

What Does Virtue Have to Do with Consequences?

In *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics*, Volume 13, edited by Mark Timmons, pp. 235–252

Some wise person says, “There is always two reasons for doing a thing: one is a good reason and the other is the real reason.”

Ms. Walter B. Helm, quoted in *The Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, February 11, 1905.

1. Introduction

In a bold and provocative book, Julia Driver once argued for a consequentialist view of virtue – a view she labels *pure evaluational externalism*.¹ On this view, virtues are dispositions to produce good consequences systematically. Importantly, they do not require good internal states of the agent such as motives and intentions, and vices do not require bad internal states.² Driver’s argument proceeds by an appeal to what she labels virtues of ignorance. She takes humility, blind charity, and acting rightly but with the belief you are doing something wrong, as Twain’s Huck Finn arguably does, as examples of virtues of ignorance. The idea is that in all these cases, we have agents who act without knowledge of what is right and so without a good internal state.

Several objections have been raised to Driver’s argument for consequentialism, which proceeds by an appeal to cases. I take the most important one to be the following: the virtues of ignorance she lists only seem to be virtues if we imagine the agent manifesting them to *also* possess a good disposition of some sort.³ For instance, blind charity is only a virtue if the blindly charitable are moved by something like a tendency to see the best in everyone, which is arguably a good internal disposition. Similarly, Huck Finn, in choosing not to disclose Jim’s identity, is displaying a virtue only if he is motivated by a desire to help his friend or an inability to betray his friend and not, say, by a desire to spite his aunt.

I do not think a good response on Driver’s behalf to this objection is available, though I will not try to show that here as there is a more important point I wish to make: the success of the objection – assuming, as I believe, that it succeeds – would not spell doom for consequentialism about virtue. This is because there is a better argument for consequentialism. A version of that argument was once advanced by David Hume. The argument asks us to consider the question of why it is good to be helpful to others, and why helpfulness is a disposition we ought to cultivate in ourselves and inculcate in our children. The answer is likely to appeal to consequences: helpfulness is instrumental in relieving distress and making life better for those who receive help. The answer is unlikely to appeal to motives,

¹ Julia Driver, *Uneasy Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). See also Robert Hartman’s “Utilitarian Moral Virtue, Admiration, and Luck,” *Philosophia*, 43 (2015): 77–95 for an updated version of a consequentialist view of virtue, of a utilitarian variety.

² Note: Driver allows for the possibility that internal states may be necessary for some particular virtues but argues that they are not necessary for virtue in general, writing, “[P]articular virtues such as generosity can be analyzed in terms of specific psychological states that characterize them. For generosity the typical motive may be something like a desire to benefit others and the typical intention one of aiding them. While this is true of the virtue of generosity, it is not true of virtue across the board,” (Ibid., 62).

³ Michael Slote, “Driver’s Virtues,” *Utilitas*, 16-1 (2004): 22–32. For a detailed defense of the importance of motives, see Slote’s *Morals from Motives* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001).

e.g., “Because helpfulness is motivated by a good state of the agent.” But virtues, whatever else they may be, would have to be good dispositions that we ought to cultivate. So they must be traits that have good consequences. This, I take it, is the crux of Hume’s point in the famous “monkish virtues” passage: Hume argued that in deciding what behavior to incentivize and label “virtuous,” we have to look at the consequences of said behavior.⁴ The motive behind the monkish virtues Hume decried may well have been a good one, and Hume does not criticize the motive. His insight was that *however this may be*, if the dispositions the motive gives rise to benefit no one, then they can hardly be called virtues.⁵

Forgetting this point can be dangerous. The danger is that we may unmoor ourselves from consequences and take what we intuitively feel to be the purity of our own motives as a guide to action. The problem with this is not only – and perhaps not even primarily – that we have a strong self-serving bias and are bad at divining the nature of our own motives, but that even if we can say with complete certainty that our motives are good, that is insufficient to show that the actions that spring from those motives are right or justified. One may, for instance, out of compassion – a perfectly good and laudable motive – end up enabling one’s sister’s addiction by giving her money, or else spend an inordinate amount of resources on a tragedy with a known victim rather than a problem with a greater number of unknown victims. More generally, even if the motivation behind a given disposition is morally exemplary, if we have a reason to think that it will lead to suboptimal social consequences, we should generally discourage it and perhaps, pronounce it a spurious virtue at best.⁶ Call the intuition behind this point the *consequentialist* intuition.

This intuition, as some of the considerations I just made in response to Driver suggest, has its contrary. In order to see that, suppose we approach the problem of virtue in another way and ask not what makes a disposition such as kindness or helpfulness a good candidate for inculcation, but rather, when and under what conditions we can ascribe virtue to some particular person. We can now elicit an anti-consequentialist intuition by imagining cases in which inner dispositions are divorced from action consequences, either because the dispositions lack consequences altogether or because there is a valence mismatch between internal states and consequences, such that when one is good the other one is bad and vice versa.

Consider the first possibility first. There appear to be stable dispositions without consequences that may nonetheless constitute virtues and vices, for instance, secret jealousy, schadenfreude, or the good will and compassion of a person with locked-in syndrome.⁷ Or consider cases of systematically mismatched valence. Imagine, for instance, that the devil is doing his best to hurt Sarah, but God intervenes and thwarts the devil’s intentions every time, making Sarah better off, instead. The devil

⁴ David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge 3rd edition, revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 270.

⁵ It must be noted, however, that Hume is not, at the end of the day, a consequentialist in the relevant sense. Consider, for instance, the following passage: “It appears, therefore, that all virtuous actions derive their merit only from virtuous motives, and are considered as merely signs of those motives,” *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by Ernest Mossner (London: Penguin Classics, 1986), 530. Driver says that she intends her account to be no more radical than Hume’s, but her account actually is more radical than Hume’s since Hume accepts the role of motives. See Driver’s “Response to My Critics,” *Utilitas*, 16-1 (2004), 33–41, 34. If the account I am about to offer succeeds, it will help explain how Hume may have thought consequences paramount without embracing consequentialism about virtue.

⁶ This is basically the argument psychologist Paul Bloom makes in *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion* (New York, NY: Ecco, 2016). It is also the type of argument that motivated the Effective Altruism movement.

⁷ Nicolas Bommarito, *Inner Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) offers a thoughtful, book-length defense of this view.

keeps hoping he'll outsmart God on the next try, but he fails every time. The devil in this case seems to be acting viciously even though Sarah consistently benefits from his actions. Finally, think of cases in which people are disposed to consistently do what is right but for utterly selfish reasons: doing what is right would benefit them personally. In all of these cases, we are tempted, in assessing an agent's character, to weigh heavily the motives rather than the consequences of the resulting actions. Call the intuition which inclines us to say that neither the devil nor thoroughly selfish people could be virtuous whatever good they may produce and however systematically, the *motivationalist* intuition.

If we lean solely on the consequentialist intuition, we end up with the view, defended in a different way (that is, by an appeal to virtues of ignorance) by Driver, that consequences are the only thing that matters, that is, with *consequentialism* about virtue. If, on the other hand, we focus exclusively on the motivationalist intuition, we are led to conclude that virtue and vice are solely a matter of internal states of the agent while consequences are irrelevant to virtue and vice ascription, a view we may, for parity's sake, label *motivationalism* about virtue.⁸

This clash of intuitions makes for a fragmented landscape. It is as though we were estimating probabilities, and some people's estimate of the likelihood of an event's occurrence were 1 while that of others were 0. Something seems to have gone wrong. What should we say about all this? Perhaps, we can argue that the two sides are not so much disagreeing as talking past each other, each focusing on a different issue. I have a good deal of sympathy with this type of response. But I think also that we cannot stop here. This is because it would be surprising if it turned out that what makes some dispositions virtues and vices in general is utterly divorced from what makes any given person virtuous or vicious. If it is the case, we have to explain how that can be. If it is not, we need an account that illuminates the connections between virtues and vices on the one hand, and consequences and motives, on the other.

By the same token, a simple addition of the two approaches in one conciliatory – ecumenical – strategy that pronounces both consequences and motives necessary for virtue while holding that neither is, on its own, sufficient would not do.⁹ Such a strategy, of course, won't satisfy either motivationalists or consequentialists since the motivationalist intuition tells us not simply that internal states matter but that they are the only thing that matters, while the consequentialist intuition tells us that all that matters, in the end, are consequences. A theoretical kumbaya which pronounces both motives and consequences necessary while denying that either is sufficient is likely to be seen as a bad compromise by both warring parties. This is not the main problem, however, since it could be that motivationalists and consequentialists do not realize that they are talking past each other. The real problem is that a viable conciliatory approach – or “mixed” strategy,¹⁰ as Driver calls this type of approach – must either explain why the basis on which a disposition is to be labeled “virtue” is unrelated to the basis on which virtues are ascribed to individual people, or else it has to explain what the connections between the two things are. In what follows, I will pursue the second strategy. I will argue that virtue requires motivation that's in harmony with the reasons that make a disposition socially desirable.

⁸ Todd Calder, “Against Consequentialist Theories of Virtue,” *Utilitas* 19-2 (2007): 201–219; John Skorupski, “Externalism and Self-Governance,” *Utilitas* 16-1 (2004): 12–21.

⁹ This type of strategy, it must be noted, has appeal among non-philosophers. See Adam Feltz & Edward Cokely, “Virtue or Consequences: The Folk Against Pure Evaluational Internalism,” *Philosophical Psychology* 26-5 (2013): 702–717.

¹⁰ Driver ascribes it, plausibly, to Aristotle.

In addressing my task, I proceed as follows: I begin by laying out my view (Section 2) and then proceed to consider responses on behalf of consequentialism (Section 3) and motivationalism (Section 4) respectively before I offer a summary and make some additional points (Section 5).

2. *What non-viciousness teaches us about virtue*

I wish to begin with an observation: what people do is important, perhaps more important from a societal point of view than why they do what they do. Thus, we want people to do their jobs well. We hope that grocers will be honest and researchers will work hard. We want scientists to discover cures for diseases and architects to envisage nice buildings. We desire these things independently of why a given person may or may not do them. We desire them so much, in fact, that we are more than willing to amply reward Dr. Burning Ambition if he finds cure for cancer even if his primary motivation is the utterly selfish one of proving himself better than his colleague Dr. Ellen Envious, who has a more prestigious research position and whom he'd always envied since she appears to be a "golden child" to whom success came easily.

Relatedly, we regard a person's actions as right or justified when there are good reasons to do those actions even if the agent's own reasons have little to do with what justifies her actions.¹¹ This is, presumably, what Mill had in mind when he said, "He who saves a fellow creature from drowning does what is morally right, whether his motive be duty or the hope of being paid for his trouble."¹² Kant noted, in a similar vein, that the honest grocer who is honest only because it is good for business is acting in accordance with duty. While Kant's main point was that such a grocer, not acting from the motive of duty or out of respect for the moral law, is not behaving in a way that is morally worthy, he suggests also, or at least implies, that the grocer's behavior, being in conformity with duty, is perfectly justified at least in the sense of being permissible.

If this line of reasoning is on the right track, we can say that consequentialists about virtue are mistaken about the proper object of consequentialist treatment. Consequences, we might say, are key to determining whether some type of action is right and should be rewarded and encouraged. This explains why, as we saw earlier, consequences are essential in determining whether a disposition to perform actions of a certain type – save drowning people, say, or be honest to one's customers – ought to be incentivized. But consequences may not be the key determinant when it comes to individual virtue ascription. We should encourage people to save drowning children, find cures for diseases, and be honest in their business dealings. Perhaps, we can even praise them if we expect that praise would incentivize the desired behaviors. But we cannot ascribe virtue merely on the basis of the fact that a person does these things unless she does them for certain reasons. This is what I wish to argue for now.

In making my case, I will begin by considering a person such as Kant's grocer. What are we to say of the grocer's character? Intuitively, Kant seems right in claiming that the grocer's (honest) actions lack

¹¹ W. D. Ross, relatedly, distinguishes between the Right and the Good, arguing that actions can be right or wrong but not good or bad while motives can be good or bad but not right or wrong. See Ross, W. D., *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930). For counterarguments, see Michael Stocker, "Act and Agent Evaluations," *The Review of Metaphysics* 27-1 (1973): 42–61.

¹² John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, edited by Roger Crisp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 109.

moral worth. Is it, perhaps, that the disposition to be honest to one's customers for self-interested reasons is a bad and vicious one?

The answer, I think, depends on whether the grocer accepts certain moral constraints on his pursuit of his own self-interest. If the grocer is committed to promoting his own self-interest subject to constraints, namely, he is committed to promoting it in a way that either benefits or at least does not harm others, then his disposition is a non-vicious one. Non-vicious dispositions need not involve deep concern for the wellbeing of others. For instance, a person may be disposed to be honest or to work hard on her scientific projects for the sake of reputation or fame. Such dispositions (probably highly common) are non-vicious. But there are two important points to note. First, non-viciousness does not amount to virtue. Non-vicious dispositions are permissible but not particularly praiseworthy (though as I noted earlier, there may be consequentialist reasons to praise them, for instance, in order to encourage them). By contrast, virtue *is* praiseworthy. Consequently, more is required for virtue. Virtues require suitable motivation: a kind of connection between the agent's motives and the reasons that make her actions permissible or socially desirable. For instance, a disposition to be helpful is a virtuous one when it disposes one to act for the reasons that make helpfulness a good thing and something we ought to encourage, that is, the consequences for other people.

Second, it is important that consequences do suitably constrain the disposition: if Jane is disposed to pursue her interests *whether or not* that would harm others, then her disposition is a vicious one, a kind of callousness, even if, coincidentally, it leads to good consequences most or even all of the time. Jane may get morally lucky and never do anything wrong, because her interests always happen to align with what is independently desirable from a societal point of view, but if her disposition is to pursue her interests regardless of moral constraints, then her disposition is in fact a vicious one though the viciousness remains masked.

We can now begin to appreciate the respective roles that consequences and motives play in virtue. Roughly speaking, consequences help delineate the class of permissible actions. Non-viciousness requires a commitment to staying on the right side of the permissibility/impermissibility boundary. No disposition can be a virtuous one without being at least permissible. This explains why attempts to decide whether some type of action is right by scrutinizing a person's motives – whether our own or those of others – are generally misguided. The purity of a person's heart *alone* cannot make her actions right, and it cannot make the disposition to perform actions of a certain type virtuous.¹³ This explains also why Hume's monk or the person who enables his sister's addiction by compassionately giving her money cannot be virtuous in acting as they do. Virtue becomes possible only after this minimum threshold has been cleared. But virtue requires more than clearing that threshold. It places stricter motivational constraints on agents and requires that an agent be directly motivated by some of the reasons that make her actions right.

I must now complicate things somewhat before placing my account in a broader context. There are two different dimensions along which theories can be classified that ought to be distinguished: one is the objective/subjective dimension and the other – the consequentialist/non-consequentialist one. On objectivist accounts, what matters to virtue are objective facts rather than factors internal to agency, while the reverse is true of subjectivist views. Both consequentialist and non-consequentialist

¹³ Skorupski, in his "Externalism and Self-Governance," suggests that on Driver's view, a person may not be able to determine what the right thing to do is through deliberation. Driver, "Response to My Critics," 38 responds, correctly, that this is a feature and not a bug of her account.

accounts can be objectivist as well as subjectivist. One can, for instance, have an objectivist but non-consequentialist account on which virtues are dispositions to do what one has an objective duty to do and perhaps, to go over and beyond the call of duty, no matter for what reasons one acts. More familiarly, one can have a subjectivist consequentialist account on which virtues are dispositions to bring about good expected consequences, where expected consequences may differ – possibly radically – from objective consequences (since we can be mistaken about what would in fact bring about good consequences).

In speaking about consequentialism here, I have in mind objectivist versions of consequentialism such as Driver's. Of the two elements – consequentialist and objectivist – the objectivist element is the crucial one. My claim is that whether some disposition is a good candidate for the label "virtue" in general is a matter of objective considerations. I happen to think also that among objective considerations, consequences would be key, but that is a secondary point. I do not insist on a consequentialist account of rightness. I spoke in broad strokes of consequences for other people. I intend my view to be compatible with an account of rightness that accommodates partiality constraints, whether or not those can rightly figure in a consequentialist theory. The view is really one about the connection between the reasons that make actions right, the reasons we have to cultivate dispositions to perform actions of a certain type, and a virtuous person's reasons for action. A person may be morally lucky when, in the absence of any commitment to curb the pursuit of her own goals, she consistently does what there is an objective moral reason to do, say because society is structured in such a way that this is not only possible but likely. (People have an incentive to do the morally right thing in almost every case.) She is minimally decent when she accepts certain constraints: like the cancer researcher in pursuit of fame, it is really her own good that she is after, but she only pursues her good in ways that align with the social good. She is virtuous when she possesses dispositions whose motivational component is in line with the objective reasons that make those dispositions desirable from a social point of view.

Let me now place this account in a broader context. As a society, we recognize that the desires and interests of different people often fail to align. In societies at a certain stage of moral development, clashes of interests are not resolved by brute force but in one of two ways: either through moral behavior (one or both parties show willingness to act in ways that do not promote their own interests) or by making changes to the system so that the interests of an individual person align with those of other people, as when we offer rewards for socially desirable behaviors and for outcomes such as finding cures for diseases or saving people in burning buildings. Promoting the good of others while at the same time promoting one's own good is in general always permissible, and the disposition to do so is not vicious. Promoting the good of others without an incentive or a self-interested reason is better than permissible – it is virtuous.

Since virtue requires a particular kind of motivation, there is a danger of losing sight of what *else* it might require. This is how Hume's monk may be led to believe that he is acting virtuously: he is doing something that requires a cost to oneself, a kind of self-sacrifice, without a tangible reward. The monk may, thus, feel virtuous in the act of self-flagellation, because self-flagellation is costly and unpleasant. Something similar is true of a person whose compassion for a sibling addicted to heroin enables the addiction: the enabler may not experience her action as costly, but she likely experiences her motivation as caring and compassionate. Actions that are not justified, however, cannot be virtuous, and justification is not guaranteed by the nature of one's motives.

On the other hand, since consequences for others are of great import, it may seem that a disposition to bring about good consequences is a virtue, however motivated. That's the consequentialist proposal. I argued that this proposal is not right as it stands but that it gets something important right.

This is the view in a nutshell, then: virtues are dispositions with a motivational component that's closely aligned with the objective reasons that recommend a certain type of behavior. There are some complications I shall return to, but first, I wish to address possible responses on behalf of motivationalists and consequentialists.

3. *The consequentialist's retort*

Consequentialists may argue that we don't really need a commitment to moral constraints much less intentions to act for moral reasons. It only seems that we do, because without such a constraint, we are unlikely to bring about good consequences reliably. But it is really the systematicity that matters in the end, not the motivation. This is Driver's view.

The problem here is that people can produce good consequences systematically yet for utterly selfish reasons. Intuitively, dispositions to do so do not amount to virtues. Julia Driver considers such dispositions. Initially, she gives a kind of bullet-biting response, suggesting that they *may* be virtues:

It is conceivable, à la Mandeville, that a motive of selfishness could produce a great deal of public good (Mandeville 1970). The motive here is self-oriented, though the good actually produced could be solely the public good. Good motives are important, so being motivated by a desire to see others happy usually produces good, because motives give rise to intentions that in turn typically give rise to actions guided by the intentions (and intentions can in turn give rise to motives). But it may be that a motive of self-interest produces good for others as well – and, if so, that motive forms part of the virtue. The virtue would be a disposition cluster consisting of tendencies to be motivated and forming beliefs in certain ways that produce good action.¹⁴

Later, however, in response to an objection from Onora O'Neill to the effect that on Driver's view, Ayn Rand may turn out to be right that selfishness is a virtue,¹⁵ Driver says:

O'Neill cites the case of Ayn Rand, and her view that selfishness is indeed a virtue. But of course it is not enough to show that sometimes selfishness has good effects. I believe Rand to be quite mistaken. The good effects must be systematic and outweigh the bad effects also produced by the trait. So, while it is indeed possible that selfishness could turn out to be a virtue, the empirical claims necessary to support this seem wildly implausible to me.¹⁶

There are two main points Driver makes, then. The first is that a selfish disposition to behave well cannot, as an empirical matter, be expected to reliably lead to good consequences, so if we define virtues as stable and reliable dispositions to produce good, a selfish disposition that leads to socially beneficial consequences will not be a virtuous one, which is presumably the conclusion we want.

However, a selfish disposition may well be reliably beneficial if society is structured in such a way that self-interest and the social good are closely aligned, as when people can expect to get rewarded for

¹⁴ Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, 91.

¹⁵ Onora O'Neill, "Consequences for Non-Consequentialists," *Utilitas* 16-1 (2004): 1–11.

¹⁶ Driver, "Response to Critics," 34.

acting well and punished for acting badly. A thoroughly selfish agent who is good at promoting her own long-term interests would then act well consistently.

Second, a selfish disposition subject to the motivational constraints I outline here is reliable as well, perhaps even more so (since it is likely to endure even when external inducements do not properly incentivize good behavior and disincentivize bad behavior). What makes it reliable – or more reliable than external inducements alone – are the motivational constraints. This disposition is not thereby virtuous, though it is not a vicious one either. I would like to say it is minimally decent.

Mere reliability, then, does not suffice. Indeed, reliability produced via endorsement of moral constraints does not suffice for virtue either but only for lack of vice.

But why think that I am right, and Driver is wrong? What reason do we have to resist thorough-going consequentialism? Maybe, we intuitively shrink from it, because we assume, a philosopher's stipulations notwithstanding, that good behavior cannot be reliably produced without good motives, and we don't want people to believe otherwise. Yet suppose for the sake of argument that reliably good behavior can be produced without good internal states. If we still wish to insist on the claim that internal states are necessary for virtue, we have to give a reason, a reason that points to a source of value independent of consequences.

There is, I think, such an independent source of value. In fact, Driver herself acknowledges, possibly unwittingly, this source, writing:

[E]ven if it turns out that the good intentions ensure better consequences with respect to all human characteristics, this would not be sufficient to show that the traits that will still produce good without the good intentions and motives are not moral virtues. People who regard only the best traits as moral virtues are maximizers, and subject to all the problems that a maximizing requirement places on a theory.¹⁷

In this passage, Driver contaminates, so to speak, objectivist consequentialism by implicitly acknowledging that an independent source of value relevant to virtue exists. If, as Driver says, dispositions would in fact be better ("best traits") when they not only produced good consequences but were motivated in a particular way, then motivation matters to virtue. But it seems to me that there is no good reason to go for this type of compromised consequentialism. Pure consequentialism, while it may sacrifice some of our intuitions about virtue, promises a kind of appealing theoretical purity. Compromised consequentialism sacrifices our intuitions (intuitively, Kant's grocer is not virtuous though he is not vicious either) without a corresponding theoretical benefit such as explanatory simplicity. If we accept that good motives make already virtuous dispositions morally better (that is, more virtuous), why not accept that good motives make non-virtuous dispositions virtuous?

Let us suppose, however, that in this passage, Driver has slipped, and that she actually intends to deny a second source of value relevant to virtue and wishes to accept, instead, pure consequentialism of an objectivist variety. Pure consequentialism promises a kind of theoretical neatness but at a steep price: at the cost of sacrificing our intuitions about what matters morally. We do not, in general, suppose that we can know whether people have some virtue or not unless we have some sense of what motivates them, what they think and feel. It simply wouldn't do for the consequentialist to say that

¹⁷ Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, 58.

the only reason we care (or should care) about those things is fear of unreliability. Dispositions to behave reliably may well exist in the absence of moral motivation. As I see things, the main problem for the consequentialist here is that there is no theoretical advantage to saying that such dispositions would be virtues. The claim that they would is simply an implication – and not a fortunate one – of the view. What is plausible about consequentialism is captured by my view. And what is plausible is the observation that the way to determine whether some type of behavior should be promoted is to look at its consequences, not its motives. If, by contrast, we want to know whether the disposition to exhibit said behavior – saving drowning children, for instance – is a virtue in a particular person or not, we have to know how that disposition is motivated.

There is a final point about consequentialism I wish to make. It is unclear how a pure consequentialist account can explain why virtues can only be possessed by rational agents and not, for instance, by unthinking robots, lacking consciousness. Driver rules out this latter possibility by simply stipulating that virtues are dispositions of character and require the ability to form intentions.¹⁸ But this stipulation is *ad hoc*.¹⁹ There is certainly no *consequentialist* reason to make it. One wonders why it matters that an agent possess the ability to form intentions if the nature of the intentions – whether they are good or bad – doesn't matter. Earlier, we were told that the nature of the intentions doesn't matter, because good consequences could be produced without a good intention. But of course, good consequences can be produced with no intention at all, and the only reason to rule out the possibility of a virtuous unthinking robot is a non-consequentialist one: this possibility is implausible and would make the view implausible. Once again, in order to make consequentialism palatable, we have to compromise it.

4. *The motivationalist's retort*

A committed motivationalist, on the other hand, can say two things. First, she can appeal to cases in which virtues and vices can be ascribed to a person solely on the basis of motivation and contend that motivational states alone suffice for vice and virtue. Second, she can argue that even when inner states have consequences, it is not the consequences *per se* that matter but the motivation to bring them or not to bring them about. More generally, the motivationalist can claim that what makes our actions right or justified is, in the end, the motives. Perhaps, the motivation of Hume's monk or the compassionate person who ends up enabling her sister's addiction are not unassailable, and the resulting dispositions are flawed to the extent the underlying motivation is flawed. I will take these points in order.

Earlier, I mentioned the case of a person with locked-in syndrome who cannot do anything but whose inner states may nonetheless be subject to moral evaluation, a case I borrow from Nic Bommarito.²⁰ We can think of other cases along those lines. For instance, in *1984*, George Orwell's character Winston describes a scene from a war film he'd seen. In the scene, a mother attempts to protect her young son from a bomb explosion though she knows she cannot. Winston says that she was:

¹⁸ Driver, "Response to My Critics", 35.

¹⁹ One could, perhaps, say that Driver must do this, because the word "virtue" in English refers to a type of character disposition involving the ability to form intentions. But this response will not do. For the word "virtue," as ordinarily understood, includes particular kinds of motives also – virtuous ones. Virtues are, typically, seen as incompatible with acting compulsively or for bad reasons. If one wishes to defend a revisionary account, one better be a consistent revisionist. And a consistent revisionist would have to say that the ability to form intentions is unnecessary (though it may be correlated with virtue since it may help ensure the reliability of dispositions).

²⁰ Bommarito, *Inner Virtue*.

[P]utting her arms around him and comforting him although she was blue was fright herself, all the time covering him up as much as possible as if she thought her arms could keep the bullets off him, then the helicopter planting a 20 kilo bomb in among them terrific flash and the boat went all to matchwood...²¹

Though the style of this description is stream of consciousness, with no capital letters and periods, the meaning is clear: the mother attempts to protect her son in a way that is bound to be ineffectual. Her arms won't fend off bullets, much less a bomb. Yet the mother does just what we expect a good parent to do.

But both Orwell's ineffectual mother and Bommarito's good locked-in person examples involve situations in which the minimum threshold has actually been cleared: while no good consequences are expected in either case, no bad ones are expected either. (In fact, arguably, the action of Orwell's character is not completely without good consequences, it is just that the good consequences are very short-lived – the child likely is comforted for a few seconds.) So virtue is incompatible with aiming to bring about bad consequences.

What about vice? Could dispositions be *vicious* without aiming to bring about bad consequences? Could the schadenfreude of a person with locked-in syndrome or the secret envy of an ordinary person amount to vices despite being, as it were, consequentially impotent?

One possible response we can give is to say that motivational patterns of this sort that have no consequences are not really vices. This is Thomas Nagel's view. Nagel (1998) argues that our private mental lives considered in isolation are not a proper subject of public moral standards.²² I have some sympathy with this line of argument, but I believe Nagel takes it too far. Sometimes, it is quite appropriate to morally evaluate our own psychological and motivational states independently of consequences.²³

Another, and in my view more promising, response is to introduce an asymmetry of sorts between virtue and vice and say that while virtue requires at minimum a commitment to avoiding bad consequences, vice can exist without disregard of bad consequences, let alone a desire to bring such consequences about. The secretly envious person need neither bring about nor aim to bring about bad consequences in order to have a deficient character. She may, in fact, be committed to not bringing about bad consequences. However, we must note also that such impotent vices – assuming they are vices at all – would pale in comparison to vices that come without a neutralizing commitment to avoiding bad consequences.

The motivationalist can, for all that, insist that thorough-going motivationalism remains undefeated. This is her second point. She can argue that consequences don't really matter to virtue, but that at most, a commitment to bringing about one or another set of consequences matters, and this commitment is an internal state.

²¹ George Orwell, *1984* (New York, NY: Signet Classics, 1966), 8–9.

²² Thomas Nagel, "Concealment and Exposure," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 27-1 (1998), 3–30.

²³ I argue for this point in my "Envy's Non-Innocent Victims," *Journal of Philosophy of Emotion* 1-1 (2019): 1–22.

One can resist this line of argument by saying that the motivation to bring about or not to bring about certain consequences matters only because the consequences matter. Consider, for instance, what H. W. B. Joseph says about W. D. Ross's attempt to sever the link between the right and the good:

Why... ought I to do that, the doing which has no value (though my being moved to do it by the consciousness that I ought, has), and which being done causes nothing to be which has value? Is not duty in such a case irrational?²⁴

Joseph points out something important. A virtuous person must hold that consequences matter. But to say this is not enough since consequences may very well matter without mattering to individual virtue. All that matters to individual virtue, one may insist, is motivation. A motivationalist who offers this response but wishes to hold also that Hume's monk or the compassionate sibling who serves as an addiction enabler do not, in the end, possess virtuous motivation can argue that, perhaps, the motives of those agents are, while not bad, somehow defective.

I don't think this response succeeds. While it is true that in some cases, a failure to properly consider the full range of an action's consequences may be due to deficient motivation, in other cases, it may not be. It may, instead, be due to a purely epistemic failure on the agent's part or even to ignorance about facts without epistemic failure. Worse still, it may not be due to anything properly described as a failure, whether cognitive or motivational. Beating one's children with the aim of bringing them up as good citizens was never virtuous, even though when corporal punishment was the norm, the disposition to beat one's children may have involved no failure on an individual agent's part, either cognitive or motivational. One can, in fact, imagine a parent who had no desire to beat her children at all but who thought she should, because this is what responsible parents did. Such a person's disposition to beat her children would not be a virtuous one though it may be one that is not blameworthy.²⁵

Last but not least, there are at least some virtues that involve an element of skill and are not plausibly seen as a matter of motivation alone. Consider tactfulness: no one can be tactful if she keeps making blunders and offending people, no matter how good her motivation is. To insist that necessarily, there would have to be something wrong with the motivation of the person who, like Mrs. Malaprop, keeps making *faux pas* and saying offensive things is to defend the indefensible. Mrs. Malaprop may be tactless even though she is fully motivated to be tactful.²⁶

5. Conclusion

²⁴ H. W. B. Joseph, *Some Problems in Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931), 26 quoted at Jonathan Dancy, "Should We Pass the Buck?", *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 47 (2000): 159–173, 160.

²⁵ It may be that when a person is blameless, as this imaginary parent arguably is, she cannot possess a vice. But she does not have a virtue either despite best intentions.

²⁶ Perhaps, one can say that traits such as tactfulness that have a strong skill component are not really moral virtues. Maybe, Mrs. Malaprop is tactless but morally virtuous. But I don't think this response succeeds. Kindness, for instance – an indisputably moral virtue – has a skill component as well. Consider the misguided attempts to comfort her described by physician Azra Raza. After she lost her husband, her friends, in an attempt to offer consolation, said all manner of inappropriate things, for instance, one friend told her not to worry as she would soon be reunited with her husband, which of course, implies that she would die soon. See "Azra Raza on The First Cell," *EconTalk*, March 23, 2020 available at: <https://www.econtalk.org/azra-raza-on-the-first-cell/>. In all likelihood, the person who said that was trying to be kind and helpful.

I promised to develop an account that does justice to both motivationalist and consequentialist intuitions, one that illuminates the connections between virtues and vices on the one hand, and consequences and motives, on the other. I have now accomplished my task. I argued that in principle, objective reasons – perhaps, primarily consequences though not only – are what makes a type of behavior worthy of the label “virtue” in general, not the motive. Objective reasons may also make it so that a well-intentioned and blameless agent – such as the parent described at the end of the last section – cannot possess a virtue. However, individual virtues and vices depend not simply on what one does or how consistently, but on why one does it, that is, they depend on motives, and a person is virtuous to the extent that her motivation is in line with the objective reasons. She lacks virtue altogether if there is no motivational connection, even when she is morally lucky and ends up doing what there is reason to do purely because of external inducements. She is minimally morally decent when she accepts certain constraints on her behavior. She is virtuous when her motives are not simply constrained by but in line with the objective good. I consider my strategy to be an improved version of Aristotle’s strategy, one that aims to explain what is plausible about both consequentialism and motivationalism.²⁷

I do not wish to engage in extended interpretation of Aristotle here, but I will note that Driver is right about the following: an account of virtue that involves such a strong knowledge requirement that it makes it impossible for us to ascribe any virtue to Huck Finn is flawed. To that extent, Aristotle’s view is flawed. But the objection does not apply to my view. I spoke broadly about one’s motives and intentions being “in line with” the objective moral reasons in part because I wanted to rule out a knowledge requirement. Huck is virtuous to the extent that he is motivated by the objective reasons to act as he does, even if he does not appreciate the normative force of those reasons.²⁸

There is a final point I wish to make before closing this discussion. I believe that objective consequences are key not simply in finding out what dispositions ought to be promoted and considered virtuous but in determining the extent to which conflicts of interests between people or between all of us and the universe, so to speak, should be resolved through the cultivation of virtue. It is often possible to improve the world and the social system in ways that make virtue less necessary. I take it that labor-saving devices are just such an improvement: one that makes life better despite, perhaps, making us lazier than we would otherwise be. I do not wish to take this point to an extreme. There may well be value in the cultivation of strengths of character such that even if we lived in a paradise in which no one needed to work, it would be better to do some work. My point is simply that this value need not be paramount. It is certainly not so important that we ought to refrain from improving the world for fear of worsening our characters.²⁹

²⁷ It is worth noting that Aristotle may not have had a conception of moral virtue as we understand it as he may not have had a conception of morality. David Wolfsdorf, “Morality and Aristotelian Character Excellence,” *Questions of Character*, edited by Iskra Fileva (New York, NY: 2016), 19–32 makes a strong case for this view, but for present purposes, this doesn’t matter. It is a disagreement about what moral reasons there are. The issue that interests me is premised on the assumption that that can be determined. Once it is, we must then ask how virtue relates to those reasons, whatever they are, on the one hand, and to motives and intentions, on the other.

²⁸ He is motivated by something like a desire to help Jim escape slavery though he doesn’t believe helping people escape slavery is the right thing to do. On this point, see also Julia Markovits, “Acting for the Right Reasons,” *Philosophical Review* 119-2 (2010): 201–242.

²⁹ It is consequentialists, I think, who are best positioned to accommodate this point. Motivationalists need not demur, however. It is just that nothing follows from their account as to the question of how important virtue is compared to other values. That question is separate from the question of what virtue is.

