests on the assumption that we do have such a tendency.

instrumentally valuable, and is not a likely candidate for virtue. So, although this line of thinking suggests that hope has a significant role to play in our lives, it falls short of answering whether it might be a virtue.

What seems to be necessary for virtue, but lacking in this line of thinking, is a link between the trait itself and doing well or flourishing, rather than simply avoiding bad consequences of fending off other temptations. In §3, I will argue that hope is non-instrumentally valuable: there is an intrinsic connection between hope and doing well or flourishing.<sup>10</sup> First, however, in §2 I will outline the conceptions of hope and hopeful action that I have in mind and defend my general approach to the question by suggesting that hope's value is best discerned by considering the role of hopeful action in human lives.

## 2. Hope and Hopeful Action

There has been much discussion of hope's impact on our agency – whether we hope, it is widely thought, somehow influences our capacity to act.<sup>11</sup> And there has also been discussion of hope's value and its possible status as a virtue. But few have connected these two thoughts.<sup>12</sup> In this section I will draw out some key features of hopeful action. I will then suggest that the best way to understand the value of hope is to examine the agential role of hope and the significance of hopeful action. In §3 I will then draw on this characterisation of hope and hopeful action to argue that hope is a virtue.

The nature of hope is widely debated. This would seem to pose a problem for any discussion of hope's value, making it difficult to approach the question of whether hope is a virtue in a way that might yield consensus. Hope is a complex phenomenon, and its value could be examined in various respects. We could examine it merely as a component of our

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<sup>10</sup> It can sound odd to ask why hope is valuable, rather than why hopefulness is, since hopefulness rather than hope is a character trait. But a similar question is asked of courage, for example, (rather than courageousness), and of love (rather than lovingness).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, McGeer (2004), Han-Pile (2017), Pettit (2004), and Walker (2006).

<sup>12</sup> Martin (2014) does link them, and indeed suggests that the appeal of the thought that hope is a virtue is largely due to the thought that hope has “a special sustaining power” in action (Martin 2014: 72). However, she is sceptical of the claim that hope has such a sustaining power, suggesting that it is merely contingently causally connected to such sustaining. She suggests that the only link between hope and agency is via fantasising, which can (though it need not) reinforce our sense of agency, as well as drawing our attention to previously unnoticed reasons to strive. At the end of §3 I distinguish my argument from the one which she rejects.

mental life, or take the affective component of hope as central, for example. Hope might, for instance, be pleasant to experience, or at least more pleasant than lack of hope.<sup>13</sup> But it seems that this would tell us little about why hope is valuable, at least in any deeply important respect.<sup>14</sup>

Nonetheless, however hope is understood, it is clear that hope manifests in hopeful actions. In this chapter I aim to shed light on the value of hope by considering the role of hopeful action in a human life. I will below identify some key features of hopeful actions. By examining the significance of such actions, we will better be able to discern the ways in which hope itself is valuable and the wider place that it has in a human life.<sup>15</sup>

Consider courage as a parallel. We see the value of courage by considering its manifestations in courageous actions: the actions of the firefighter or whistle-blower, for example, are clearly valuable (whether or not they are successful). The firefighter's rushing in to the burning building in order to save people despite the personal risk involved, for instance, seems clearly important and admirable; such actions reflect well on them as a person. Courage, the capacity or disposition to act in this kind of way, could thus be vindicated by considering the general significance of such courageous actions. Examining these actions illuminates the role that courage has in a life, and gives us a sense of why courage might be considered to be a virtue: the capacity to act in such ways seems essential to living well.

Like courage, hope is manifested in certain characteristic ways. And, like courage, I will argue that hope manifests in kinds of action that are essential to living well. Examining these hopeful actions and their place in a good human life thus provides a way of examining the

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<sup>13</sup> Bovens suggests something along these lines with his claim that hope "provides for the pleasure of anticipation and respite in trying times" (Bovens 1999: 680). Walker similarly suggests that hope has a positive affective profile: "[t]he momentum of hope is "buoyant," not rigid or driven, and there are characteristic earmarks of this energetic lightness in thought, feeling, and expression." (Walker 2006: 54). Milona and Stockdale (2018) understand hope as an emotion.

<sup>14</sup> In any case, I think the significance of hope's affective associations should not be overestimated. Many commonplace examples of hopeful actions involve agents who do not feel occurrent positivity. Solnit, for example, describes a protestor involved in the *Women Strike for Peace* protests remembering how "foolish and futile she felt standing in the rain one morning protesting at the Kennedy White House" (Solnit 2004: 3). This description of her feelings does not sound uplifting or positive, as one might assume hope would be. Moreover, sustained projects that are essentially hopeful (such as bringing up a child) can often take years or even lifetimes to carry out. During that time, one would expect the agent's affective states to vary widely.

<sup>15</sup> This discussion of hope's value is thus consistent with the account of hope offered in the previous chapter but does not depend on it.

value that hope has. This is the kind of argument for understanding hope as a virtue which I shall offer.

What do hopeful actions look like? Hopeful actions are commonplace, and I take it that we have a fairly firm pre-theoretical grasp of what they involve. Hopeful actions can take many different forms, but I shall take the following cases as core cases of such actions:

Case 1 *Gardening*: Phoebe moves into a new house and decides to plant flowers in the garden. She buys seeds, plants them, and waters them carefully each day in the hope that in time they will grow.

Case 2 *Dream Job*: A job has come up which a friend describes as their dream job. I make a plan for how to celebrate the new job if they get it.

Case 3 *Women Strike for Peace*: Solnit (2004) gives an account of the actions of Women Strike for Peace, an antinuclear activist movement, active in the 1960s. The women protested in the hope of having some influence on political decision makers, though it was far from guaranteed that their protests would do so. The individuals in the movement did not always feel hopeful, but their protest made sense in the light of their shared hopes.

In this chapter I will not rely on any specific account of hope or hopeful actions. I will, however, use the above examples to draw out some key features of hopeful action that will be significant in the argument for considering hope to be a virtue.

In acting, we pursue various ends, and these ends are often within our control. On getting up this morning, I pursued the end of eating toast for breakfast, and I took it to be something that I could easily bring about. I straightforwardly believed that (since I intended it) I would have toast for breakfast. However, many of the ends we pursue are things that may not be realised, things that might not come about no matter how we act.<sup>16</sup> The ends or goals in the three examples of hopeful action are all risky in the sense that the pursuers recognise that they might not be realised. The protestors, for example, aimed to have nuclear testing banned. But they did not believe or outright expect that this end would come about. Similarly, Phoebe aims to have a garden filled with flowers, but despite planting and tending to them she

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<sup>16</sup> Of course, it would seem impossible or at least irrational to pursue something we regarded as *impossible*. But this is significantly different from thinking that an end is possible but that regardless of how we act it might fail to be realised.



does not outright expect to have such a garden. Ends that might not be realised in this sense are *vulnerable*, and their realisation is in part down to circumstantial luck. The agents could do everything as they ought to, and the projects might still fail.

In one sense, both eating breakfast and the banning of nuclear testing are vulnerable to luck. After all, one's house could have been burgled during the night and the food might have been stolen. Or one might trip up whilst walking down the stairs and end up in A and E with a broken leg before having had the chance to eat breakfast. But this kind of luck seems significantly different to the kind of luck to which hopeful actions are hostage.

In normal circumstances one can reasonably believe or outright expect to eat toast for breakfast if one has decided to do so. Although it is possible that one would fail to eat toast for breakfast despite having decided to, one relies on the belief that one will do so in forming further beliefs and intentions (one might plan, for example, to leave the house half an hour after getting up, as eating toast for breakfast takes little time). We usually think that one can have *knowledge* about such future events. That is, in the case of eating breakfast the realisation of the aim is dependent on factors outside of one's control, but these factors are things one can take for granted, things that do not preclude knowledge.<sup>17</sup> This is not the case with the protestors' ends. The realisation of their ends was dependent on factors outside their control, but which they could not have simply expected to obtain. We would therefore be reluctant to attribute knowledge about whether nuclear testing would be banned to even the most optimistic of protestors. Similarly, the factors determining whether the friend gets the job in *Dream Job* are not factors one could take for granted, or simply expect. Vulnerable ends, then, are ends that are vulnerable to factors outside the agent's control which the agent does not take for granted.<sup>18</sup> The kind of luck that precludes knowledge makes an end vulnerable.

One might wonder why hopeful actions must involve vulnerable ends, rather than simply possible ones. Christopher Bobier (2017), for example, suggests that hope (and thereby hopeful action) needs only to involve ends that are believed by the agent to be possible, where

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<sup>17</sup> Of course, one can be wrong in taking certain things for granted, or for failing to do so. Importantly, the belief that I will have toast for breakfast seems far safer or more reliable than the belief that nuclear testing would be banned. There are plausibly therefore constraints on what one can justifiably take for granted, and one can take factors for granted without being justified in doing so. Nevertheless, the agent who takes little for granted requires more hope than someone who takes more for granted, even if the latter is justified in doing so.

<sup>18</sup> The idea that what counts as a vulnerable end depends on what one takes for granted has the benefit of allowing for possible stakes-sensitivity. That is, what we take for granted may depend on how important the end is. Whether an end counts as vulnerable might therefore be dependent on the significance of the end in question.

possibility is consistent with certainty.<sup>19</sup> On this view, then, my choosing to eat toast for breakfast is a hopeful action. After all, in order to intend to have toast for breakfast, I must believe it to be possible that I do so. But this vastly overgenerates cases of hope. ‘Hope’ suggests a level of uncertainty about an outcome. We contrast it with ‘expectation’, which is the appropriate attitude to take towards many possible outcomes. Hopeful action therefore seems to require something more than merely possible ends: it requires ends that are vulnerable.

*Gardening*, *Dream Job*, and *Women Strike for Peace* all describe actions that involve vulnerable ends. All of the actions described in these cases are thus responses to reasons to act for the sake of vulnerable ends.<sup>20</sup> In *Dream Job*, for example, the vulnerable end is the situation where the friend gets the job, and the reason to which the hopeful agent responds is that it would be good for the friend to get it. Hopeful actions involve ends that do not simply *happen* to be vulnerable. Rather, hopeful actions involve ends that are *recognised* by the agents themselves as being vulnerable. For example, if the women protesting against nuclear weapons regarded the protests as guaranteed to force the banning of nuclear testing, the protest would not have been hopeful. Rather, it would have been naïve or overly optimistic. But, at least as Solnit describes it, the activists were hopeful: they regarded the outcome they desired as vulnerable but nonetheless strove to bring it about. Hopeful actions, then, involve ends that are vulnerable and that are recognised as such by the agents who take them.

In all three cases the vulnerable outcomes are also taken by the hopeful agents to be valuable or desirable. Had Phoebe regarded planting and watering the garden simply as good exercise and not cared about the garden itself, it would seem odd to think of her as acting hopefully. Her actions might in one sense be knowingly vulnerable to luck, but the thing she valued or desired in them would not be. By contrast, hopeful actions are taken (at least in part) because one values the vulnerable end that they involve.

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<sup>19</sup> Bobier accepts the following fuller account of hope: “*S* hopes for *x* if: (a) *S* believes the attainment of *x* is possible or is at least uncertain about it; (b) *S* desires *x*; and (c) *x* is future to *S* (lowest-common-denominator view of hope)” (Bobier 2017: 495). His suggestion that this entails that hope is necessary for practical deliberation implies that he takes these conditions to be sufficient for hope.

<sup>20</sup> In all three of the examples, the agents act ‘for the sake of’ a vulnerable end in that their actions are intended to bring about, or raise the probability of, the end in question. But one can act ‘for the sake of’ something without striving to bring it about. Refraining from laughing at a joke made at the expense of one’s friend, for example, is something one could do for one’s friend’s sake without hoping to thereby bring about closer friendship.

In many other respects, these cases of hopeful action differ from each other. For example, the first two cases are cases of individual hopeful action, whereas the third involves hopeful joint action, namely the hope that the protestors would *together* bring about the valued end. In addition, whereas in *Gardening* the success of Phoebe's hopeful actions (given her input) depends largely on non-human factors, in *Women Strike for Peace* the success of the hopeful action depends largely on other people. And, finally, the degree to which the hopeful actions contribute to bringing about the hoped-for ends is variable between the three cases. Whereas in *Gardening* Phoebe significantly contributes to bringing about the hoped-for end, in *Dream Job* the hopeful actions are not causally efficacious in bringing about the vulnerable end.

Hopeful actions, then, have the following important features: they involve ends that are valued, that are vulnerable to luck (in the sense of being dependent on factors that rule out knowledge, that the agent does not take for granted), and that are recognised as vulnerable. There may be other features that hopeful actions have, but these are the ones that are important for the purposes of my argument. I shall take these features to be sufficient for hopeful action; when actions meet these conditions, the actions are properly described as hopeful. An agent who takes hopeful actions has hope. These conditions are also taken by almost all commentators to be necessary conditions for hope.<sup>21</sup> In order to hope it is at least necessary, most think, that one regards a valued outcome as merely possible and as vulnerable to luck. Hopeful actions are actions that manifest this hope.<sup>22</sup> Hopeful actions express the agent's hope and can be understood only by reference to their hope.

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<sup>21</sup> With the exceptions of Chignell (2013), who believes that it is possible to hope for things that are certain, and Bobier (2017), who also rejects the condition that the end must be vulnerable to luck.

<sup>22</sup> Many philosophers have been persuaded by the thought that all hope is agential or active, oriented towards these kinds of action (for example, McGeer and Walker). Martin too, though she denies that hope is necessarily active, thinks that all hope has a close connection to action, since it involves taking the object of hope to offer a certain justificatory rationale for given activities (albeit some 'passive' ones such as fantasising). Kadlac, Calhoun (2018) and Pettit, by contrast, think that some hopes can be more minimal and entirely idle. I am not weighing in on this debate here, since my argument depends only on the thought that hopeful actions are essential to living well, and that this vindicates hope as such. Similarly, there might be instances of courage that do not eventuate in courageous action, but the value of courage might nonetheless be best understood with reference to courageous actions.

### 3. The Value of Hopeful Actions

Hope's value, I have suggested, is best illuminated by considering the role of hopeful actions in our lives. The above characterisation of hopeful action implies that in acting hopefully an agent is responsive to reasons to act for the sake of vulnerable ends. I will argue that responsiveness to such reasons is necessary for human beings to participate in many valuable projects. And participation in at least some such projects is necessary to live a good human life.<sup>23</sup> Given the kind of beings we are, we need hope in order to pursue many particular projects that are of significant worth, as well as many that are obligatory. The hopeful person, then, structures their life in the right kind of way.

Human beings are limited creatures: our capacities to act and influence the world are highly restricted. We have limited physical and cognitive powers to bring about those things that we aim for, and our attempts often end in failure. As such, insofar as our beliefs are accurate many of the valuable projects we have reason to pursue are vulnerable. Think, for example, about reasons to act in ways that will make others happy: one is unlikely to be able to secure the other's happiness, but nonetheless these seem like important kinds of reasons. Equally, many self-concerned reasons also concern vulnerable ends: Phoebe's planting the garden and watering the seeds cannot ensure that they will grow, but it is something she has reason to do given her desire for a beautiful garden. The projects that make up our lives are often extended over time, and thus require a stable and supportive environment in order to come to fruition. They frequently require the success of multiple sub-plans, each of which may itself be risky. And they can depend on others' cooperation as well as on non-human factors.<sup>24</sup> A vast number of our possible projects thus require being responsive to reasons to act for the sake of vulnerable ends.

Living well does not require responsiveness to every reason one has. At any point in time it seems plausible that one will have reasons to act in many different, often inconsistent, ways: reasons, for example, to read a book, go for a walk, and also to spend time with friends.

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<sup>23</sup> This perhaps gives a way of understanding McGeer's (2004) claim that "we cannot live a human life without hope" (McGeer 2004: 100). Walker makes the similar claim that hope "is as basic to us as breathing, and basic in the same way: it is something we must do to live a human life" (Walker 2006: 44). The inclusion of 'human' in both quotes suggests that this depends on a normatively rich conception of what constitutes a 'human life'.

<sup>24</sup> Morton and Paul (2019) suggest that these factors also ground the need for 'grit', which they understand as a kind of epistemic resilience, a resistance to overly readily forming the belief that one will fail.

Assuming that living well is at least possible, it therefore does not require that one respond to every reason one has, since responding to every reason that one has would be impossible. The mere fact that one has reasons to act in ways that are vulnerable to luck is therefore not sufficient to show that responding to such reasons is necessary in order to be living well.<sup>25</sup>

However, to live a good human life it *is* necessary to respond to at least *some* reasons to act for the sake of vulnerable ends. Given our agential limitations, many of the ends and projects we value are vulnerable. The only way to avoid such vulnerability would be to take on only very limited and minimal projects: those that are within our capacity to secure, whose realisation is not therefore vulnerable to significant luck. But taking on only such limited and minimal projects would be incompatible with living a good life. The projects one engaged in would be far too narrow and unambitious for one to be living well. Any life containing projects that are sufficiently rich and ambitious to be valuable will involve some vulnerable projects. A good life, then will inevitably involve responding to some reasons to pursue ends whose realisation cannot be guaranteed. A good life thus requires responding to some subset of the reasons that one has whose aims are vulnerable to failure. And actions in response to such reasons are essentially hopeful actions.<sup>26</sup>

In being responsive to the reasons that they have, the hopeful agent can do the right thing in an important respect even if their project fails. They can have acted in the right way even if the desired outcome does not come about. Had the women's protest in *Women Strike for Peace* been wholly unsuccessful, then (assuming that the action was appropriate) it would not have been a failing on the part of the protestors. In being responsive to a valuable possibility outside their full control, the protestors would have acted well regardless of the outcome.<sup>27</sup> It seems plausible that their actions would have been valuable even if they were ultimately unsuccessful.

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<sup>25</sup> That we are evaluable with regard to how well we respond to reasons is supported by the thought that weakness of will and imprudence seem to be agential failures. The weak-willed or imprudent person could value the right things, whilst failing to respond properly to those reasons that they have.

<sup>26</sup> On this account, the person who is very cautious or pessimistic and resists taking many 'normal circumstances' for granted requires more hope than the ordinary believer. Since they regard many things as vulnerable, they psychologically require lots of hope. However, they might also be justified in taking a lot more for granted than they do, so that although they require a lot of hope given their beliefs, what is overall required of them is an adjustment of their beliefs.

<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, acting hopefully does often influence the realisation of an outcome. Hoping can contribute to the likelihood that the outcome comes about even if it is not an outcome that is within our control. In all three of the above examples, there are ways that the agents' hopes might contribute to the realisation of the hoped-for ends.

Living a good life is thus partly constituted by being responsive to some reasons to act for the sake of vulnerable ends. Insofar as we recognise the vulnerability of such ends, a good life must contain projects that we recognise as vulnerable.<sup>28</sup> Hopeful actions are therefore a necessary constituent of a good human life.<sup>29</sup> The person whose life contains vulnerable projects has ordered their life in the right kind of way: their life has the right kind of overarching structure to be living well. Hope is thus a *virtue of self-governance*, a trait that enables one to structure one's life in an excellent way.

Participating in projects involving ends that are vulnerable, then, is necessary for living well. In order to live a sufficiently rich life, human beings must act on some reasons to pursue ends that are vulnerable. But we not only have general reasons to act on any subset of such reasons; engaging in particular vulnerable projects can sometimes be morally required. The success of our moral projects, in particular, is often dependent on luck. As such, many important moral projects require hopeful actions. Many moral reasons involve ends that are vulnerable, and knowingly acting upon them requires hope. The *Women Strike for Peace* protests are one such case. But there are plenty of more quotidian cases: for example, one might do something for a friend in an attempt to cheer them up, where one's success depends on a large degree of circumstantial luck that cannot be taken for granted. Hope is thus necessary for living well not only because acting upon *some* subset of reasons to pursue ends that are vulnerable is necessary for living well, but because there are many such reasons that we *ought* to be responsive to. To be morally good, then, is also often partly constituted by acting hopefully, or by being disposed to act hopefully. Hope is thus a virtue of self-governance not only in that the hopeful person's life contains the right kind of projects, but also in that it is structured in a way that enables many particular goods to be realised.<sup>30</sup>

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Bovens also explores this function of hope: "[a]hopeful rather than a defeatist attitude may at least be partly responsible for bringing some task to a successful end" (Bovens 1999: 671).

<sup>28</sup> This suggests that there are two ways in which one might fail to hope. Firstly, one might despair or be resigned to the outcome. This is a kind of practical paralysis. In despairing or being resigned to an outcome not coming to pass, one gives up on the end in question. Secondly, one can lack hope in virtue of not recognising the vulnerability of the end, or not valuing it. Blind optimism or pessimism, presumption and cynicism all rule out space for hope, but these depend on kinds of epistemic defect. Govier (2011) discusses these as 'opposites' of hope.

<sup>29</sup> In one sense, this provides a narrower vindication of hope than is suggested by Bobier (2017). Since he regards hope as constituted by desiring a state of affairs and regarding it as possible, he claims that hope is necessary for *all* practical deliberation, essential for the end-setting activity that practical deliberation involves. In this case it would be necessary not only for adoption of certain kinds of project, but in order for one to choose any project as such. However, I have suggested that this rests on a mistaken characterisation of hope.

<sup>30</sup> Vice (2011) suggests that hope is necessary for the flourishing of relationships, which are fundamental human goods.

For hope to be a virtue it needs to be more than *causally necessary* for living a good life. After all, a thing might be causally necessary for living a good life without itself being a virtue. This was why the thought that hope moderates harmful extremes did not suffice to show that hope is a virtue: it did not indicate that there is an intrinsic connection between hope and living well. As I mentioned above, caution, for example, is plausibly causally necessary for living well, but does not seem to itself be valuable. Caution, that is, seems to contribute to flourishing *only* instrumentally. Hope is non-instrumentally valuable because living well as a human being *constitutively* involves being responsive to reasons to pursue ends that are vulnerable. Living well, that is, is in part constituted by being hopeful, because living well is in part constituted by engaging in vulnerable projects. Hope is not a mere causal prompt for the actions involved in vulnerable projects. Rather, the actions themselves are essentially hopeful. If living well is in part constituted by hopeful actions as such, hope is well thought of as a virtue. It constitutively contributes to one's life going well.<sup>31</sup>

### 3.1 Causal and Constitutive Contributions to Living Well

I have argued that hope's role in certain projects (those involving vulnerable ends) grounds its status as a virtue. I will now turn to a related line of thinking that has been criticised by Adrienne Martin (2014) and Cheshire Calhoun (2018). Martin suggests that the appeal of thinking of hope as a virtue is likely to be grounded in the thought that hope equips us with a special or even unique *sustaining power*. This special power is valued for enabling us to persevere through obstacles and setbacks. Calhoun speaks of hope in similar terms: "in difficult circumstances ... we talk about hope as though it supplied some special motivational oomph" (Calhoun 2018: 70). Both, however, go on to reject this conception of hope, holding that it has no such special sustaining power. That is, both criticise the idea that hope has any significant or distinctive *causal* role to play in hopeful actions. I will now show that my account does not rest on this idea, and hence is not subject to their critiques.

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<sup>31</sup> Stockdale (2019) notes that social and environmental contexts can encourage or threaten hope, and that oppression, in particular, can be a threat to hope (Stockdale 2019: 33). She suggests that this should inform our willingness to think of failure to hope as criticisable. That hope is a virtue, then, need not suggest that agents are necessarily criticisable for failure to hope.

Martin and Calhoun both reject an account of hope on which it is a desire-like motivational drive. On this conception hope constitutes an extra motivation we can have that is brought in when facing risky circumstances; on this view, hope combines with our ordinary motivation in order to enable us to persevere for longer than we otherwise would when pursuing a difficult task. But my description of hope's agential role does not depend on this conception of hope. My argument for conceiving of hope as a virtue does not depend on it being an extra motivational force that causally enables us to adopt or persist in certain projects. Rather, I have suggested that certain actions and activities are themselves essentially hopeful: hope is needed in order to have certain projects. I have suggested that the pursuit of vulnerable ends as such is essentially hopeful. And I have argued that pursuing *some* such ends is required for a good human life. Whilst I have suggested that hope is necessary for good agency, then, it is not so much in order to provide an additional motivational impetus in a task that could be pursued without hope, but in order to pursue certain tasks at all. Hope, on my view, is constitutively rather than causally necessary.

Nonetheless, a connection to increased perseverance or resilience can be made on the basis of this constitutive connection between hope and vulnerable projects. Hopeful action, as I have understood it, does have some connection to perseverance and resilience. The hopeful person, unlike the blind optimist, can form intentions and act in full awareness of the vulnerability of the thing they hope for. Indeed, they necessarily conceive of their actions as (to some extent) vulnerable to luck. They are therefore less likely to be prompted to reconsider their actions or aims when presented with evidence suggesting that it might not come about. Having formed their intentions in the knowledge that an outcome is uncertain or even unlikely, evidence that the outcome may not be realised may not sufficiently change their conception of the circumstances to prompt reconsideration or doubt. If one expects a task to be easy, the evidence that it may not be successful can be significant enough to cause one to reconsider pursuing it. But if one has undertaken a project in the knowledge that it is vulnerable, then evidence that it may not be successful need not significantly alter one's position and therefore does not necessarily give one reason to reconsider one's commitment to the project.<sup>32</sup> It therefore generally takes a higher amount of evidence that a project will fail in order for one to alter one's commitment to a hopeful project than to alter one's commitment to a project

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<sup>32</sup> *Some* evidence that the outcome is unlikely *can* give one reason to reconsider a hope. However, my suggestion here is that the threshold for evidence that will prompt reconsideration is likely to be higher when actions are hopeful than when they are not.



that is not hopeful. Hope is therefore likely to promote greater resilience or perseverance in a task overall.<sup>33</sup>

I have argued that hope is a virtue because living well is (partly) constituted by acting in hopeful ways. And morally living well, in particular, is partly constituted by acting hopefully. In the introduction to this chapter I suggested that courage and kindness are thought to be inherently valuable because they contribute not only to the individual's life going well, but also to the flourishing of one's wider community. In the next section I will explore the ways in which hope contributes to the well-being of one's wider community as well.

#### 4. Hope and the Wider Community

Hope, I have suggested, is a virtue because hopeful actions are required for many of the projects that constitute a good life. The hopeful person's life is going well in that it is structured in the right kind of way: it contains vulnerable projects. Hope's value has thus been explained primarily in terms of the benefit that it brings to the individual who has hope. But we tend to think that the virtues are beneficial to other people, too. In what ways can hope be beneficial to communities as a whole?<sup>34</sup> I will suggest that there are three senses in which the benefits of hoping can be gained by others. Firstly, hopeful actions are often taken for the sake of ends we value for others' sakes. Secondly, hopes reach out beyond individual agents in important ways: hope often offers support to others in attaining their ends, as well as inspiring and encouraging them to adopt new hopes. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, hope need not be a fundamentally individualistic matter: many hopes are shared hopes. Hope therefore has an important role to play in communities as a whole as well as in individual lives.

Many hopeful actions are taken for the sake of other people. After all, many of the things we value, we value not for their effect on us, but for their effect upon others we care about. Many of the protestors involved in the *Women Strike for Peace* protest, for example, cared about nuclear weapons because they were concerned about their effects on other people (in

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<sup>33</sup> Morton and Paul (2019) discuss the kinds of evidential norm that would ground perseverant responses ('grit'), suggesting that the gritty agent will have a high evidential threshold for updating expectations of success. My suggestion is that hope can contribute to resilience or perseverance *despite* recognising low chances of success.

<sup>34</sup> Foot (2002), for example, suggests that the primary benefit of virtues may be to the community rather than the individual.

particular, future generations). In thus hoping on others' behalves, we often raise the chances of those things being realised. In hopefully protesting, for example, the women plausibly raised the chances of a non-nuclear future coming about, a future that they believed would be beneficial to others. I suggested earlier that many moral projects require hope. Often, the primary benefit of such projects is benefit to other people. Hopes can thus be beneficial to others by directly contributing to bringing about ends that are valuable for them.<sup>35,36</sup>

This points towards the second way in which hopes can be of benefit to others, which is an indirect variant of the first way. Our hopes are often responsive to the hopes of others: others' hopes, and their expressions of these hopes, can guide and reinforce our own efforts to attain certain ends. McGeer (2004) refers to this process as 'scaffolding hope': in hoping on others' behalves and expressing such hopes, we can support them in achieving their aims and offer a defence their despairing or becoming resigned when the chances of success are low. In doing so, we can support others in attaining those things they value.<sup>37</sup> And others' hopes can offer such support on moral matters, too: Martin, for instance, suggests that what she calls 'normative hopes', hopes for how others will act, can form this kind of scaffolding to encourage ethical behaviour.<sup>38</sup>

Scaffolding hope is possible because hopes are characteristically contagious attitudes: expressions of hope can encourage others' hopes, even when those hopes are not aimed at the same end. Hopeful people can imbue others with a new sense of possibility and energy to

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<sup>35</sup> Bovens regards hopes on others' behalves as being crucially important in our interpersonal relations. He suggests that hopes on others' behalves are constitutive of loving: "hoping and fearing for the well-being of a loved one are constitutive of loving" (Bovens 1999: 676). Whilst this claim might seem too strong, it does seem plausible that having certain hopes on others' behalves is at least *partially* constitutive of loving them; it is a manifestation of caring. And such love seems to be morally valuable. That is, we expect those with whom we're in close relationships to value things for our sakes, and to hope accordingly.

<sup>36</sup> Walker suggests that hope is necessary for trust. On her conception of trust, it involves reliance on another person, despite recognition that they could do otherwise. It thus requires the hope that they will act well. Having trusting relationships is plausibly something that is valuable for a wider community. That hope and trust are significantly interrelated is also suggested by psychological tests conducted by Halevy (2017), in which inducing hope also increased participants' levels of trust, and vice versa.

<sup>37</sup> McGeer particularly considers this in a developmental context. She suggests that the ways in which parents' hopes can support their children is important in the development of full agency.

<sup>38</sup> Martin regards such normative hopes as an important part of our interpersonal engagement, connected with a distinctive set of attitudes such as interpersonal disappointment and gratitude. She states that normative hopes "can be an essential part of scaffolding a person's developing agency... More fundamentally, though, it is a practice like holding people responsible, that is intrinsically valuable for the meaning it constitutes in human relationships" (Martin 2014: 140).

pursue their goals.<sup>39</sup> For example, Solnit describes a *Women Strike for Peace* protest as stirring hope in those who were not participating. Solnit reports on a protestor describing the experience:

The woman from WSP told of how foolish and futile she felt standing in the rain one morning protesting at the Kennedy White House. Years later she heard Dr Benjamin Spock – who had become one of the most high-profile activists on the issue – say that the turning point for him was spotting a small group of women standing in the rain, protesting at the White House. (Solnit 2004: 3)

In this case, the protestors' hopes served to inspire new hopes in others, hopes that in turn led to important hopeful actions. Hope, then, can support others in their already existing aims, but also inspire others to new hopes and aims.<sup>40</sup>

The final way in which hope can contribute to the wider community is that hopeful action is not necessarily individualistic. Some hopes, like Phoebe's hope in *Gardening*, are simply the hope of one individual. And in *Dream Job*, too, though the hope is for something that will benefit another person, it is still simply a single individual's hope, and the concomitant actions are taken alone. But *Women Strike for Peace* suggests that not all hopes are like this. The hope in this case was a joint hope, a hope with a fundamentally social character: the hope was the hope that they would *together* achieve an end that as a group they valued, and whose benefit would be to the community as a whole. This hope that a non-nuclear future could be brought about was thus a shared hope, and the hopeful actions of the activist community, too, were something that they engaged in together.<sup>41</sup> In this context, hope's primary benefit would not be to an individual, since shared hope is not a matter of an individual hoping for something in isolation, but to those who hope together, along with the others for whom they hope.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Hope is of course not the only attitude to be contagious: resignation and cynicism, for instance, are often contagious in a parallel way.

<sup>40</sup> Preston-Roedder (2013) similarly discusses the importance of what he calls 'faith in humanity', a faith in people's decency or capacity to act decently. He examines the ways in which such faith can prompt others to act rightly and provide morally important support for them in doing so. Since such faith can be had despite the recognition of people's capacity for evil, this seems to importantly involve the *hope* that people will come to act decently or become better people.

<sup>41</sup> In a recent paper, Snow (2018) discusses a kind of social hope as a 'democratic civic virtue'. She argues that hope is "a civic virtue, especially well suited to democracies" (Snow 2018: 408). She links this specifically to agency, writing that "hope as a democratic civic virtue relies on the agency of individuals" (Snow 2018: 412).

<sup>42</sup> Kadlac (2015) suggests that hope can encourage *solidarity*, which is perhaps necessary for joint projects. Shared hopes certainly seem to encourage solidarity. It seems plausible that the responsiveness of our hopes to others' hopes means that individual hopes, too, can encourage solidarity.

Hope, then is not merely of individual benefit, but plays an important role in our wider social lives. Hopeful actions can help to bring about ends that will benefit others. Hopes can support others in their actions and can inspire new hopes in others. And not all hopes and hopeful actions are individual hopes: some are fundamentally shared. Much like courage and kindness, then, hope has an important role within the wider community as well as within individual lives.

## 5. Hope and Bad Ends

Hope, I have argued, is a virtue. It is non-instrumentally valuable, and acting hopefully is partly constitutive of living well. Bobier (2018) offers an argument against thinking of hope as a virtue. His central concern is that hope can be aimed at bad ends. The spiteful person seems to be just as capable of hoping for others' pain and humiliation as the morally ideal person is capable of hoping for social goods. And in cases of hopes for bad ends, hope seems to contribute not only to an agent's *doing* bad things, but to their *being* a bad person. Think, for example, of Jeanette's mother's hopes for terrible suffering to fall upon her many 'enemies' (neighbours) in Winterson's *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*. She fervently hopes and prays that suffering will befall her neighbours, and this seems to contribute to her moral unattractiveness. If hoping for certain things can not only fail to make one a better person, but actively make one a worse person, can we still think of hope as a virtue?

First, a little more should be said about exactly what the worry is. Bobier phrases his worry in terms of hope being a *passion*: his concern is that hope is a passion, and passions are not virtues since they lack intrinsic value. Bracketing the assumption that hope is a passion, why would he regard passions as lacking intrinsic value? His answer to this seems to hinge primarily on the thought that passions do not have the right connection to the good, or to living well overall, to be virtues.<sup>43</sup> As he notes, there is no inherent conformity between hope and reason, or hope and good ends; that is, we can hope for bad ends. He writes:

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<sup>43</sup> On some conceptions of the unity of the virtues, it can seem that virtues, at least when possessed in full, must contribute to living well *overall*. See fn. 49 for a suggestion of a way of retaining the theory of the unity of the virtues whilst making space for structural virtues.

[E]veryone admits that we can hope for immoral things and that vicious people can be hopeful. Hitler hoped to win the war and eradicate various people groups. Thieves and adulterers presumably hope to get away with their wrongdoing. (Bobier 2018: 225)

Bobier's worry here seems to be that there is insufficient connection between hope and morally 'getting things right' for hope to count as a virtue. Hitler, it seems, genuinely hoped to win the war and eradicate various people groups, and yet it seems wrong to think of him as engaging in something valuable in this respect. By contrast the kind person, for example, plausibly does the right thing in being kind in at least one respect (they act rightly regarding others' needs, perhaps). It's not obvious that in hoping for bad ends one gets anything right at all.

Of course, some people do hope for the right things: people who are morally well-oriented will hope for valuable things. But Bobier's worry is that in order to hope well, one's hope must be regulated by something *external* to the hope itself. In arguing against hope being a virtue, he compares it to anger and fear, which can also be apt and bring about good consequences in certain circumstances, but of which he claims:

The skills or dispositions by which these passions are regulated are distinct from the passions that they regulate. (Bobier 2018: 226)

That is, if there were some regulation internal to hope by which proper hope were oriented to the good, Bobier might be willing to regard it as a virtue. But in the case of hope, he regards hoping well as regulated by factors independent of the hope itself. As such, he denies that hope could be a virtue.

But need there be something internal to hope that regulates it and ensures it is aimed at good ends in order for it to be a virtue? A glance at some other traits considered to be virtues suggests not. Think, for example, of courage.<sup>44</sup> Courage is an uncontroversial virtue, yet it can plausibly be aimed at bad ends. And, as with hope, it seems to be something distinct from and external to courage that regulates it; courage is no less courageous for being misguided. Similarly, hope appears to be no less hopeful for being aimed at bad ends. If

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<sup>44</sup> Kadlac also makes this point: "Hope's connection to courage is particularly instructive at this point since individuals can arguably exhibit courage while performing morally suspect actions ... I contend that we can still see the courage as a genuine virtue and, however grudgingly, admire it as such" (Kadlac 2015: 348).

courage is nevertheless a virtue, then this reason to think that hope might also be a virtue too.<sup>45</sup> Foot (2002) similarly suggests that temperance can be displayed in bad actions, and can be displayed in over-industriousness or over-willingness to refuse pleasure as much as in cases where one gets things right. Sincerity, too, seems like a virtue, though one can be sincere whilst being misguided in many important ways. Finally, it seems that one can be prudent in acting in a certain way, even if it would be better overall were one to be selflessly generous. At least some intrinsically valuable traits, then, do not have any inherent connection to doing the right thing overall. That hope seems to have little connection to doing the right thing overall does not therefore give us reason to think that its value is merely instrumental.<sup>46,47</sup>

Some virtues, of course, are plausibly connected to doing the right thing overall, or living well overall. Justice, for example, plausibly has such an intrinsic connection to the good. But this need not lead us to conclude that the same is true of all the virtues. One distinction that is useful here is between what Robert Merrihew Adams (2006) calls ‘motivational’ and ‘structural’ virtues. He distinguishes these as follows:

[Motivational virtues] are defined by motives which in turn are defined by goods that one is *for* in having them, as benevolence, for example, is defined by the motive of desiring or willing the good of others. (Adams 2006: 33, emphasis added)

Structural virtues, such as courage and self-control, are not defined by particular goods or evils one is for or against, but rather by types of strength in rational self-government. A structural virtue is not a matter of having one’s heart in the right place, but of being excellently able and willing to govern one’s life in

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<sup>45</sup> Foot (2002) argues that in cases where virtues are turned to bad ends they do not operate as virtues: when they are aimed at bad ends the virtues act in uncharacteristic ways. She explicitly regards hope as one virtue where this is possible: “[s]imilarly in a man habitually given to wishful thinking, who clings to false hopes, hope does not operate as a virtue and we may say that it is not a virtue in him.” (Foot 2002: 17).

<sup>46</sup> The case of *trust* will be particularly instructive here, since it looks closely parallel to hope. Trust, like hope, seems like a virtue without which one cannot live well, an excellence of character that we often consider admirable. But trust can be misplaced: people can trust the wrong people, or trust them too much, and in such situations it ceases to seem virtuous. If we are tempted to think that trust still qualifies as a virtue, then it seems that there is space to consider hope, too, a virtue.

<sup>47</sup> This suggests that we may be mistaken in expecting the virtues to be a neatly unified set. Even within the canon of traditionally recognised virtues, there may be significant variation between the virtues. Foot (2002), for example, notes that wisdom seems to have a stronger connection to doing the right thing than courage, prudence or temperance.

accordance with one's own central aims and values, whatever they are. (Adams 2006: 37)

Justice and benevolence, on Adams' account, are motivational virtues, virtues defined with reference to particular first order substantive goods. But the structural virtues, on Adams' account, are not defined by reference to first order good ends but as 'types of strength in rational self-government'.<sup>48</sup> Prudence, courage, fortitude and sincerity are plausibly structural virtues, virtues of good self-governance. Since structural virtues are not defined by reference to first-order substantive goods, they need not be connected to doing the right thing overall. Hope, as I have noted, seems to fit well within this latter category.<sup>49</sup> One can hope without valuing the right ends overall, but it is nonetheless a structural excellence, a virtue of self-governance.<sup>50</sup>

With the distinction between motivational and structural virtues in hand, we can ask how structural virtues contribute to living well, despite guaranteeing no connection to substantive first order goods. Firstly, the hopeful person is responsive to right reasons *in one particular respect*. Think of the person who values the right kinds of thing but gives up too easily on ends that are vulnerable. Though they value, and try to pursue, the right kinds of thing, they swiftly despair of success when confronted with obstacles to realising such ends. Although in one sense they are responding to the right reasons (since they value and pursue the right things), in another they are not (since they treat low chances as a reason to stop, and are not responsive to reason to structure their life well). As an agent, they are responsive to considerations to which they should not be responsive. Although the hopeful person can go

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<sup>48</sup> Robert Roberts (1984) also makes this distinction. He suggests another relevant difference between the two kinds of virtue: "Unlike justice, compassion, generosity, and friendship, courage and self-control are not in themselves moral motives. A person can feed the poor out of compassion, struggle on behalf of the oppressed out of concern for justice ... and perform sacrifices out of friendship. But actions exhibiting courage and self-control are not done out of courage and self-control. Actions done out of moral motives may, however, be done in virtue of courage and self-control and patience, if the circumstances, psychological and environmental, demand such virtues." (Roberts 1984: 231).

<sup>49</sup> One need not think that there is any sharp or absolute distinction between these to make use of this distinction: it seems like there is at least a difference in emphasis between these two kinds of virtue. Moreover, these need not be the only kinds of virtue; Adams explicitly notes that "[t]he classification of virtues as motivational and structural is not meant to be exhaustive" (Adams 2006: 34). The possibility of structural virtues may seem to imply that the theory of the unity of the virtues should be rejected, since it seems possible for one's life to be (internally) structurally ideal whilst nonetheless being aimed at the wrong ends. However, if one accepts that there are (at least) two kinds of virtue here, but finds the theory of the unity of the virtues appealing, one might think that the unity of the virtues applies only to the 'motivational' virtues.

<sup>50</sup> Kadlac compares hope to such virtues, suggesting that hope "shares important features of" structural virtues (Kadlac 2015: 342). My claim here is stronger; I am suggesting that it *is* such a virtue.

wrong in other ways, they respond in the right way to a certain kind of reason: they are getting more right than the person who values the wrong ends *and* lacks hope. The hopeful person, we might say, gets things right in one respect (structurally), and thus hope enables them to live well *in that respect*.

Still, one might think that structuring a life in the right way constitutively contributes to making a person good, or making their life go well overall, but that it does so *only* if the person possesses motivational virtues, or moral knowledge about which ends are valuable.<sup>51</sup> This, however, is compatible with the thought that hope is a virtue and that it contributes to one's life going well overall. For example, it is partly constitutive of being a good student to hand essays in on time, but perhaps not if one does so because one plagiarises them. More generally, many traits that have intrinsic prudential value can fail to contribute to a life going well overall. They do so when their possessor does not also possess sufficient practical knowledge.<sup>52</sup> That is, one's life going well in a particular respect may only contribute to one's life going well as a whole given success in other respects, or given a structure that is supportive overall. In this case, one might argue that in order to contribute to one's life going well overall, hope must be well-oriented. Such orientation is the result of possessing knowledge about which ends are valuable (or, alternatively, other virtues) but one can act hopefully in the absence of such knowledge. Nonetheless, hope always contributes to one's life going well in one respect: the hopeful person has the right *kind* of projects (vulnerable projects), and they thus structure their life in the right kind of way. There is therefore good reason to think of hope as a virtue, and regard it as playing an important role in living well, despite the fact that one can hope for bad ends.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that hope is a virtue of self-governance. The hopeful person, I have suggested, constitutively gets things right in at least one, structural, respect. I

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<sup>51</sup> Cobb (2015) comes to a similar conclusion regarding hope's epistemic status: "hope can function as an intellectual virtue only to the extent that it has benefitted from the correcting and perfecting influence of other cognitive excellences" (Cobb 2015: 269).

<sup>52</sup> As Foot notes: "it is clear that one defect may neutralise another. As Aquinas remarked, it is better for a blind horse if it is slow" (Foot 2002: 15-16)



have argued that this can be seen by considering the role of hopeful actions in our lives: a life without such actions would be too narrow and limited to be a good life. Moreover, some such actions are morally required of us, and they can contribute to the good of the wider community as well as to the flourishing of the hopeful individual. Despite the fact that we can hope for bad ends, it is therefore a virtue.



## Chapter 5

# Humility and Ethical Development

*Humility is a rare virtue and an unfashionable one and one which is often hard to discern. Only rarely does one meet someone in whom it positively shines, in whom one apprehends with amazement the absence of the anxious avaricious tentacles of the self ... And although [the humble man] is not by definition the good man perhaps he is the kind of man who is most likely of all to become good.*

*(Murdoch 1970: 101)*

Humility can seem like a somewhat ‘unfashionable’ virtue: the word can conjure an image of cringing servility, unduly romanticised feelings of inferiority, or a level of self-denial which seems ill-placed in a life well-lived.<sup>1</sup> But the term can also capture *something* of great ethical importance. In this paper, I will propose an account of humility that attempts to capture this ethical significance. I will then explore the connection between humility and ethical development, and offer an argument in support of Murdoch’s claim that the humble person is likely to *become* good. If such a connection is vindicated, it suggests that humility is valuable

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<sup>1</sup> O’Hagan (2018) writes “‘humility’ might arouse worries about failures of self-respect” (O’Hagan 2018: 1120). Raterman (2006) similarly states: “One suspicion that bears entertaining is that modesty [which he takes to be interchangeable with humility] was labelled a virtue by those who had some interest in keeping people subjugated. To teach people that modesty is a virtue is to teach them to divert credit for their skills and accomplishments away from themselves, so that when they demand their “just desert”, the amount they take themselves to be justified in demanding (in terms of rights, money, influence, standard of living, etc.) will be less than if they took more credit. Perhaps they will even consider the very act of demanding their just desert to be immodest” (Raterman 2006: 221-2).

twice over: it has intrinsic worth but is also instrumentally valuable, enabling us to become better people.

In §1 I will begin by gesturing to the everyday conception of humility through offering two literary examples in which the characters' lack of humility is particularly salient. In §2 I will explore Nicolas Bommarito's (2013) account of humility, which importantly brings together two distinct aspects of it. I will suggest, however, that it falls short of identifying the core of humility. In §3 I will then offer my own account of humility as the trait of not valorising relative superiority. I will suggest that this explains the ways in which humility is manifested, and why such a trait would be virtuous. In §4 I will briefly answer three objections to the account. In §5 I will argue that humility thus understood is importantly connected with ethical development, both epistemically and motivationally. I will thus argue that the humble person is good (in a certain respect), and, following Murdoch, also likely to become good.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Two Paradigms of Lacking Humility

Despite Murdoch's contention that humility can often be hard to discern, it seems possible to identify at least some paradigm cases of it – as well as paradigm cases of individuals *lacking* humility. I will take the two examples below as paradigm cases of lacking humility. In depicting the absence of humility, they illuminate something at the heart of what is crucial to it. The first is taken from Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, in which Uriah Heep continually asserts that he is 'a humble man':

'When I was quite a young boy,' said Uriah, 'I got to know what umbleness did, and I took to it. I ate umble pie with an appetite. I stopped at the umble point of my learning, and says I, "Hold hard!" When you offered to teach me Latin, I knew better. "People like to be above you," says father, "keep yourself down." I am very umble to the present moment, Master Copperfield, but I've got a little power!'

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<sup>2</sup> Although this paper defends Murdoch's insight that humility is connected with ethical development, it should be noted that I am not seeking to provide an interpretation of specifically *Murdochian* humility. Moreover, the claim I seek to defend will be weaker than Murdoch's: I will argue that humility is important for ethical development, but will not explore the stronger claim that the humble person is *most* likely to become good.

And he said all this – I knew, as I saw his face in the moonlight – that I might understand he was resolved to recompense himself by using his power (Dickens: ch. 39)

Uriah's continual claims to be humble here contribute to his overall unpleasantness. He claims to be humble in order to ingratiate himself with others, and he is ultimately driven by a desire to be superior and have power over others. His assertions regarding his own humility are particularly striking because they seem to be self-undermining; his claims are not only untrue, but also undercut by the very purpose to which he puts them. For instance, in the above quote his self-satisfied claim to have 'a little power' sits uncomfortably following an assertion of his humility. Dickens thus describes him as exhibiting 'false humility'. This striking feature of this case is frequently regarded as holding for all or at least many instances of asserting one's own humility.<sup>3</sup> An account of humility should explain why Uriah Heep is not humble and should shed light on the self-undermining nature of his claims.

The second example comes from George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*. The two protagonists of the novel, Daniel and Gwendolen, stand opposed in almost every respect. Gwendolen has for all of her life been surrounded by servile flattery, and at the beginning of the novel is complacent about her own superiority. She is particularly proud of her singing, until she is told by someone she recognises as a true musical genius that she possesses no particular musical talent. Upon having this realisation, Gwendolen ceases to be able to enjoy music. The following dialogue occurs when Daniel urges her to enjoy others' singing and suggests that hearing excellence in others will entice Gwendolen to pick up music once more:

"I should rather think my resolution [to stop singing] would be confirmed," said Gwendolen. "I don't feel able to follow your advice of enjoying my own middlingness."

"For my part," said [Daniel], "people who do anything finely always inspirit me to try. I don't mean that they make me believe I can do it as well. But they make the thing, whatever it may be, seem worthy to be done. I can bear to think my own music not good for much, but the world would be more dismal if I thought

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<sup>3</sup> Driver (1989; 2001), Kellenberger (2010), and Bommarito (2013), for example, all discuss the peculiarity of asserting that one is humble. Driver argues that modesty depends on ignorance, and thus that asserting one's own modesty is not just odd but impossible.

music itself not good for much. Excellence encourages one about life generally; it shows the spiritual wealth of the world.”

“But then if we can't imitate it? – it only makes our own life seem the tamer,” said Gwendolen, in a mood to resent encouragement founded on her own insignificance. (Eliot: ch. 36)

At this point in the novel, Gwendolen is no longer ignorant of the limits of her talent, but her inability to continue to enjoy music indicates that she lacks humility. Eliot contrasts this with Daniel's ability to enjoy music despite his lack of unique talent: Gwendolen's inability to enjoy music seems like a natural continuation of her earlier arrogance.<sup>4</sup> But Gwendolen's lack of humility is also a barrier to her *becoming* better. It prevents her from immersing herself in the world (as Daniel advises her), which means she is unable to escape her self-centred preoccupations. By the end of the novel she is a sadly stunted character. I will suggest that there is a general connection between humility and ethical development that explains this case.

In depicting individuals who lack humility, the above examples portray people who are vicious in different respects. Virtues are generally thought to stand in opposition to certain vices. Lack of a virtue, that is, is manifested in the possession of opposing vices. Courage, for instance, is thought to stand in opposition to cowardice and recklessness. Lack of humility, too, thus entails possession of certain vices. In the above example, Uriah Heep is plausibly invidiously envious, and Gwendolen's viciousness lies in her arrogance or conceit. Both thus lack the humility that would overcome their vices.<sup>5</sup>

In order to understand these cases, it is first necessary to have a more explicit grasp of what humility is. In the next section I will explore one recent account of humility, but argue that it misidentifies the core of humility. In §3 and §4 I will then set forward and defend my own account, which sheds light on what is morally lacking in Uriah, and why his assertions of humility are problematic. In §5 I will then turn to explore the connection between my notion of humility and ethical development, and explain why it is that Gwendolen's lack of humility is a barrier to her ethical improvement.

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<sup>4</sup> Calhoun (2017) suggests that contentment with imperfection can itself be a kind of virtue.

<sup>5</sup> Kellenberger (2010) describes humility as opposed to 'the axis of pride and shame', and thus opposed to vices of arrogance, envy or jealousy, and self-abasement.

## 2. Bommarito: Humility as a Pattern of Attention

Bommarito (2013, 2018) has recently set forward an account of humility which he suggests captures its moral value.<sup>6</sup> He argues that there is a distinctive subset of virtues that are ‘virtues of attention’, and that humility is one such virtue. These virtues, he claims, are “rooted in certain patterns of attention” (Bommarito 2013: 93). On Bommarito’s account, the humble person has a tendency not to attend to their own good qualities or achievements but instead will tend to attend to the good qualities of others. The humble person may sometimes attend to their own good qualities; but then it matters exactly what they attend to. For example, they might attend to a good quality of their own but not to its value, or they might attend to the quality but direct their attention towards the good fortune enabling them to gain the quality in question. Bommarito suggests that in such cases, despite attending to their own good quality, the individual still exhibits patterns of attention appropriate to humility. He also puts this in terms of *dwelling* on one’s good qualities or achievements: “[m]odesty does not demand inattention in the sense of a total lack of attention but in the sense that one does not *dwell* on one’s own good qualities” (Bommarito 2013: 108).<sup>7</sup>

Extant accounts tend to focus on either self-directed or other-directed aspects of humility.<sup>8</sup> In so doing, they explain one aspect of humility but not the other. Self-directed accounts focus on the humble person’s beliefs or attitudes about or towards their self. For example, Garcia (2006) claims that humble people “are unimpressed with their own admired or envied features” (Garcia 2006: 417), and Flanagan (1990) suggests of the related concept of

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<sup>6</sup> Bommarito proposes this view in a paper entitled “Modesty as a Virtue of Attention”, but explicitly states that he will “take the terms [modesty and humility] to be interchangeable” (Bommarito 2013: 93). He discusses others’ views on humility, and at times refers to humility rather than modesty. The assumption that humility and modesty are interchangeable is widespread in the literature, shared by Raterman (2006), Garcia (2006), Kellenberger (2010), Sinha (2011), Winter (2012), Priest (2017), and O’Hagan (2018) among others. I am sympathetic to the idea that humility and modesty are importantly distinct. Nonetheless, since many have taken humility and modesty to be identical, and take their accounts to shed light on both, I will engage with some of the literature on modesty.

<sup>7</sup> Nadelhoffer et al (2017) describe humility as consisting in low self-focus and high other-focus. I take their account to be similar to Bommarito’s. As I argue below with regard to Bommarito’s account, it seems that in order to capture the moral significance of this pattern of focus, one must stipulate that one focuses in this way for the right reasons (not, for example, because one is obsessively envious). Alternatively, such focus might be understood as normatively rich in the first place, but then it seems to be morally valuable in virtue of being a kind of care. In that case, an account is needed of what kind of care humility is grounded in. My own account focuses on this question.

<sup>8</sup> This distinction is made by Garcia (2006), who uses the terms ‘inward-directed’ and ‘outward-directed’. Byerly (2014) also draws on this distinction.

modesty that it involves not overestimating oneself.<sup>9</sup> Other-directed accounts focus on the humble person's attitudes or behaviour toward others. For example, Byerly (2014) describes humility as "preferring to promote others' good rather than one's own" (Byerly 2014: 890).<sup>10</sup> Since such accounts focus on a single dimension of humility, they tend to struggle to shed light on the range of ways it can be manifested. For example, self-directed accounts generally fail to explain why the humble person is characteristically patient and generous with others (the manifestations of humility that other-directed accounts regard as central), whereas other-directed accounts generally fail to explain the humble person's distinctive attitudes to their self (which self-directed accounts regard as central).

Bommarito's account does not neatly fall into either category. He takes the pattern of attention constituting humility to have both other- and self-directed poles. He explains the self and other-directed aspects of humility as resulting from a broad overall pattern of attention to oneself and others. His account, then, has the advantage over extant accounts that it seems capable of explaining a wider variety of manifestations of humility than they do. In this section I will first explain Bommarito's account. I will then suggest that it is nonetheless ultimately inadequate as an account of humility and misidentifies a manifestation of humility as constitutive of it. Moreover, I will argue that a particular care is at the heart of humility and that this sheds light on *why* certain patterns of attention are manifestations of humility.

On Bommarito's account, humility requires more than simply a pattern of attention. It also requires that the humble person possess a good quality to be humble *about*. After all, if one does not possess a good quality to direct one's attention away from, one is not being inattentive to it: if I have no sporting talent, then I am not being inattentive to my sporting prowess in not attending to it. Bommarito therefore describes humility as a dependent virtue, a virtue that can be attained only if one already possesses good qualities.

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<sup>9</sup> These are far from the only adherents of this approach. Driver (1989; 2001) suggests that "a modest person *underestimates* self-worth" (Driver 1989: 374). Raterman (2006) claims that the modest person has an 'appropriate attitude' towards their own goodness. Milligan (2007) suggests that humility involves discernment of our limited moral competences. Richards (1988) suggests that humility involves withstanding pressures to think too much of ourselves. In less recent thinking, Aquinas considered humility to involve 'self-abasement to the lowest place'. Although there are a range of tendencies identified here as humility, they all focus on the humble person's attitudes towards their self, and thus count as self-directed accounts.

<sup>10</sup> O'Hagan (2018) also offers an other-directed account on which humility involves 'excellence in moral perspective taking': he claims that the humble person is committed to recognising others as equally morally valuable. Wilson (2016) provides an other-directed account of modesty as involving presenting one's accomplishments or positive attributes in a way that is sensitive to the impact of such presentation on others.



Bommarito is seeking to provide an account of something he takes to be a virtue. What would be virtuous about manifesting the patterns of attention he identifies? There is no simple connection between patterns of attention and virtue. There can be good reasons for attending to one's own good qualities (for example, to discern whether one is capable of taking on a new responsibility) and some reasons for attending to others' good qualities that render such attention morally suspect (for example, enviously doing so). Bommarito recognises this, so in order to secure the idea that humility is a virtue, he suggests that the patterns of attention exhibited by the humble person must be grounded in the agent's values, desires, or concerns. Such concerns or desires, he claims, must be *good*. He claims that the humble person has particular kinds of reason for attending to others' good qualities rather than their own:

[T]hey are modest if their inattention is the result of a lack of certain bad desires or concerns, such as a desire to ogle their own self-image. (Bommarito 2013: 104)

Bommarito thus suggests that whether a pattern of attention counts as humble depends not only upon the pattern of attention itself, but upon the reasons behind the pattern.

Bommarito does not, however, offer a specific account of the desires or concerns that underlie humility:

The general account of modesty as a virtue of attention is not wedded to any particular account of the desires and values that make directed attention count as modest. As long as one accepts that our values and desires are often closely related to how we direct our attention, one can fill one's own preferred good and bad desires or values into the account. The specifics of these values and desires are irrelevant to the claim that modesty is a virtue of attention. (Bommarito 2013: 104)

That is, whenever the pattern of inattention to one's own good qualities is a result of caring about good things, Bommarito considers the agent in question to be humble.<sup>11</sup>

There are therefore three distinct requirements for humility within Bommarito's account of humility as a virtue of attention:

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<sup>11</sup> Bommarito, does, however, allow that "modesty is not of equal importance to everyone", since he regards it as a counterbalance to a tendency to dwell on one's own successes, a tendency that is not universal (Bommarito 2013:116). In particular, it seems likely that such a tendency is gendered etc.

- a) that one “have a good quality to be modest about” (Bommarito 2013: 103)
- b) that one “direct one’s conscious attention in certain ways – away from the trait or its value or toward the outside causes and conditions that played a role in developing it” (Bommarito 2013: 103)
- c) that “the associated pattern of attention is a manifestation of morally good desires or values” (Bommarito 2013: 115)

The first condition Bommarito picks up from existing literature.<sup>12</sup> The second condition is taken by him to be the core of his account; he describes humility as ‘rooted’ in patterns of attention. The third condition is then introduced in order to secure the ethical value of humility.

I want to raise concerns about each of the above conditions. First, I will argue that condition (a) is mistaken – one can be humble regarding one’s failures as well as one’s good qualities. Second, I will argue that condition (b) is unjustified, and rendered obsolete by (c). Most significantly, I will argue that (c) therefore ends up doing the work in this account, but is not sufficiently specific: we require an account of *which* good values, desires or concerns ground humility.

First, in condition (a) Bommarito claims that humility is about particular good qualities that we possess.<sup>13</sup> This, however, doesn’t seem to quite match our ordinary conception of humility; humility need not be an attitude one takes towards one’s successes or good qualities.<sup>14</sup> It seems possible to have a humble mindset without this humility being ‘about’ any particular good quality one possesses, to simply be a humble person. Moreover, humility can be exhibited as much in one’s attitudes towards one’s failures as in one’s attitudes towards one’s successes. Gwendolen, for example, demonstrates a lack of humility through her behaviour regarding her lack of musical talent. Uriah Heep also conspicuously lacks humility though he has no similarly

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<sup>12</sup> In this, Bommarito is following Slote (1983).

<sup>13</sup> Garcia’s self-directed account also makes this assumption, as does Raterman (2006), and Winter (2012) (concerning modesty). However, Byerley (2014) and Roberts and Cleveland (2016) reject the idea that humility is dependent on having good qualities or achievements. Moreover, some recent writers have made the opposite assumption, suggesting that humility requires *limitations*. Snow (1995) suggests that it involves acknowledgement of one’s weaknesses, and more recently Whitcomb, Battaly, Baehr and Howard-Snyder (2015) suggest that humility is “having the right stance towards one’s limitations” (Whitcomb, Battaly, Baehr and Howard-Snyder 2015: 516). Ben Ze-Ev (1993) and Um (forthcoming) make the related claim that *modesty* is not dependent on achievements or good qualities. In §3 I suggest that humility is inherently aimed at neither weaknesses nor good qualities.

<sup>14</sup> Of course, our ordinary conception of humility might stand in need of revision. Nonetheless, it provides at least *prima facie* evidence that this condition is unnecessary.

conspicuous achievements or qualities. More generally, admitting to and apologising when one is in the wrong is a paradigmatically humble action, though it is necessarily a response to failure rather than success.<sup>15</sup> One can thus manifest humility in one's attitudes towards qualities that are not admirable as well as in one's attitude towards one's good qualities.<sup>16</sup>

Second, there are reasons to reject condition (b), the claim that the humble person must direct their attention in the ways specified. Such an emphasis on attention seems independently dubious, as well as questionable in light of the account itself. First, consider the independent reasons. Humility can be manifested in many different ways: there are patterns of emotion, judgement, and action as well as attention that are characteristic of humility. For example, the humble person will characteristically take pleasure in others' successes, sympathise with others' failures, and be patient with others' shortcomings. The humble person's judgements are, similarly, likely to manifest a lack of self-absorption and their appreciation of others. They will also be motivated to *act* in ways that manifest these concerns. These are all important manifestations of humility, and plausibly also manifestations of virtue. Bommarito's account, however, privileges patterns of attention over the other manifestations of humility, assuming that patterns of attention are the explanatorily basic manifestations of humility. There seems to be no good independent reason for doing so.<sup>17</sup>

Even according to Bommarito's own lights it is hard to see why he focuses on attention rather than any other manifestation of humility. He claims that the patterns of attention he identifies count as humble and thereby virtuous *because* they manifest good concerns: "this connection between patterns of attention and values and concerns allows us to see what is morally good about modesty" (Bommarito 2013: 104). At this point, it seems far from obvious what work the idea of a pattern of attention is really doing in his account. In order to explain

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<sup>15</sup> Murdoch similarly discusses "the honesty and humility of the scholar who does not even feel tempted to suppress the fact which damns his theory" (Murdoch 1970: 89).

<sup>16</sup> This stipulation is perhaps influenced by the fact that Bommarito largely writes in terms of modesty rather than humility, though he explicitly states that he regards the two as interchangeable. It may make more sense to say that someone is modest about a particular quality or achievement than it does to say that they are humble about a particular quality or achievement.

<sup>17</sup> Bommarito does suggest that the other manifestations can be understood with reference to patterns of attention. For example, attending to others' successes and achievements allows one to take pleasure in them (Bommarito 2013: 115). However, it is far from clear that this is the right order of explanation. After all, it seems equally plausible to say that one's more likely to attend to things that will be emotional weighty, or that one values or believes to be important. Although such phenomena are interlinked, attention does not seem to be foundational or explanatorily basic. I will suggest that a unified explanation of the emotions, judgements, patterns of attention etc. characteristic of humility can be given by understanding them all as manifestations of an underlying concern or value.

the goodness of exhibiting certain patterns of attention, Bommarito claims that such patterns manifest morally good cares or desires. But the patterns of attention can arise for other reasons, and would no longer be valuable. The goodness of humility thus seems to be entirely dependent upon the goodness of the underlying cares or concerns rather than the pattern of attention itself. In this case, although the pattern of attention might result from such underlying concerns, it seems to be peripheral to humility itself, a mere symptom of the trait that is of moral significance.

Finally, the most serious problem facing the account is that condition (c) seems unsatisfactory without further specification of *which* particular desires, cares, or values ground humble patterns of attention. Firstly, desires, values, and concerns seem to each be fairly different. In a recent book, Bommarito argues that cares or concerns entail sometimes having certain desires but can be contrasted with desires in that they are longer term, persisting states:

[C]aring about something is an underlying, typically long-term, positive orientation to something... To care about something means that it *matters* or is *important* to you in a deep way. (Bommarito 2018: 30)

Bommarito suggests that desires can be fleeting, but values, cares, or concerns are long-term states revealing something important about the overarching orientation of our lives. It is possible, he claims, to care about something in the absence of an occurrent desire: one can care about a friend, for example, whilst one is consciously occupied only with working out a crossword. On his account, cares are connected with judgements of value, but not identical with them. He notes that one can judge that “scholarship on economics in the history of Latvia” is valuable, for example, without it mattering or being important to you (Bommarito 2018: 29). Given that humility, if a virtue, is a character trait, it seems that mere desire will not be sufficient to underlie it, and cares or concerns are what must underpin humility.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, without identifying the *particular* cares or concerns that underpin humility this account overgenerates instances of it. There are good cares or concerns that give rise to patterns of attention along the lines Bommarito envisages that nonetheless have little or nothing to do with humility. For example, one might care about a friend who is keen on poetry and, as a result, always attend carefully to skilful poetry readings in order to be able to tell one’s friend about them. Whilst this might make one a good friend (which seems like a good quality),

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<sup>18</sup> That is, assuming the standard conception of a virtue as something like a character trait.

it seems to say nothing about one's level of humility. The individual in question could take any attitude towards their own poetic potential and other people's abilities whilst exhibiting this pattern of attention; not every pattern of attention to others' good qualities that manifests a morally good concern will reflect one's humility. Humility is therefore more dependent upon particular cares or concerns than Bommarito recognises, and Bommarito lacks an account of which particular cares it depends upon.

Bommarito thus fails to offer a satisfactory account of humility. There is reason to doubt condition (a), that one must possess a good quality to be humble about. Condition (b), the attention constraint, seems to privilege attention over the other manifestations of humility in a way that is independently implausible, and unnecessary given (c). Finally, although Bommarito seems right to introduce condition (c), that the humble person must care about or value the right kinds of thing, the particular cares that underpin humility need to be identified. In the absence of an account of the particular cares that underpin humility, this account overgenerates instances of humility. In the next section, I will propose an account of humility in terms of the particular things that the humble person cares about or values.

### **3. The Virtue of Humility as Not Valorising One's Relative Superiority**

The strength of Bommarito's account is that it offers a way of unifying the self- and other-directed poles of humility. I have suggested, however, that his focus upon patterns of attention misidentifies the core of humility. Condition (c), the idea that the humble person cares about certain things, is introduced by Bommarito in order to explain why certain patterns of attention are morally significant. The things one cares about do seem relevant to whether one is humble. In this section, I will suggest that a particular care or value forms the core of humility. I will explain and motivate this account of humility and give some reasons to think that humility thus-conceived is a virtue. In the next section I will then defend this account against three important objections.

The variety of ways in which humility can be manifested suggest that it is not best characterised by any particular manifestation. Rather, Bommarito seems right to suggest that it has to do with the underlying things the humble person values. My suggestion is that *the*

*humble person does not valorise being relatively superior.*<sup>19</sup> That is, the humble person is not concerned with relative social positionings and does not intrinsically value being relatively better off than others. To ‘valorise’ relative superiority is to ‘care’ about it in the sense outlined by Bommarito above. The humble person might value her good qualities or achievements for their own sake, but not for their impact on hierarchical ranking. This lack of valorisation by the agent of relative positionings cannot be the result of mere indifference to the quality, activity or achievement in question as a whole, but must concern qualities, activities or achievements that the agent cares about. A lack of interest in relative positionings that was the result of mere indifference to the quality would not suggest anything about the agent’s character as a whole, whereas not valorising relative positionings concerning things one cares about seems to indicate something far more substantial about the agent.<sup>20</sup>

On this account, to be humble regarding x is:

- a) to care about x
- b) to not valorise being relatively superior regarding x<sup>21</sup>

As I noted above, however, humility does not seem to always take this specific form: we don’t always think of humility as being ‘about’ anything in particular. For instance, we naturally speak of ‘humble people’ and take it to be a general trait that one can possess. This kind of general humility can be understood on the same model as the more limited forms.

To be humble in general is:

- a) to not valorise being relatively superior<sup>22</sup>

The person who is generally humble simply does not value being relatively superior. She is not status-conscious; she does not value being high up in a hierarchy.<sup>23</sup> This explains why, for

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<sup>19</sup> Roberts and Cleveland (2016) make the similar suggestion that “[t]he virtue of humility is intelligent lack of concern for self-importance, where self-importance is construed as conferred by social status, glory, honor, superiority, special entitlements, prestige, or power.” (Roberts and Cleveland 2017: 33). However, they explore it primarily by contrasting it with pride.

<sup>20</sup> It is worth noting here that this account of humility characterises it as an absence, rather than a positive disposition. In this, humility seems similar to virtues like patience (absence of a disposition to irritation) or forgiveness (absence of a disposition to resentment). If the positive disposition that an absence counters is a sufficiently strong or common temptation, it seems plausible to think that its absence (i.e. the disposition not to respond in a certain way, or to resist responding in a certain way) can be a virtue.

<sup>21</sup> ‘X’ here could be read as referring to a character trait, an activity, or a particular achievement. One could be humble about one’s athletic capacities, about athletics, or about winning a particular race, for example.

<sup>22</sup> That is, assuming that one has a range of things one cares about, which seems essential for an ordinary human life.

<sup>23</sup> This allows that the humble person might care about social positioning in some sense. For example, they might desire an egalitarian society.

example, Gwendolen is not generally humble as a person. Her care about relative positioning means that music can have no role in her life if she is not highly ranked musically: she refuses to allow herself to *value* things that do not increase her relative positioning. Of course, valorising relative superiority is something that will come in degrees: some people will not care about relative rankings at all, whereas others will care to some extent. Humility, then, will also be a matter of degree rather than an all-or-nothing affair.

This account therefore avoids making humility a dependent virtue (as it is on Bommarito's account) since one can valorise being relatively superior whether or not one is actually superior. Simply caring about being relatively superior, on this account, counts against humility, regardless of whether one is actually superior. A person who is jealous or envious of another's relative superiority, for example, might very much valorise being relatively superior, whilst not themselves being at all superior. Not valorising relative superiority, then, means that to the extent that they are superior to others, they do not value this, and to the extent that they are not superior, they don't desire to be.<sup>24</sup>

What would humility look like? Imagine Anna, a humble runner. She counts as humble if she cares about being a good runner, but does not intrinsically care about being better than other runners. And Anna would be humble not only regarding running but generally if she does not valorise being better than others generally.

This account does not entail that concern at being worse than others *necessarily* indicates a lack of humility. The agent might take such relative positioning merely as indication that they could be doing much better than they are and that they therefore have reason to put more effort into the area in question. Only if their concern is for the relative positioning itself, rather than for what it might indicate, does it entail a lack of humility.<sup>25</sup> For example, Anna might be disappointed to come last in a race. If this disappointment were disappointment at her relative position, she would not be humble. But her disappointment could well be simply because

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<sup>24</sup> One might worry that giving up on humility being a dependent virtue makes it too easy to attain. Should the unaccomplished but lazy person, for instance, really count as humble? I think that two responses to this worry are available. Firstly, if the lazy person's laziness is incompatible with their *caring* about excellence in the respect in which they are unaccomplished, then they would not count as humble on the account I am offering. If, on the other hand, the lazy person can still *care* about the activity in question, then I think that they should count as humble. Such a person might lack ambition or drive, but these are distinct traits from humility.

<sup>25</sup> Morgan-Knapp (2019) makes a similar point.

losing is an indicator that she could be doing better, and such disappointment would be compatible with humility.<sup>26</sup>

### 3.1 Advantages of the Account

On this account, not valorising being relatively superior is what constitutes humility. What we valorise or care about shapes our emotions, judgements, and actions, so this account of humility is well placed to explain the patterns of these that are characteristic of humility. In this section, I will identify some commonly accepted core features of humility and show that they are well explained by understanding humility as not valorising being relatively superior.

The pattern of attention that Bommarito highlights is explained by this account: the humble person has little motivation to attend excessively to their own good qualities, since doing so would not be a source of comparative pleasure. Neither would they be motivated to attend excessively to themselves through an anxious concern that others might be better off than them. The account allows that the humble person might nonetheless sometimes attend to their good qualities, which seems right, since this can be necessary for self-improvement, and a proper pride in one's good qualities seems desirable. However, this account rules out this attention being motivated by comparative concerns.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, the humble person's tendency not to valorise their own relative positioning can shed light on the various emotional manifestations of humility. Since the humble person does not valorise relative positionings, they are likely to feel neither self-aggrandising pleasure at being better than others (in particular respects) nor envy, jealousy or shame simply at being less good than others (in other respects).<sup>28</sup> Anna, for example, would not feel distress simply because other runners are faster or have greater endurance than her. Moreover, the humble person is unlikely to make anxious comparative judgements between themselves and others,

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<sup>26</sup> It's also worth noting that on this account, humility is compatible with a variety of evaluations of one's abilities. That Anna is humble regarding her running is not an indicator that she is correctly assessing her abilities or undervaluing herself.

<sup>27</sup> Bommarito is also keen to allow that the humble person might attend to their own good qualities in order to improve themselves.

<sup>28</sup> See Perrine and Timpe (2014) and Taylor (1988) for discussions of envy as a vice. Perrine and Timpe specifically link it to perceiving of oneself as inferior, and cite humility as a corrective.



because others' success would not constitute a threat to them.<sup>29</sup> The humble person is likely to be good at taking pleasure in others' success and feeling sympathy for their setbacks. This is because one significant barrier to such empathy has been removed: the selfish concern that others' success might relatively down(or up)grade one's own position.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the humble person is unlikely to feel complacent, since even if they are doing well on a relative scale, it is unlikely that they will have realised a good quality in all its fullness.

The expectations we have concerning how a humble person would act can also be explained by this account. The humble person, I take it, is characteristically good at recognising their shortcomings. That is what we would expect if we are not concerned that such shortcomings would relatively downgrade them: the humble person lacks one strong incentive to self-deceive. They are also characteristically good at apologising for the effects of such shortcomings. Again, that is what we would expect on the present account: for the humble person, such apologies do not lower them in any important way. The humble person is characteristically willing to spend time and effort on others' behalves. This, too, makes good sense, since on the present account the humble person does not feel threatened by others' success (and, as discussed above, can take pleasure in others' successes).

As we have seen, Bommarito claims that the humble person is more likely to be aware of the contingent factors that have led to their successes, as well as the ways in which their achievements have been dependent upon good fortune and the help of others.<sup>31</sup> He suggests that humble people therefore typically express greater gratitude than non-humble people. For example, on winning a race, Anna might be likely to thank those who supported her and acknowledge their contributions to her success. This too is explicable on the present account. Awareness of one's dependence on other people and contingent strokes of fortune seems to destabilise one's position in a hierarchy. It makes one's position appear dependent on factors outside of one's control, things that could easily have been otherwise. As such, the person who

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<sup>29</sup> There are some reasons why the humble person might nonetheless make anxious comparative judgements. For example, they might be aware of their high achievement in a particular field, and be anxious to not make others feel bad. But one kind of anxious comparative judgement, where the anxiety is about one's own relative status, is inconsistent with humility.

<sup>30</sup> As a result of the humble person's increased capacity to take pleasure in others' success, they are likely to be alert to others' needs and willing to help others without feeling any threat to their own positioning. As such, this explains the 'focus' on others that Nadelhoffer et al describe as central to humility.

<sup>31</sup> Bommarito's suggestion is stronger than this: on his account such awareness is (partially) *constitutive* of humility. Since I have rejected his account, I will instead explore whether my account can explain it as a *manifestation* of humility.

valorises relative positioning is likely to find it unpleasant to recognise the role that such factors have played in their success and, therefore, to be reluctant to do so.

This account also sheds light on the cases with which we began. It can explain why Uriah Heep's continual assertions that he is humble are so grating. Uriah spends the whole of *David Copperfield* anxiously attempting to improve his comparative position. It matters very much to him that he should be considered, and that he should regard himself, as relatively more successful than others. As such, he takes pleasure in setbacks faced by those around him and is wholly unable to appreciate others. His assertion that from a young age he 'ate umble pie with an appetite' suggests a relish in the task that seems ill suited to humility: his keenness to indicate that he is *more* humble than others is self-undermining. His general unpleasantness is therefore amplified by his asserting his own humility in the service of precisely the kind of one-upmanship that humility guards against.

Uriah Heep's assertions of his own humility are strange not only because of their contrast with his wider behaviour but reflect something generally perplexing about such assertions. There seems to be something odd about making such claims at all, an oddness that would not disappear if Uriah did in fact generally act humbly. Uriah's assertions serve to constantly call attention to his 'humility' in a manner that suggests an air of competition: he wants his humility to be recognised, and wants himself to be regarded as *more* humble than others.<sup>32</sup> This suggests that what is paradoxical about his assertions is at least in part that in making them he implies that he is *better* with regard to humility than others: he regards his humility as worth calling to others' attention because he regards himself as humbler than others.<sup>33</sup> A truly humble person would not value such relative ranking, and thus would feel no need to self-ascribe humility in this way.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Of course, there are some cases in which assertions of one's humility does not have this competitive or comparative character. Raterman notes that in a "quiet conversation with a good friend about the personal qualities one values possessing", asserting that one is humble may be entirely consistent with modesty (Raterman 2006: 232). Winter (2012) similarly suggests that some assertions of one's own modesty are legitimate. My explanation accounts for the why such self-assertions are often or usually perplexing without implying that all instances are strange or self-undermining.

<sup>33</sup> Similarly, imagine saying at a philosophy conference that one's good at philosophy. Whilst the sentence might be apt in a room of non-philosophers, at the conference it would imply that one is *better* than others, or *notably* good.

<sup>34</sup> Others have suggested alternative explanations of the oddness of assertions of one's humility. Driver (1989) suggests that humility requires ignorance of one's self-worth, and thus that the humble person must be *unaware* of their own humility. Kellenberger (2010) suggests that one might recognise one's own humility, but could not generally assert that one is humble. Bommarito (2013) suggests that the humble person would not dwell upon or draw others' attention to their own humility, but that one can know of one's own humility. Like the latter two, my explanation of the oddness of assertions of one's humility allows that the humble person might recognise this about

### 3.2 Humility and Virtue

As with Bommarito's account, this understanding of humility suggests that it is likely to have good consequences. For example, humble people are likely to cause less social friction than those lacking humility, since they are likely to be more attuned to the needs of others and, conversely, able to share in others' happiness. I suggested above that they are also more likely to be aware of and grateful for others' roles in their successes. These seem like valuable consequences. But this account of humility allows for more than this to be said: it explains why humility is *intrinsically* valuable. As such, it plausibly explains why humility is a *virtue*.

On the account I have offered, the humble person does not valorise being relatively superior. The central reason why this is importantly ethically valuable is that valuing relative superiority over others seems to involve a failure to properly value them. In wanting to be superior to others, I fail to fully appreciate them and recognise their worth. Valorising being *superior* to others (as opposed to wanting oneself to be excellent) seems to involve valuing looking down on others, valuing regarding them as lesser than oneself. This is in tension with adequately valuing them. Since recognition of others' worth is centrally morally important, humility is an important virtue.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, this trait is virtuous to the extent that the humble person is thereby free to value the right kind of thing: the humble person recognises that having good qualities or achievements is what matters, rather than relative rankings. Gwendolen's inability to enjoy music once she realises that she has no exceptional talent suggests a kind of failure in her valuing of it in the first place. Her excessive valorisation of her own relatively elevated musical status seems to come at the expense of truly caring about music itself. This seems like a general feature of valorising relative rankings: such cares seem to be wrongly oriented and to indicate a lack of concern for goods or activities according to which there is a tendency to rank

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themselves. It suggests that the humble person would be generally unlikely to assert that they are humble, but such assertions would not be incompatible with humility.

<sup>35</sup> That valorising relative superiority involves a failure to properly value others suggests a connection between humility and love. Since love plausibly involves a certain kind of appreciation or valuing of others, humility seems to plausibly be necessary for love. Jollimore (2011) also explores the connection between loving someone and comparing their value to that of others, suggesting that for the lover comparative considerations comparing the beloved to other people are silenced.

ourselves. At the extreme, such activities, qualities or achievements become wholly fungible, since engaging with the activity becomes a mere means to hierarchically raise oneself. The humble person, then, avoids one important way in which our valuing can be distorted.<sup>36,37</sup>

Returning to the worries raised in the introduction about humility, we can therefore see that humility need not involve inferiority or servility.<sup>38</sup> Not valorising relative superiority leaves open whether one takes pleasure or pride in one's achievements, and whether one is able to recognise one's good qualities. Recognising one's good qualities and taking pride and pleasure in them seem sufficient to ground a sense of self-worth that is in tension with servility and inferiority. Servility entrenches one form of hierarchy, social hierarchy. But, far from serving to entrench and justify social hierarchies, humility is connected with resistance to such hierarchy. The individual who does not valorise their own relative superiority is likely to do so because they do not valorise relative superiority in general.<sup>39</sup> Undue acceptance of inferiority and subservience, however, seem to involve an acceptance of social hierarchy that is in tension with not valorising relative positioning in general. That is, acceptance of social hierarchy seems to depend on valorising relative positionings, on viewing those in certain positions as better in virtue of their position. Humility thus need not involve inferiority or servility, and is in tension with some of the assumptions that underpin such attitudes. This account therefore avoids the politically concerning connotations of humility.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> It might be the case that having some talents better enables one to appreciate certain activities or achievements, so it is not necessarily an indication of lack of humility if someone particularly enjoys or values those activities they are good at. What would indicate a lack of humility would be if they enjoyed or valued those activities they are good at only because they get the satisfaction of being better than others.

<sup>37</sup> GF Schueler (1997) suggests a similar account of humility to the one offered here, which he later explicitly links with the idea of 'ranking' (Schueler 1999). However, he suggests that humility is valuable because the goals and purposes of a person who cares whether others are impressed with them for their accomplishments are shaped or created by others: "to the extent that someone cares about whether people are impressed with her accomplishments, the direction of her life comes not from within herself but from others" (Schueler 1999: 839). However, that the content of the purposes and direction in one's life comes from others need not be a bad thing, let alone vicious. The purposes and direction of one's life might be shaped the needs of one's children or partner, for example, but this does not seem like a bad thing.

<sup>38</sup> This is not to say that there are no uses of the word 'humility' that have negative connotations such as self-abasement or self-abnegation (Aquinas, for example, talks of humility in terms of self-abasement and taking a lowly place. Nadelhoffer et al offer an overview of such historical accounts.) Rather, my claim is that the understanding of humility that distinguishes something important, interesting and most worth picking out does not involve servility.

<sup>39</sup> Again, not valorising relative rankings need not entail that one could not attend to such rankings at all. After all, rankings might be used merely as indicators of intrinsic value or worth.

<sup>40</sup> An implication of this is that on this account, humility has a lot more to do with *being humbled* (which need not be unpleasant) than with *humiliation*.

## 4. Three Objections to the Account

Having proposed and motivated my account, I will now turn to briefly answer three objections to it. Firstly, I will explore how the humble person can participate in competitive activities. Secondly, I will examine whether caring about activities themselves is compatible with caring about relative positioning. Finally, I will answer the objection that on this account humility is compatible with caring *too much* about one's achievements.

### 4.1 Objection 1: Humility and Competitive Activities

Are there not some cases in which valorising one's relative positioning is unproblematic? Is valorising one's relative positioning *always* a bad thing? Whilst caring about being a good host for the sake of improving one's relative social positioning seems like a bad thing, there are some cases where the status of valorising one's relative positioning seems less clear cut. Most prominently, it may seem that aiming to be better than others is integral to some competitive activities such as sports and games.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, it can seem that valorising relative positioning is necessary for success in such activities. Take, for example, playing chess. It can seem impossible to *participate* in playing chess if one is not aiming to win, and it can seem impossible to be a *good* player without valuing winning. This poses a problem, because it seems that there can be humble people who participate in such activities.

Such cases pose a problem because excellence in such activities involves valuing victories that are necessarily relative to others' losses. To be good chess player involves having the capacity to beat others in a game of chess, the capacity to gain relative victories. In this respect, such activities are very unlike the activities mentioned above: in music or cooking, for example, excellence does not necessarily involve being *better than* others. My account of humility will not straightforwardly cover such cases. But on consideration, that should not be surprising: few ordinary virtues and vices seem to straightforwardly apply to games. A good

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<sup>41</sup> Austin (2014) argues that humility is a virtue in the context of sport. However, his conception of humility involves elements of self-lowering that mine does not.

monopoly player is likely to exhibit selfishness and avarice that would be condemnable outside the game, for example, and a generous monopoly player who shared their gains with others would be very dull to play with. Insofar as the game as a whole requires such traits, we do not consider them vicious. Nonetheless, the present account explains how people participating in competitive activities can be or fail to be humble.<sup>42</sup>

When aiming to win is an integral part of an activity itself, humility cannot simply be a matter of not aiming to gain a relative victory, since aiming to win *is* aiming to beat one's opponent. But there are nonetheless different reasons one might have for aiming to win. It seems unobjectionable to want to win simply because one wants to enjoy playing a game, or because one valorises being good at chess. But wanting to win *because* one valorises being relatively superior to one's opponent does seem to be objectionable. In the former case, caring about relative superiority is compatible with humility: the player does not primarily or intrinsically valorise relative positioning. In the latter case, however, the motivation seems morally objectionable and at odds with humility. In the context of competitive activities, valorising relative superiority is acceptable insofar as it is valued merely as something entailed by excellence in the activity or for some similar reason. However, caring about winning simply as such would rule out humility. Even in the context of competitive activities, it therefore seems that valuing relative superiority for its own sake is unnecessary and objectionable.<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, not valuing relative positioning, or valuing it only insofar as it is necessary for excellence in the activity in question would leave one well placed to cope with *not* being the best at the activity in question. The humble person is well placed to accept their losses whilst valuing their (noncomparative) achievements. Returning to Anna, the humble runner, we can imagine her losing a race. Such a loss would not be likely to eventuate in bitterness or resentment towards the winners. Indeed, if she had run well, then she could well feel satisfaction in her achievement despite the relative loss. Moreover, she would be likely to admire people who are better runners, value their achievements, and perhaps attempt to

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<sup>42</sup> One important thing to note here is that games, where excellence is necessarily indexed to relative positioning, are more highly socially constructed than activities like cooking. I am suggesting that with regard to such highly socially constructed activities, valorising relative positioning might be permissible as long as there is independent justification for the activity and the relative positioning is not valued for its own sake, but as a part of the game that is valued.

<sup>43</sup> Roberts and Cleveland similarly note: "To be invidious, the kind of superiority that the prideful individual prizes has to be noninstrumental. For example, athletes typically want to outdo their competitors, but this concern for superiority need not be invidious, because it can be teleologically subordinate to winning the game, which may be merely playful." (Roberts and Cleveland 2016: 35)

emulate them in the future. Anna would therefore be well positioned to improve her skills and become a better runner.<sup>44</sup>

## 4.2 Objection 2: Compatible Cares

Another objection that might be raised at this point is that humans generally care about many different things. As such, it might seem possible for one to care about *both* relative positioning and activities or ends in their own right. If one could care about both things, then some of the purported reasons why humility is valuable would seem to be undercut.<sup>45</sup>

In response to this, the first thing to note is that a person who valued achievements, qualities, or activities in themselves but also valued relative superiority would still be regarding others in a problematic way. That is, their valuing being superior to others would constitute a failure to properly value others. Although the person who valued things in themselves as well as relative positioning concerning those things would perhaps be better off than the person who valued only relative positioning, they would still lack much that is of moral significance.

Caring about rankings is generally in tension with properly valuing activities, qualities, and achievements. Ranking individuals with respect to an activity seems to depend upon a flattening out of the valued realm. Determining who is better, even with regard to a relatively narrow realm, is a difficult task. In order to rank individuals, we thus tend to pick out a couple of fixed dimensions along which to evaluate. But our appreciation of the activities, qualities, and achievements characteristically extends far beyond these few dimensions, and we particularly value the ways in which people's contributions can be unique and interesting. Caring about ranking therefore seems to flatten out the rich and interesting ways in which a

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<sup>44</sup> This may not seem to vindicate all of our current practises (around, say competitive sports). I regard this as a benefit of the account, since it thus gives us the resources to critique current social practises that foster competitiveness. Not all environments are equally conducive to virtue. Social practises that foster valorising relative superiority rather than valuing achievements for their own sake will not be conducive to virtue, and this seems like reason to at least alter them.

<sup>45</sup> One thing to note in response to this challenge is that many things that we value are inconsistent with valorising relative superiority regarding those things. That is, there are plausibly many activities, achievements, and qualities we value that *cannot* coexist with valuing one's relative superiority. For example, think of having some close friends over for a casual dinner. Valuing this activity seems to be inconsistent with valorising being a better host than others, or cooking better food than others: the activity as a whole would no longer be oriented in the same direction. Similarly, it seems impossible to properly value generosity whilst valuing being *more* generous than others: it cuts against the very kind of thing that generosity is.

performance can be good. This suggests that caring about being better than others can lead to a kind of distortion in our appreciation of activities or performances themselves. For example, imagine trying to determine who is the better ballet dancer. There are certain things we could measure: the number of pirouettes that the dancer can turn, the height they can get their leg in an arabesque, the elevation they reach in a grand jeté. But obviously none of these (even when taken together) seem like plausible candidates for determining who is the better dancer; there are many varied ways in which one can achieve excellence as a ballet dancer. It seems as if most of the activities that we value are like this: there are many ways of achieving excellence at them, and often we particularly value the original and unusual ways of doing so. This therefore implies that we often fail to get the appreciative benefits of valuing things in themselves unless we *don't* care about relative rankings.

Moreover, the benefits of caring about achievements, qualities, and activities are dependent on not caring about relative superiority. Pleasure in achievement can be undercut by caring about relative positioning. That is, there are many instances where one will have achieved something valuable that is not itself a relative achievement, and similarly there will also be cases where one has relatively achieved something but not performed well. In such cases, valuing relative achievement will undercut the pleasure (or displeasure) one would take in the performance itself. We would thus fail to get the benefits of caring about something without also being humble with regard to it.

Finally, caring about relative superiority can divert one's energy and attention away from the performance or end itself. If such energy and attention are a constitutive part of caring about the performance or end itself, then such a diversion would weaken the extent to which one can care for the thing in question. This suggests that, in some cases, the two cares cannot exist: caring about one's relative position will undermine caring about activities or ends in themselves.

### 4.3 Objection 3: Humility and Pride

The third objection I will consider concerns pride. As I noted earlier, on this account humility is compatible with pride (of a certain kind). This opens up space for a possible objection to the account: does this account allow for the humble person to care *too much* about



their achievements? That is, is humility on this account consistent with an excessive pride in one's achievements?

In answer to this, it is important to first note that I take the compatibility of humility with pride in one's achievements or good qualities to be a virtue of the account. It coheres with our intuitive thought that taking pride in our successes is a good thing. It also coheres with the intuitive thought that were Anna to feel a glow of satisfaction on finishing a difficult and tiring race, it would not impinge on her humility. Indeed, it seems plausible that we would wish her to feel such pride. Such pride also seems important to motivate us to participate in such activities in the first place and to be necessary for adequate practical reasoning: recognising and valuing when one has done well seems essential to knowing how one should improve.

Pride *per se*, then, does not seem to be problematic. What seems ethically problematic is arrogant pride, or pride whereby one looks down on others or sees oneself as superior to them. Such superiority, haughty disdain and contempt for others are clearly inconsistent with humility on this account: valorising being relatively superior is a necessary condition for the objectionable kind of pride. When such pernicious underpinnings of pride are absent, it does not seem objectionable. For the same reason, by-products of pride like bragging are ruled out on this account: bragging functions on the presupposition that one is not merely good but *better than* others (stating that one has swum 100m in two minutes might constitute bragging in some contexts, but not in a room of Olympic swimmers).

The objection might then be reformulated as follows: I have argued that humility is consistent with some pride. But what if a person cares *only* about their own achievements (in non-relative terms), and simply fails to care about others' (non-relative) achievements at all? Would such a person not lack humility? Firstly, we might doubt that such a person cared about the activity in question. If not, then on the account I have offered they would not count as humble. Secondly, there would certainly be something wrong with such a figure, but I think it would be incorrect to say that they necessarily lack humility. Their behaviour would rather seem to be somehow pathological. Think, for example, of the people who most frequently exhibit such patterns of caring: very young children. Very young children do, for example, show great pride in their scribbles, whilst remaining unmoved by great works of art. But we wouldn't think of them as lacking in humility as a result of this. Rather, their failure to care about others' equivalent achievements is seen as resulting from the fact that they are not fully

developed as moral agents or practical reasoners. It therefore seems inappropriate to describe them as *either* humble or lacking in humility. By contrast, if an adult were to act in this way, it would be pathological. It seems that it would be inapt to describe a person with such a pattern of caring as either humble or lacking humility: their pattern of care is, rather, disordered in a different respect.

## 5. Humility and Ethical Development

Humility, then, seems to qualify as a virtue. However, I began with Murdoch's suggestion that humility also plays a significant role in ethical *development*.<sup>46</sup> I am here taking 'ethical' development to be broader than narrowly moral development, although ethical development will have a distinct moral dimension.<sup>47</sup> In the answer to the above objection concerning competitive activities I suggested that Anna, the humble runner, would be well placed to develop her talents. Although humility is no guarantee of development, my claim is that it generally puts one in a good position to develop ethically. This provides a limited vindication of Murdoch's claim that "although he [the humble man] is not by definition the good man perhaps he is the kind of man who is most likely of all to become good" (Murdoch 1970: 101).<sup>48</sup>

In the example from *Daniel Deronda*, Gwendolen's lack of humility is made apparent in her inability to appreciate music once she realises that she has no exceptional talent. This lack of humility forms a formidable barrier to her becoming a better person. Gwendolen, although utterly selfish, has some capacity to perceive her own need to change. But she is prevented from doing so by her felt need to maintain her superiority. She is resolute in preventing others from recognising that they are in some respects better off than her (hence her unwillingness to tell anyone but Daniel of her unhappiness), but also unwilling to admit this to herself. Since

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<sup>46</sup> Clifton (2013) also notes Murdoch's claim that the humble person is the most likely to become good. He suggests that this is explicable "because of his self-abnegation, which opens up possibilities for displaying attention to the world" (Clifton 2013: 212). However, Murdoch states that "humility is not a peculiar habit of self-effacement", which seems to resist this interpretation (Murdoch 1970: 95). I am proposing a way of connecting humility with moral growth without understanding humility as involving self-abnegation.

<sup>47</sup> This is particularly clear if one regards the virtues as kinds of skill (see, for example, Annas 2011).

<sup>48</sup> In a recent paper, Soyarslan (2018) notes that Spinoza makes the similar suggestion that humility can be useful as a means towards virtue, though he does not regard it as itself a virtue. However, he suggests that it fulfils this role only for 'weak minded' people.

she cannot bear to consider herself as lesser than others in any respect, she is therefore unable to appreciate how she might become better. Her valorisation of her relative positioning also prevents her from responding in the right way to those deficiencies in herself that she can perceive: she is both unable to see how to become better and unable to become better.<sup>49</sup>

On the account of humility that I have offered, this is a general feature of humility. Humility is not only, as I suggested above, intrinsically valuable but also importantly connected with ethical development, the process of becoming *better*. As illustrated with the case of Gwendolen, humility is important for both epistemic and motivational reasons. It removes barriers to developing the knowledge necessary for ethical development (knowledge about how to become better), and also removes barriers to being motivated in ways that aid ethical development. I will consider these in turn.<sup>50</sup>

Firstly, humility has some direct epistemic benefits. It removes a significant motivation for distortion in our beliefs about ourselves, thereby allowing us to recognise our successes and failings as such. Since the humble person does not valorise being relatively superior, they lack a significant motivation to distort what they see in order to reassure themselves that they are relatively more successful than others. They also lack a significant motivation to regard their own achievements as uniquely admirable or worthy. The humble person would thus be more likely to be able to perceive the true value of their own qualities and achievements. Such recognition seems crucial to improvement, since improvement plausibly requires recognising when one has done well or badly. That is, recognition of one's failings as such is necessary if one is to know where to improve. The ability to recognise the ways in which one's successes are the result of others' assistance or good fortune, an ability characteristic of the humble person, is also likely to enable one to have a realistic vision of developing one's skills that will mean one is epistemically well placed to improve.<sup>51</sup>

Moreover, the humble person will be more likely to recognise the valuable achievements or qualities of others as such than the unhumble person. They lack a significant

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<sup>49</sup> Murdoch is particularly concerned with the destructive effects of the 'ego': "[i]n the moral life the enemy is the fat relentless ego" (Murdoch 1970: 52). Although I am not claiming to offer a specifically Murdochian account of humility, the plausible connection between humility and (lack of) self-absorption perhaps throws some light on her interest in humility.

<sup>50</sup> This claim allows that humility *alone* will not lead to ethical development. After all, the humble person might care about the wrong kind of thing whilst not valorising their relative positioning regarding that thing. In a community valuing cruelty, not valorising being crueller than others would be unlikely to help one improve ethically. But my claim is simply that one significant barrier to ethical improvement is removed, not that all such barriers are removed.

<sup>51</sup> MacIntyre (1999) suggests that some virtues are 'virtues of acknowledged dependence'.

motivation to anxiously look for reasons to think of others' achievements as less significant than they are, and are therefore likely to be able to recognise others' achievements. As a result, they are also likely to be well-guided in their own attempts to improve, since accurately recognising others' achievements enables one to have good models of how to be successful, and to choose wisely whom to emulate.

Humility also has some indirect epistemic benefits. The humble person is typically a good listener and able to take advice from others.<sup>52</sup> They are likely to be willing to listen to others in the first place and to not be dismissive of what others have to say. They are thus well positioned to gain knowledge that would enable them to become better. Since they do not care about being relatively superior, they are likely to be less invested in pernicious stereotypes about what others have to teach them. Properly listening to someone involves thinking that the speaker might have something to tell one, that they may know some things that one does not. It thus involves attributing (possible) epistemic goods to others and acknowledging that one may not possess such goods. This acknowledgement can grate against a felt need to assert one's own rightness, or to see oneself as the one with knowledge, with greater epistemic authority or success. For the person who valorises being relatively superior such an acknowledgement will be particularly painful, and thus they are likely to be motivated to avoid it. But the humble person is not threatened by the thought that others may possess epistemic goods that they do not. They are not invested in the idea that others are 'below' them on some hierarchical scale, nor in the idea that others are unlikely to have anything of note to communicate. A significant barrier to being a good listener and being good at taking advice is therefore missing in the humble person, enabling them to gain important knowledge.<sup>53</sup> Humility therefore lessens one important barrier to ethical growth, lack of knowledge, both by removing a distorting factor in our judgements and by removing an obstacle to receiving testimony.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Fricker (2007) suggests that there are certain virtues involved in being a good listener in this sense. She refers to these as virtues of testimonial and hermeneutical justice. The humble person, I have suggested, will be a good listener in a slightly broader way than that she picks out, but would be likely to also possess the virtues she identifies.

<sup>53</sup> Such advice or testimony might be moral or non-moral, but seems particularly important in the moral case.

<sup>54</sup> Tanesini (2016) discusses the moral and epistemic viciousness of intellectual arrogance. My account of lack of humility has parallels with what she calls 'haughtiness', something that "manifests itself through disdain for other people... arrogance of this kind is often identified with a feeling of superiority over others" (Tanesini 2016: 73). She suggests that such haughtiness involves the presumption that one is exempt from the ordinary responsibilities of conversational participants, and can lead to silencing. As such, she argues that it fosters ignorance. Although my claim is about general lack of humility rather than specifically intellectual arrogance, this seems to me like a plausible account of some of the ways in which lack of humility can be epistemically harmful.

Secondly, humility is important for ethical growth because it involves motivational or affective responses that aid ethical development. That is, it enables us to affectively react in the right kinds of way to our own and others' achievements (or failures). Recall the example of the humble runner, Anna. On recognising that another person is a better runner than she is, she would not feel envy or resentment. Rather, though she might feel disappointment at her own performance, she is also likely to feel admiration for the other runner's achievement. Anna's response seems like the appropriate response to admirable achievements. But it also seems likely to help her to become a better runner through motivating her to emulate the person in question. By contrast, the person who recognises that the other runner is better but feels only envy or resentment is likely to feel equally motivated to 'pull down' the better runner as they are to improve themselves. This is what happens with Uriah Heep, who recognises others' successes but is led to hope (and scheme) for their downfall.

Finally, for the person who lacks humility, recognising others' relative superiority can lead to sour grapes, where they feel discouraged from participating in the activity at all, regarding it as of low value and not worth the effort. This is what happens with Gwendolen: her lack of relative success discourages her from participating in or even appreciating music. Faced with the fact that others are more musically talented than she is, Gwendolen cannot bear to think that music itself is valuable at all. As such, she forfeits any chance to improve musically, as well as the opportunity to appreciate music itself. By contrast, the humble person is not only in a good position to recognise others' successes but is also disposed to react to such successes in ways that enable them to emulate such success and, therefore, to become better at the activity in question.

Humility, then, removes common barriers to ethical development that are both epistemic and motivational. As a result, the humble person is disposed to become better. This does not guarantee that the humble person will develop ethically, since other obstacles might stand in their way, but it at least suggests that they are well placed to do so. This vindicates Murdoch's claim that the humble person is likely to become good.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Murdoch makes the stronger claim of the humble person that 'perhaps he is the most likely of all to become good'. This is seemingly a result of her view that the 'anxious ego' is the primary obstacle to moral growth. I have provided an argument only for the claim that humility is *an* important condition for ethical growth, not that it is the *most* important condition for it. Murdoch is, however, seemingly hesitant in making this claim, and thus it seems that my argument captures the spirit of her remark.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have suggested that Bommarito's account of humility mischaracterises it by unduly focusing on patterns of attention. I have instead offered an account of humility as the virtue of not valorising relative superiority. Such a trait is valuable, I have suggested, because the humble person avoids one way in which our valuing of others can be distorted. I have argued that understanding humility in this way sheds light on the further manifestations of humility such as their patterns of attention, appreciation, and action. Moreover, I have suggested that humility is thus an interesting trait and one worth seeking for two distinct reasons: not only because it is a virtue, but because it plays an important role in our ethical development.

## Chapter 6

# Responsibility and Comparative Pride: a Critical Discussion of Morgan-Knapp

Comparative pride is the pride one can take in how one compares to others. In the terms of the previous chapter, it is thus a ‘relative’ notion, an experience that involves valuing relative superiority over others. In a recent paper, Christopher Morgan-Knapp (2019) argues that although such pride is commonly culturally affirmed, it is not only morally or prudentially questionable, but that it should be rejected on wholly theoretical grounds: it “presents things as being some way they are not” (Morgan-Knapp 2019: 317). He thus argues that comparative pride is never warranted. I will argue that Morgan-Knapp’s arguments for the claim that comparative pride is unwarranted are unsuccessful. And to the extent that they are successful, they do not concern the merely theoretical adequacy of comparative pride, but rather its moral fittingness. Either way, then, Morgan-Knapp fails to identify any theoretical shortcoming in comparative pride.

In this chapter, I will begin in §1 by outlining the main argument Morgan-Knapp offers against comparative pride. In §2 I will then argue that it should be rejected for two reasons: first, it misidentifies the object of comparative pride, and second, it hinges on considerations that undermine the warrant for noncomparative pride as well as comparative pride. In §3 I will then discuss a second argument suggested by his paper which might be thought to save his

conclusion. I will argue that this argument fails to offer purely theoretical grounds on which to reject comparative pride. The argument may be a good one, but it would depend on substantive ethical assumptions rather than the purely theoretical considerations that Morgan-Knapp claims. Although in chapter 5 I have argued that valuing relative superiority is problematic, it is thus problematic for ethical rather than purely theoretical reasons. I therefore conclude that Morgan-Knapp's arguments do not succeed in showing that comparative pride is theoretically mistaken.

## 1. Morgan-Knapp's Core Argument

Comparative pride, Morgan-Knapp suggests, is generally considered legitimate within both contemporary culture and contemporary philosophy. However, he believes that this status is undeserved: he claims that comparative pride depends on a 'theoretical mistake', and is *always* 'irrational' (Morgan-Knapp 2019: 317). There are two claims that might be at stake here: firstly, that comparative pride is such that it *necessarily* fails to be rational or warranted (because, for instance, it involves logical inconsistency); or, secondly, he might argue for the weaker claim that no instance of comparative pride in fact happens to meet the conditions to be rational or warranted. Though the secondary argument I will discuss in §3 seems to make the former, stronger claim, his core argument seems to be best understood as directed at the second, weaker claim.<sup>1</sup> In §2 I shall argue that this argument fails.

Morgan-Knapp's core argument against comparative pride proceeds as follows:

- 1) We can rationally take achievement-pride only in things that we're sufficiently responsible for.
- 2) We do not have any significant degree of responsibility for comparative achievements.
- 3) Therefore, taking achievement-pride in comparative achievements is a mistake.

Achievement-pride, as Morgan-Knapp understands it, is something that can be expressed by the locution 'proud *of myself* for'. One is proud of oneself for those things that are to one's

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<sup>1</sup> That this is his claim is suggested by that fact that he considers in turn the factors that could make a difference in a comparative achievement, and suggests that none of them could ground achievement pride. This seems to suggest that it is at least *possible* that some such factor could ground comparative achievement pride.



credit, that reflect well on one as an agent: one might be proud of oneself for keeping a difficult resolution, cooking a delicious dinner, or being a good friend when it was hard to do so.<sup>2</sup> This contrasts with identity-pride, whereby one can be proud of being a certain way or having a certain feature, where that feature is out of one's hands: for example, think of the idea of gay pride or national pride.<sup>3</sup> Identity-pride is often expressed as pride in 'being' a certain way. To be proud *of oneself*, Morgan-Knapp states, is to assess oneself as an agent. And assessment of oneself as an agent involves assessing oneself with reference to things one is responsible for. Given this conception of achievement-pride, (1) is meant to be something like a conceptual truth. From now on, by 'pride' I will be specifically referring to achievement-pride.<sup>4</sup>

The crux of Morgan-Knapp's argument, then, is in his justification of claim (2). Having suggested that achievement-pride can only be taken in something that the agent is sufficiently responsible for, he argues that comparative achievements will never meet this threshold of responsibility. This is because whether one wins a comparative victory depends significantly on what other people achieve. Others' achievements are not normally things that we are responsible for, but (1) stated that we can take achievement-pride only in things we're sufficiently responsible for. So, since other's achievements are not significantly up to us, he concludes that we are mistaken in taking pride in states of affairs involving relative achievements.<sup>5</sup>

Morgan-Knapp discusses the warrant for comparative pride with regard to Claire Tuggle's achievement in setting the US record for the 200-metre freestyle swim for girls of age ten and under. He allows that Claire's impressive swiftness was an achievement, but rejects the idea that her setting the record (the comparative achievement of swimming 200 metres *faster* than any other American girl aged ten or less) constitutes any further achievement beyond

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<sup>2</sup> It is plausibly conceptually true of achievements that they involve *tasks* that are *difficult*. See, for example, Gwen Bradford (2015).

<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Fischer (2017) makes much of cases of identity-pride in his argument against the thought that pride *per se* requires moral responsibility for the object of pride. However, his argument is consistent with Morgan-Knapp's claims about achievement-pride, since Morgan-Knapp explicitly understands achievement-pride as being merely one kind of pride.

<sup>4</sup> Morgan-Knapp focuses on comparative *achievement*-pride, but says nothing about the possibility of comparative *identity*-pride. Since he regards identity-pride as warranted for at least some things that are outside of one's control, it is possible that even if his argument were successful, some instances of comparative pride could be defended as instances of identity-pride.

<sup>5</sup> Morgan-Knapp does allow that there will be no clear hard and fast boundary between things that we are sufficiently responsible for and those that we are not: "there is apt to be a good deal of vagueness regarding how much responsibility for an attribute will be sufficient to make it something we can be proud of ourselves for being or doing" (Morgan-Knapp 2019: 320). However, he claims that there is nonetheless an important distinction here.

swimming swiftly. The only component of the comparative victory that goes beyond the absolute achievement, he claims, is constituted by others' achievements (i.e. by how fast Claire's competitors swam). He therefore concludes that Claire is not sufficiently responsible for the comparative victory to take pride in it:

[A]ssuming things are not strange, Claire was not responsible for the specific things that made her performance not only fast, but record-setting. In this case, if Claire were to be proud of herself for setting a record in addition to the pride she takes in swimming fast, that extra, comparative pride would be based on something that she is not responsible for. Her comparative achievement-pride would thus be misleading; it would falsely present her record-setting (as distinguished from her simply swimming fast) as something she is responsible for. (Morgan-Knapp 2019: 322)

In making this argument, Morgan-Knapp does not deny that there will be some reasons that Claire swam faster than any other child her age and thus that there will be some reasons explaining why she set the record. He allows, for instance, that Claire may have trained harder than the other competitors, had better training opportunities than them, had physical advantages over them, or that perhaps luck was simply on her side. But he suggests that none of these reasons for the comparative victory render her sufficiently responsible for it to make comparative pride appropriate:

[H]er performing better than children who did not have the opportunity to perform to their physical potential is nothing that should evoke additional admiration. (Morgan-Knapp 2019: 325)

Some others she swam faster than simply didn't try hard enough, and many never tried at all. Out-performing those who haven't really tried, who haven't put in the effort to realize their potential, is also nothing that elevates her achievement. (ibid)

Claire has physical advantages that are absent in those ten-year-olds that could not possibly have matched her time ... This advantage, though, disqualifies her besting them from being worthy for the same reason that there is nothing worthy in my being able to run faster than a toddler. There is nothing noble in beating people who had no chance of performing to your level. (ibid)

In fact, Morgan-Knapp suggests that *no* reason that would explain why Claire swam faster than any other swimmer in her category could make her achievement any more impressive or worthy. He argues that any possible reason for her comparative success would be something that she was not responsible for, since it would have to explain others' relative slowness as much as her own speed. And Claire (barring unusual circumstances such as cheating) could not be responsible for others' relative slowness. No possible reason that would explain Claire's relative victory, he suggests, could thus render Claire sufficiently responsible for it to be a proper object of pride.

According to Morgan-Knapp, comparative pride thus 'presents things as being some way they are not' because it presents comparative achievements as things for which we are responsible, when we are not.

## 2. Two Reasons to Reject the Core Argument

I wish to raise two related reasons why this argument should be rejected. Firstly, the general thought that we are not (sufficiently) responsible for relative achievements depends on a mistaken conception of the object of comparative pride. Secondly, the argument, if successful, would undermine non-comparative as well as comparative pride. Since non-comparative pride is plausibly warranted in many cases, there is reason to doubt that the threshold for 'sufficient responsibility' to warrant pride is as high as Morgan-Knapp assumes. I will then suggest that the temptation to think we are not sufficiently responsible for comparative achievements depends on a general instability in our thinking about action, and that this undermines the significance of this line of thinking for comparative pride in particular.

Firstly, Morgan-Knapp suggests that in taking pride in swimming fastest, Claire would be taking pride in the conjunctive fact that she swam fast and that all other swimmers in the relevant category swam at speeds that were lower than hers. This is why he claims that "[w]hat distinguishes the comparative achievement from the non-comparative achievement is what others have (or in this case, have not) done" (Morgan-Knapp 2019: 322). In other words, he suggests that to distinguish between the non-comparative achievement of swimming *fast* and the comparative one of swimming *faster* than anyone else, we simply add in others' achievements. And he suggests that doing so does not alter our conception of the non-

comparative achievement. But this way of thinking about it is misleading. For Claire might take comparative pride not simply in the overall state of affairs in which she has swum at a certain speed and others have swum at a lower speed.<sup>6</sup> Rather, her comparative pride might be in a relational property of her own achievement. That is, we might think of her swim itself as having the property of being faster than others' swimming. The addition of contextual factors such as others' swimming times to our overall picture might therefore add something to our conception of Claire's swim itself: we can then discern the relational properties that her swim itself has, such as 'being the *fastest* swim'. And these relational properties seem like prime candidates for being the objects of comparative pride.

When we think of being the fastest swim as a relational property of *Claire's* swim, it no longer seems so odd to think that she could be significantly responsible for it. Morgan-Knapp seems right to say that we think of achievements as things over which we have a significant degree of control. He thus suggests that being proud of oneself for having been the recipient of a windfall inheritance from a relative one never knew, for example, would be mistaken. But one significant difference between such good fortune and Claire's relative victory is that being the fastest swimmer in the relevant category is something one could set for oneself as an end, whereas being the recipient of an unexpected fortune is not.<sup>7</sup> That is, being the fastest swimmer is something one could actively seek, an end in accordance with which one could organise one's actions. For example, in seeking to be the fastest swimmer, Claire might monitor other competitors' performances to ensure that her own is up to scratch. She might continue training until she is the fastest, and push herself until she has achieved this.<sup>8</sup> It would seem odd if despite having sufficient control over the realisation of something to set it as one's end, one nonetheless had insufficient responsibility for its realisation to ground pride. There is therefore

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<sup>6</sup> Morgan-Knapp states that comparative pride "represents its basis—one's superiority to others—as valuable independent of the value of one's performance considered on its own" (Morgan-Knapp 2019: 326). But of course, one need not think that superiority is *independently* valuable in order to think that it adds to the value of an achievement. (Being novel might add to the value of an artwork *iff* it's novel in way that adds to the aesthetic value of the work, for example).

<sup>7</sup> Of course, in the previous chapter I suggested that there are reasons not to set such ends for oneself, or at least not to inherently value such relative superiority. But Morgan-Knapp claims to be putting forward a theoretical rather than ethical criticism of comparative pride. It certainly seems *possible* to do so.

<sup>8</sup> Of course, the actions that she would take if she sought to simply become a fast swimmer would also be apt in attempting to become the fastest swimmer. However, it is notable that in the above cases her actions might well be different from those she would pursue were her end simply the end of swimming as fast as she could. And even if she did the same things (e.g. extra training), they would be differently organised, or taken for different reasons.

good reason to doubt Morgan-Knapp's contention that we are not to any significant degree responsible for comparative achievements.<sup>9</sup>

A second reason to reject this argument is that the specific considerations Morgan-Knapp invokes to suggest that we're not sufficiently responsible for comparative achievements to take pride in them also undermine the possibility of warranted pride in non-comparative achievements. Morgan-Knapp suggests that calling to mind the reasons why Claire beat other people undermines our willingness to think of her comparative success as an achievement on her part. After all, Claire was not responsible for her physical advantages, training opportunities, or luck. According to his argument, the causal role such factors play in Claire's comparative victory makes it seem merely lucky that Claire was the fastest swimmer, and thus undermine our willingness to think that Claire was sufficiently responsible for the achievement to warrant pride.<sup>10</sup> But the same factors that led to her comparative success also seem to be those which are responsible for her non-comparative success. The non-comparative achievement of swimming swiftly was also the result of some combination of physical advantages, good training opportunities, effort, and luck. In fact, it seems that any possible reason for Claire's swimming fast could also be a reason that Claire swam faster than others.<sup>11</sup> If Morgan-Knapp's argument against comparative pride were successful, it would thus undermine the warrant for non-comparative pride as well. Given the plausibility of the thought that pride in non-comparative achievements can be warranted (a thought Morgan-Knapp explicitly accepts), there is reason to think that his argument is mistaken in its identification of the threshold for sufficient responsibility to warrant pride.

When we consider the various reasons Morgan-Knapp mentions that might explain why Claire set the swimming record, it seems plausible that we do feel tempted to think she is

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<sup>9</sup> This initial consideration does not vindicate all comparative pride, since in many instances comparative victories are not set as ends in this way. Nonetheless, it gives reason to reject Morgan-Knapp's claim that comparative pride is *never* rational.

<sup>10</sup> Morgan-Knapp does identify effort as another factor that might explain Claire's relative victory. But he suggests that outperforming those who have not tried hard is not a valuable achievement. If others are simply not trying to win, then gaining a victory over them seems like insufficiently taxing to count as an achievement. But if the fact that others have put in less effort than oneself undermines the relative victory being an achievement, it seems that putting in effort should also undermine one's own success being an achievement.

<sup>11</sup> That is, for any achievement the effort and skills that are necessary in order to achieve the relevant end will be determined by environmental factors. In this respect, the fact that swimming fastest depends on others swimming more slowly (something that is not up to me) is not different from the fact that jumping a high fence depends on it being a certain height (something that is not up to me).

not sufficiently responsible for her achievements to make pride appropriate. But this temptation stems from an instability in our thinking about our actions in general. That is, in general when we consider our actions or achievements with reference to their purely causal histories, we seem to find no space for the agent to step in and influence them. Thinking about our actions in this way thus seems to undermine thinking about them as things for which we are responsible at all. But unless one is a hard determinist – a position Morgan-Knapp claims to set aside – this causal history must somehow coexist with agential responsibility.<sup>12</sup> That is, insofar as one is willing to think that Claire could be responsible for her achievements at all, detailing their causal history will not rule out agential responsibility for them. And Morgan-Knapp gives us no reason to think that if we set hard determinism aside Claire will nonetheless be insufficiently responsible for her comparative achievements for pride to be appropriate.

Morgan-Knapp's core argument thus fails to give us reason to accept the claim that no instance of comparative pride meets the conditions to be rational. It thus fails to give us reason to think that in taking pride in comparative achievements we are making a theoretical mistake. There is, however, another line of argument suggested by later comments in his paper, to which I will now turn.

### **3. A Further Argument**

After setting forward his core argument, Morgan-Knapp briefly seems to suggest a second line of argument. In this line of argument, he makes a stronger claim than was implied by the core argument. Whereas he there suggested that no comparative achievement is actually such that the agent is sufficiently responsible for it to ground pride, he here suggests that “there is a kind of incoherence in taking pride in being the best” (Morgan-Knapp 2019: 327). That is, he suggests that there is a kind of logical incoherence implicit in the very idea of comparative pride. I shall suggest that there need be no such incoherence in taking pride in being the best. The problem with such an agent would not be that they were incoherent, but that they were valuing the wrong kinds of thing: the mistake they would be making would not be wholly theoretical, but importantly ethical.

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<sup>12</sup> The classic discussion of this is Strawson (1962)

Morgan-Knapp suggests that in taking pride in comparative achievements, one must value the situation where others fail but one succeeds. As such, he claims that one must value others' failure, since it is a necessary component of one's comparative success. But he suggests that this is incoherent, since in order to value one's own success one must value achievement itself in the given domain.<sup>13</sup> He writes:

Such pride involves both a positive valuation of success in that domain – for otherwise it would not be the source of one's pride – and a positive valuation of failure in that domain – for one's superiority is conceptually dependent on others' inferiority. (Morgan-Knapp 2019: 327)

Morgan-Knapp seems here to be thinking that in order to value comparative success, one must value non-comparative success in a domain. That is, in order to for something to be a success or achievement, one must view the task or activity as valuable or worthwhile. But in order to take comparative pride one must also value others' failure in that domain, for the two are conceptually interconnected.<sup>14</sup> He argues that valuing others' failure in a given domain whilst valuing non-comparative success in that domain would be somehow incoherent. He thus suggests that there is a kind of incoherence implicit in the idea of comparative pride.

However, there is no entailment between feeling comparative pride and valuing others' failure, at least if such failure is non-comparative. I earlier noted that the person who values comparative success does not merely value other people doing badly. Rather, they value standing in a certain relation to others (something along the lines of 'better than them in respect x'). As such, the person who takes comparative pride in an achievement need not value others' failures *per se*. Rather, in valuing doing better than others, they value others doing worse than themselves. That is, they value other's comparative failures, but not necessarily their non-comparative ones. This seems significantly different from valuing their failure itself, and it fails

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<sup>13</sup> This seems parallel to attempts to show that egoism is self-contradictory, since the reasons we have to value (or avoid) things for ourselves are also reasons to value (or avoid) them for others. Nagel (1970), for instance, makes an argument in this vein.

<sup>14</sup> In this respect, valuing comparative success seems importantly dissimilar to valuing goods that are limited. One can plausibly value eating the last slice of cake simply *because* cake is tasty, not because doing so entails that others cannot eat it. The connection to others' failure to enjoy eating cake is merely contingent. But the very notion of a comparative achievement is necessarily interconnected with others' failure.

to yield an inconsistency: it seems coherent to value others doing worse than oneself whilst also valuing non-comparative success in a domain.<sup>15</sup>

Specifically, only given certain ethical assumptions does valuing others' success in a domain seem inconsistent with valuing others doing worse than oneself. For example, if we include the assumption that we value other people, or value their doing well, then there might be an incoherence in also thinking success in a given domain was valuable and yet that others doing worse than oneself was valuable. But these are substantive ethical assumptions. It is hard to see how one could reach something approaching incoherence without some such assumption. The ethical assumptions that need to be invoked to yield an inconsistency are, however, highly plausible. This second argument thus fails as a purely theoretical argument, but as an ethical argument it is promising.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Morgan-Knapp does not give reason to think that comparative pride is theoretically problematic. I have argued that his first argument rests on a mistaken conception of the object of comparative pride, and that once we conceive of the object of comparative pride as a relational property, we can reject this argument. His second line of argument also fails to show that there is any theoretical incoherence in comparative pride. Whilst his conclusion may seem appealing, it rests on ethical assumptions rather than wholly theoretical ones. Morgan-Knapp's arguments do not therefore succeed in showing that comparative pride is theoretically mistaken.

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<sup>15</sup> Indeed, given that easy victories can seem somewhat hollow, the person who values comparative success might prefer others to be non-comparatively successful.



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