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# CHARACTER ETHICS AND MORAL WISDOM<sup>1</sup>

Robert C. Roberts

A particular conception of the enterprise of character ethics is proposed, in which the central preoccupation of the discipline is to explore the logical-psychological features of particular virtues. An attraction of this approach is the prospect it holds out of promoting in its practitioners and readers the virtue of moral wisdom. Such analysis is sensitive to differences among moral traditions which imply differences in the logical-psychological features of versions of types of virtues. Thus Christian generosity could be expected to have some features which differentiate it from Aristotelian or Stoic generosity. On the proposed view, the aim is not to produce a theory of the virtues which, it is argued, is likely to be reductivist and thus systematically distorting. Instead, the aim is to produce "grammatical" analyses of them. To this end a series of open-ended questions are provided, to guide the exploration. The method is illustrated by a schematic analysis of the virtue of gratitude. The paper ends with remarks about the power and limits of such analysis to produce moral wisdom.

## *Introduction*

When I was younger, my conscience was often uneasy about doing philosophy. It was fascinating, stimulating, a context for showing conceptual ingenuity, affording, from time to time, the kind of satisfaction that I imagine good chess players feel when with unusual flair they polish off a challenging opponent. But where was it all going? Could philosophy be, in any serious sense, a contribution to human life? Was it any more than a private amusement for me and my intellectual friends? Might I do myself, or anybody else, any good by pursuing philosophy? Its institutional backing reassured me a little: People who had some talent for it could be paid to study it under the supervision of highly intelligent people at great universities; and persons who showed cleverness and perseverance there might draw a salary the rest of their lives for teaching other people to do it. Surely these institutions would never have been set up for philosophy if somebody hadn't seen some intrinsic or instrumental value in it. I was also reassured by the historical veneration received by such greats as Plato and Aristotle, Leibniz, Kant, and Wittgenstein. Surely so much of history cannot have been daftly misguided.

But such external reassurances served poorly my moral comfort. With ambivalence that continued right into the early years of my teaching ca-



reer, I allayed my uneasiness a little by focusing philosophical activity on ethics and religion. Ethics, surely, was central to the life of every day and everyone. The philosophical ethics I grew up with, and later subjected my students to, was dominated by questions about the foundations of obligation and the semantic status of ethical discourse. I taught my students about the nature and application of the categorical imperative and the problems it faces. We rehearsed the versions of utilitarianism and their theoretical problems; and we looked at social contract theory and divine command theory and pursued the questions of “meta-ethics”: Are ethical sentences fact-claiming? Or merely expressions of preference? Or universal prescriptions? Or what? And if they do make any non-subjective factual claim, what kind of claim is it, and is it plausible?

These discussions struck both me and my students as ethically arid, though the brighter of my students liked the intellectual sport and took it from me that the questions must be important. And I delighted ambivalently in the subtleties of the discussion and took it from the philosophical establishment that the discussion must be important. It was about this time that Bernard Williams remarked, in the Preface to his little book *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*, that “Contemporary moral philosophy has found an original way of being boring, which is by not discussing moral issues at all.”<sup>2</sup>

Reacting, I think, to the aridity and irrelevance of this kind of moral philosophy, thinkers took increasing interest in applying their critical and constructive skills in two “new” areas of ethics. One was that of practical ethical problems such as arise in medicine, biological science, business, the military, race and gender relations, and so forth. Here it seemed that philosophers might apply their special talents and skills to the actual improvement of ethical decisions. The other area was that of the character and moral psychology of individuals and communities. Inquiry into character, too, seemed to hold out a promise of usefulness. If problem-centered ethical inquiry might improve public policy and individual decision-making, perhaps character ethics could be hoped somehow to improve people’s character.

#### *Wisdom as an Aim of Moral Philosophy*

One moral effect that I have hoped for from inquiries in the ethics of character is the formation of practical or moral wisdom. Wisdom in this sense is a rather rare kind of heartfelt and articulate knowledge of what is morally good for people. It is articulate in two senses. It is a power of discernment in the details of the moral life — not just a mastery of broad principles, or a capacity to think abstractly about morality, but an ability to think clearly and justly and concretely about the *joints* of the moral life that are indicated by such words as ‘justice,’ ‘anxiety,’ ‘generosity,’ ‘happiness,’ ‘trust,’ ‘humility,’ ‘shame,’ ‘self-control,’ ‘guilt,’ ‘despair,’ ‘gratitude,’ ‘friend,’ and many others. Thus moral wisdom descends to the particulars, to the actual problems of living, following the articulations of the moral life in ways that pinch and form and edify people who explore them. It is also articulate in the less original but more ordinary sense of the word: The person of moral wisdom not only understands moral geography in some

detail, but is able to talk or write clearly about it, and so is fit in some small way to pass his wisdom on to others.

In the same Preface from which I just quoted, Williams goes on to say,

Certainly the trouble is not, as some pretend, that if the philosopher is not patently detached and even methodological, then he must be *preaching*; that cannot possibly be the only alternative. It is rather a stylistic problem, in the deepest sense of 'style' in which to discover the right style is to discover what you are really trying to do (p.xi).

One can think of the present paper as an essay on philosophical style, an effort to discover and articulate just what I want to do as a moral philosopher. You will discover that I am less cautious about keeping the moral philosopher from preaching than Williams is; though *philosophical* preaching (and philosophical pastoral work in general) will have its distinctives. And I'm willing to introduce a bit of procedure into the pursuit of moral wisdom, without fear that it will objectify ethics to the point of evaporating its subject-matter.

Let me give some historical examples of what I have called moral wisdom. Socrates seems to have been a wise man in this sense. Most of the words that Plato attributes to him do not particularly show the tendency; but it is indicated when Socrates describes his daily mission in the marketplace as that of trying to teach people "to make your first and chief concern not for your bodies nor for your possessions, but for the highest welfare of your souls" (*Apology* 30b, translated by Hugh Tredennick<sup>3</sup>) and when Alcibiades declares that Socrates

talks about pack asses and blacksmiths and shoemakers and tanners, and he always seems to be saying the same old thing in just the same old way, so that anyone who wasn't used to his style and wasn't very quick on the uptake would naturally take it for the most utter nonsense. But if you open up his arguments, and really get into the skin of them, you'll find that they're the only arguments in the world that have any sense at all and that nobody else's are so godlike, so rich in images of virtue, or so...entirely pertinent to those inquiries that help the seeker on his way to the goal of true nobility (*Symposium* 221e-222a, translated by Michael Joyce<sup>4</sup>).

The Stoics were of course specialists in this kind of wisdom (see, for example, the *Enchiridion* of Epictetus, the moral epistles of Seneca). Thomas Aquinas's *style* is perhaps not optimally edifying, but his discussions of the virtues and vices contain some examples of insights such as I have in mind. The following thoughts can be found in his question on the virtue of liberality in his *Summa Theologiae*, Second Part of the Second Part, Question 117:

"Generosity...has its being not in the amount given but in the disposition of the giver." "The sentiment is what determines whether a gift is handsome or niggardly and gives the gift its value." Generosity or the lack thereof is indicated by such passions as "pleasure or

sorrow with regard to what is given." Motives like the desire to show off, or the desire to help someone rob others, rule out the generosity of an act; a motive essential for generosity is the well-being of others. The generous person is free from undue attachment to what he or she gives away, but the generous person "knows the value of money." "The more indebtedness there is, the less is payment an act of generosity."<sup>5</sup> As just, one gives another what belongs to the other; as generous, one gives another what belongs to oneself.

Samuel Johnson's *Rambler* essays<sup>6</sup> display the kind of wisdom I am thinking of:

The understanding of a man, naturally sanguine, may indeed be easily vitiated by the luxurious indulgence of hope, however necessary to the production of everything great or excellent, as some plants are destroyed by too open exposure to that sun which gives life and beauty to the vegetable world ("On Looking Into Futurity").

The great art, therefore, of piety, and the end for which all religious rites seem to be instituted, is the perpetual renovation of the motives to virtue by a voluntary employment of our mind in the contemplation of its excellence, its importance, and its necessity, which, in proportion as they are more frequently and more willingly revolved, gain a more forcible and permanent influence till in time they become the reigning ideas and standing principles of action and the test by which everything proposed to the judgment is rejected or approved ("Uses of Retirement").

A frequent and attentive prospect of that moment which must put a period to all our schemes and deprive us of all our acquisitions is indeed of the utmost efficacy to the just and rational regulation of our lives; nor would ever anything wicked, or often anything absurd, be undertaken or prosecuted by him who should begin every day with a serious reflection that he is born to die ("Contemplation of Death").

The moral interests and judgment evident in such novels as George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and *The Mill on the Floss* make them another example of what I have in mind. A young outsider to Middlemarch, Tertius Lydgate, is trying to establish a medical practice there. He finds himself caught in the local politics of religious factions, and is forced to vote on whether to remove a perfectly good hospital chaplain so as to replace him with an evangelical. The one designated for ouster, the Rev. Camden Farebrother, warns him about inconvenient consequences if Lydgate takes his side. In this connection, Eliot narrates some impressive moral reflection:

That, entering into Lydgate's position as a newcomer who had his own professional objects to secure, Mr. Farebrother should have taken pains rather to warn off than to obtain his interest, showed an unusual delicacy and generosity, which Lydgate's nature was keenly alive to. It went along with other points of conduct in Mr. Farebrother which were exceptionally fine and made his character resem-

ble those southern landscapes which seem divided between natural grandeur and social slovenliness. Very few men could have been as filial and chivalrous as he was to the mother, aunt, and sister, whose dependence on him had in many ways shaped his life rather uneasily for himself; few men who feel the pressure of small needs are so nobly resolute not to dress up their inevitably self-interested desires in a pretext of better motives. In these matters [Farebrother] was conscious that his life would bear the closest scrutiny, and perhaps the consciousness encouraged a little defiance towards the critical strictness of persons whose celestial intimacies seemed not to improve their domestic manners and whose lofty aims were not needed to account for their actions (Chapter XVIII).

This is moral discourse that bristles with understanding. Is there anything philosophy might do to help prepare people to think, speak, and write so well about the moral life? Søren Kierkegaard is sometimes regarded as a philosopher, and his writings are rich in wisdom of this sort. A recent book that I would also like to mention is *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, by Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.<sup>7</sup>

These writers have acquired an understanding of the moral life that strikes me as an essential *kind* of understanding for a philosopher to have — an understanding that is central to all moral understanding and ought to precede any other intellectual inquiries concerning morality. Yet it seems that few professionally trained philosophers, whether ethical theorists, meta-ethicists, problem-centered ethicists, or virtue ethicists, have this kind of understanding in any unusually high degree. In the twentieth century, most mainstream philosophical ethics has not shown so much as an interest in acquiring wisdom in this sense, and consequently has not undertaken to find a way by which it might be fostered.

### *Exploring the Virtues*

In the late 1960s I was studying at Yale Divinity School, and Paul Holmer taught courses on such topics as “Emotions, Passions, and Feelings” and “Virtues and Vices”. In the catalog, these didn’t fall under the rubric of ethics courses, but it occurred to me, even at the time, that they might have. And they were very different from anything that was then being called ethics. Readings were from Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Spinoza, Kierkegaard, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, John Henry Newman, and the more psychological writings of the analytic philosophers of the time, Gilbert Ryle and Peter Strawson and many lesser lights. The project was to do a bit of what Elizabeth Anscombe commends in her “Modern Moral Philosophy”<sup>8</sup>, namely conceptual analysis of psychological concepts bearing on ethical life. The concepts of emotion, feeling, and mood loomed large, as well as particular emotion concepts like remorse, awe, anxiety and peace, hope, and joy; pleasure and happiness also came in for scrutiny, as did intention and action, and finally the concept of virtue and the concept of particular virtues such as temperance, meekness, charity, and faith.

It seemed to me then, and it still seems to me, that the concepts of the particular virtues are the crown and center of this enterprise, and that the other psychological concepts are of ethical interest insofar as they are players in the story that we tell about such virtues as generosity, faith, hope, practical wisdom, patience, and humility. What is character ethics without an understanding of the traits that constitute ethical character? Are we to assume that no exploration is needed here because everybody's understanding of these traits is perfectly clear and we know very well what the virtues are? One of the wonders of philosophy, to me, is its ability to uncover arresting and enlightening features of concepts that we use every day. It seems to me that one *ethical* service that philosophy can do us is to give us a perspicuous and thus moving representation of the character ideals of the moral life. If it can do that, then ethical philosophy can provide a strong voice calling us to live our lives well.

Joel Kupperman has contrasted character ethics with virtue ethics and argued the superiority of character ethics.<sup>9</sup> If ethical analysis is focused on individual virtues, says Kupperman, it will not clarify how a trait that is designed for a particular kind of life-situation can have implications for our attitudes and behavior in other kinds of situation. For example, virtue ethics cannot explain why a generous person is inclined to notice other people's need for help, or how generosity affects a person's view of her social world even in cases where generous behavior is not called for (107-108). Character ethics, which in Kupperman's view does not center on individual virtues, is capable of clarifying these matters, and so is superior to virtue ethics.

This is a bad argument inasmuch as it makes some very unrealistic or invidious assumptions. It assumes that the analyst who focuses on individual virtues does not notice the complex interconnections between the trait she is presently analyzing and other virtues, and that she does not notice that virtues are dimensions of a person's character, traits that go more or less to the heart of the person as such. Thus the argument presupposes that the virtue ethicist has a very superficial understanding of virtues. For it is surely part of the analysis of generosity to display the special perceptive capacities of the generous person, and to show how this trait is not merely a disposition to emit outwardly "generous" behavior, but a basic structure of personality or character, all tied up with perception, judgment, and motivation.<sup>10</sup> And it is surely a misconception of virtue to think that a virtue like generosity can be understood in isolation from such other virtues as justice, compassion, forgiveness, temperance, friendship, self-respect, and many others. If we have a good understanding of what a virtue is, then to study character just *is* to study the virtues, and to study the virtues is to study character. In a footnote to his argument, Kupperman admits that if the thesis of the unity of the virtues were true,

virtue-ethics would be immune from the criticisms just leveled in the text and would have no more disadvantages than does character-ethics. Indeed, the two would become indistinguishable (113).

I think the expression 'the unity of the virtues' is misleading and has generated false claims. It is false to claim that a person cannot have any virtue

without having all the virtues. It is empirically obvious that people differ in the configuration of their virtues, and that some good people lack (in some appropriate sense of the word) some of the virtues. The moral personality is not such a lock-step machine that if one cog is missing all the other virtues grind to a halt. For example, a person might be unusually forgiving, and yet a glutton. And yet it is clear that the virtues are intricately interconnected: the virtue of justice is likely to be compromised in a person who is short on generosity. As a judge, for example, such a person is likely to have blind spots which more generosity or compassion would enlighten. So I prefer to speak of the "interconnection of the virtues" rather than "the unity of the virtues." The virtues are interconnected in rich, various and complex ways, which may vary from one moral outlook to another, and which can be established and revealed, in detail, only through careful examination of individual virtues in their settings in particular moral outlooks. But once these interconnections are displayed, the weaknesses that Kupperman thinks he discerns in virtue ethics all disappear.

Kupperman's fear of focusing on particular virtues does rest on a sound intuition, however, and that is that the moral life is necessarily an integration of its aspects. And this means that character ethics will not bear the kind of fruit that I have been calling moral wisdom unless the philosopher treats of a large enough range of virtues to facilitate the display of this interconnectedness of the psychological aspects of moral life.

#### *What is a Virtue?*

Novelists and essayists like Eliot and Johnson may become wise and purvey their wisdom without much regard for the conceptual question, What is a virtue? Maybe their wisdom is more "intuitive" than what we expect from a professional philosopher. Philosophers who have explored the virtues have typically leaned on one or another general theory of virtue. Such accounts have usually been reductivist, impeding the analysis of the virtues while helping it. Every theory I know of captures something about the nature of virtues, but at the same time hides from view some virtues and features of virtues that ought to be explored. I cannot even approach an exhaustive survey of theories of virtue here, but I want to look briefly at three leading ones, as a background to proposing a nontheoretical way of exploring the virtues conceptually.

Aristotle defines a virtue as a disposition to experience passions and perform actions in a mean. "A virtue is a disposition to choose, in a mean relative to us, a mean determined by reason such as a wise person would employ" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1107a; my translation). Throughout his discussion he stresses the notion of the mean as defining virtue, and it is clear that the concept of a mean is quantitative: "Now of everything that is continuous and divisible, it is possible to take the larger part, or the smaller part, or an equal part, and these parts may be larger, smaller, and equal either with respect to the thing itself or relatively to us; the equal part being a mean between excess and deficiency" (1106a 28-29).<sup>11</sup> The supposition seems to be that actions and passions are among the things that are "continuous and divisible" (συνεχῆς καὶ διαίρητος), things whose wrongness



thus consists in their being too large or too small in amount; and whose rightness consists in their being in just the right amounts; relative to us. But it seems awkward, at best, to suppose that the *amount* of an action or a passion is the feature most relevant to its rightness or wrongness, and therefore is the feature by reference to which the goodness and badness of dispositions to actions and passions are defined.

Aristotle seems to feel the force of this observation, for he backs off from his theory (while still asserting it). Thus he frequently switches to a qualitative interpretation of virtues, and offers it as though it is just a further clarification of the theory of the mean. For example, soon after introducing the mean he comments,

one can be frightened or bold, feel desire or anger or pity, and experience pleasure and pain in general, either too much or too little, and in both cases wrongly; whereas to feel these feelings at the right time, on the right occasion, towards the right people, for the right purpose and in the right manner, is intermediate and best... (1106b19-23).<sup>12</sup>

But is it true that to feel emotions *rightly* is the same as feeling them in some medium *amount*?<sup>13</sup> Consider Evan, who has a strong sense of justice and also a kind of humility that disposes him to put the interests of others ahead of his own interests; and Louis, who is equally strongly concerned about justice, but only as it relates to his own private concerns. And let us say that they experience about equal amounts of anger, over a representative period of time. (We can think of quantity of anger as a matter of frequency, duration, and intensity of anger episodes.) The difference between Evan and Louis is in the occasions of their anger, the people they are angry at, and the reasons for their anger. Much of Evan's anger is about injustices done to other people. For example, he is angered about the corruption of public servants who siphon money away from feeding and education programs for poor children. By contrast, when somebody maneuvers, at the last moment, into a parking place for which he has been patiently waiting a couple of minutes, he shrugs off the injustice with little or no anger. Louis's anger episodes are about equal to Evan's in frequency, duration, and intensity, but he spends most of his anger on people who steal his parking places and on neighbor children who are noisy when he's trying to attend to beer drinking on his back patio; while he reads with equanimity about the theft of public funds. In sum, we could say that Louis is disposed to morally trivial anger, while Evan is disposed to get angry about significant wrongs. This example shows that virtue with respect to anger is not a disposition to experience anger in a mean, but to experience proper anger. If Aristotle thinks that Evan's anger is in a mean but Louis's isn't, then his concept of a mean is non-quantitative and eccentric.

The theory of the mean may be inspired by the virtue of temperance, which as Aristotle construes it has to do with bodily appetites such as food- and sex-hunger rather than with what we would call emotions (these could all be lumped together under Aristotle's word *πάθος*). The goodness and badness of bodily appetites may be more susceptible to a quantitative analysis (always relative to us, of course) than that of emotions. But I

have doubts about this in the case of the sexual appetite. The virtue of marital chastity (a form of temperance) probably does not consist so much in mean sexual appetite, as in sexual appetite for the spouse and little or no appetite for others. In other words, an analysis of temperance in terms of right appetite seems more plausible than an analysis in terms of the mean.

The theory of the mean discourages Aristotle from recognizing virtues that do not fit the schema. For example, he admits that the supposed virtue of *πραότης* (gentleness, mildness), which is a disposition with respect to anger, is not on the mean, since persons with this virtue tend to have less anger than is found on the mid-point between irascibility, which is the corresponding vice of excess, and the unnamed extreme on the defect side (1125b27-1126a2). By contrast, the virtue with respect to anger does not have a name (1125b27). *Πραότης*, not being a mean state, is not really a virtue, “but seems to err on the side of defect” (1126a1). But why think of *πραότης*, which seems to have been considered a virtue by Aristotle’s untheoretical contemporaries, as erring at all? Why should a virtue *not* fall on the defect side of the mean between the anger-extremes? Aristotle’s reason for thinking that it cannot appears to be his theory of the mean. The theory distorts Aristotle’s philosophical eyesight a little bit.

It also seems to keep him from identifying as virtues dispositions that empower a struggle *against* emotions. Courage, for example, might plausibly be thought to involve the ability to “handle” fears that are inappropriate in some way — either because they are disordered in themselves (say, a fear of snakes that the agent knows to be harmless), or because they are inconvenient in the circumstances (a fear of drowning might discourage a man from trying to rescue a swimmer in trouble). The courageous person would then be someone who can master such fears well enough to get on with business. Guided by his doctrine of the mean, Aristotle says that “the courageous person is he who endures or fears the right things and for the right purpose and in the right manner and at the right time, and shows confidence in the same way” (1115b18).<sup>14</sup> But even in this nonquantitative interpretation, Aristotle’s formula excludes such a power of self-management from the category of courage, since there will be no point in managing a fear unless it is in *some* way “wrong.” In general, the doctrine of the mean forces most<sup>15</sup> true virtues into the mold of temperance (*σωφροσύνη*), ruling out dispositions with the form of self-control (*ἐγκράτεια*), though Aristotle does recognize self-control as something like virtue and certainly better than self-indulgence, vice, and bestiality. Self-control, he says, is neither concerned with the same dispositions as virtue, nor does it belong to a different genus than virtue (1145b1).

If for Aristotle self-control is only a sort of quasi-virtue, and the sense of duty is not an Aristotelian virtue, for Kant virtue is paradigmatically a kind of self control, in the service of doing one’s duty.

Virtue is the strength of man’s maxim in obeying his duty. All strength is known only by the obstacles it can overcome; and in the case of virtue the obstacles are the natural inclinations, which can come into conflict with moral purpose.<sup>16</sup>

Kant tells us that a maxim is the subjective principle of volition, as contrasted with the practical law, which is the objective principle. That is, a maxim is the principle on which a person *actually* acts, or proposes to act, as contrasted with the practical law, which is the principle on which he or she *ought* to act.<sup>17</sup> So we might say that virtue is the strength of a person's disposition to conform the maxims of his actions to the law of duty, in opposition to his natural inclinations. Accordingly virtue would seem to be the disposition to attend to, and think in terms of, the categorical imperative, in such a way as to act in accordance with it. Kant agrees with classical accounts of the virtues in taking virtue to be acquired, rather than a merely natural endowment like high IQ:

this capacity as strength (*robur*) is something that must be acquired by upholding the moral incentive (the representation of the law) both through contemplating (*contemplatione*) the dignity of the pure law of reason within us and at the same time through exercise (*exercitio*) as well.<sup>18</sup>

To say that virtue is the strength of one's maxim in obeying one's duty is not to say that every act of virtue is an act of self-control in which one struggles and wins against one's natural inclinations; one can, after all, act with strength without struggling, as when a strong man lifts a light or medium-size weight. But it is to say that all virtuous action is thought of and intended as conforming to duty; that is, the subject of every virtuous act conceives his action as dutiful.

Both consequences are reductivist. Surely Aristotle is right in thinking that direct dispositions to right appetite and emotion, which do not require moral strength for their exemplification, can be virtues. And it is better to think of the sense of duty as one virtue among many than to suppose it the form of all the virtues. To revert to our example of Evan, let us say that he is angered by a news broadcast reporting official corruption in the management of poverty programs, and his anger leads him to undertake political action aimed at legislation that will reduce such corruption. In so acting, he may be doing his duty as a citizen, but his action will exemplify the virtue of justice whether or not he *thinks* of himself as doing his duty. The action exemplifies the virtue of justice by arising out of a concern that justice be done. Indeed, if he needs the motivation of considering the action his duty, we may be less inclined than otherwise to attribute to him the virtue of justice. On Kant's conception of virtue as the strength of one's maxim in acting dutifully, virtues like generosity, compassion, and friendship, virtues that are heavily characterized by inclination, will either drop out of the picture or get twisted.

David Hume offers an account of virtue that seems less theoretical and more open to the whole range of virtues than the theories of Aristotle and Kant. He proposes to apply "the experimental method" in moral philosophy, a method that contrasts with that of establishing "a general abstract principle" and then deducing ethical conclusions from it — a pattern we seem to see in Aristotle and Kant.

Men are now cured of their passion for hypotheses and systems in natural philosophy, and will hearken to no arguments but those which are derived from experience. It is full time they should attempt a like reformation in all moral disquisitions; and reject every system of ethics, however subtle or ingenious, which is not founded on fact and observation.<sup>19</sup>

He defines a virtue as any trait that pleases either its possessor or his associates, either immediately or because of its usefulness to them. But who are this possessor and his associates supposed to be, and to which uses do they propose to put traits? In effect, Hume is proposing that moral philosophers use observational and descriptive methods much like those of our own cultural anthropologists. But he does not recognize the relativistic implications of doing so. If we have learned anything from anthropology, it is that people's tastes in traits and their conceptions of utility vary culturally. They also vary within a culture — at least they do within ours. Whether a trait pleases somebody depends on the particular formation of that person's sensitivities and concerns. What appears laudable generosity to somebody formed in one way may appear detestable improvidence to someone formed differently. To avoid this relativism Hume must presuppose a "normal" generically human response pattern amidst all the cultural and individual variety of moral formations. But to do so is to be as theoretical, albeit in a very different way, as the deductivistic moralists whom Hume wishes to relegate to pre-scientific history.

Among thinkers and traditions, the variety of tastes in traits is rather principled, though not in such a way as to establish one pattern as incontrovertibly superior to its rivals. As we look at the virtue ethicists and traditions of the past, including Hume, we see that accounts of human virtue presuppose a background of distinctive and controvertible suppositions about basic human nature. Some, if not all the virtues of the Stoic, the Christian, the Aristotelian, the Kantian, and the Humean seem to be in the service of actualizing human nature as so severally conceived. Thus it is plausible to think that it is, at least partially, because of Hume's special commitments concerning human nature that he finds the "monkish" virtues of Christianity repugnant.<sup>20</sup> Not being a creature of a personal God, human nature does not, in his view, call for obedience and submission and acknowledgment of a higher power as it does for Christians. Though Hume admires the Stoics and often cites them, the Humean virtues are not Stoic, because in his view of human nature "reason" does not have the same function and dominance that it has for the Stoics. And a Christian might find Hume's version of some virtues (e.g. of chastity) repugnant, or at a minimum not very impressive as virtues. Christians will certainly find some of the traits that please Nietzsche, because of his supposition that human nature is basically a will to power, as repugnant as Nietzsche finds many of the Christian and utilitarian virtues. No doubt some things are pleasing to generic human nature — e.g. drinking water when thirsty — but there may be no set of personal traits that are deep and complex enough to count as virtues, that are pleasing to generic human nature.

I have not shown that no theory of virtue can be formulated that avoids

artificially narrowing the array of virtues or distorting the nature of some of them. However, I do mean to suggest this, as a speculation. Of course, a general enough formula might cover all the cases. For example, "A trait is a virtue if and only if it is acquired through some developmental process and is regarded by some serious moral community as good." One might object that this formula, and any like it, is not conceptually rich and particular enough either to count as a theory or to forward significantly our analysis of virtues. But my case against theories is not just that all of them are distorting. It is that even if we find one that is not, it will not be what we need if our purpose as character ethicists is to understand the virtues.

### *A Nonreductivist Proposal*

In contrast with all such theories I want to propose a way of examining virtues philosophically that will, as far as possible, not foreclose any possibilities of what traits can be virtues or what features those traits can include. Furthermore it will, I hope, yield a rich account of the internal character of each of the virtues, from which we can learn the sort of insights about the life of virtue that I earlier called wisdom.

I have suggested that virtues are highly influenced, in their internal structure, by variations in moral outlook. What may appear to casual observation to be a single cross-cultural virtue — say, courage as found in a Homeric hero, an Aristotelian citizen, a Stoic, a Christian, and a Nietzschean — is not one virtue but five, commended for quite different reasons, with perhaps just enough overlapping features to justify speaking of them all as versions of courage. Thus a great deal of vagueness, confusion, and unhelpful generalizing can be avoided by indexing comments about virtues to one moral tradition or another, speaking, for example, of Aristotelian courage and Christian courage, rather than just courage. Given a particular moral tradition, then every virtue that figures in that tradition has a rich internal logical and psychological structure the knowledge of which is capable of being moral wisdom. I now propose a way of exploring and displaying that inner structure, a way that is recognizably philosophical, yet does not depend on any theory of the virtues as a background for the exploration.

I propose that, instead of starting with a constricting definition or theory of virtue, we start with a set of questions and suppositions which we frankly own not likely to be all equally relevant to all the virtues, a pool of questions that will help us to "look" and "see" how the virtues actually go, in our tradition (or perhaps some tradition that is not our own). Here are some questions that will aid in such a mapping.

- 1) What beliefs are presupposed by the virtue in question? In particular, how is this virtue connected (if it is connected) to the picture of human nature and the world central to the moral outlook? How would the virtue differ with changes in the conception of human nature or the nature of the world?
- 2) How is this virtue connected with other virtues in the outlook? For example, how is Aristotelian courage connected with Aristotelian

justice, or friendship? How is Christian hope connected with compassion? Is it connected differently with this virtue than it is with self-control?

3) How does this virtue differ from its counterpart in some other moral outlook? How, for example, does Jewish generosity differ from its Aristotelian counterpart, or Christian compassion from some Buddhist counterpart?

4) Is the virtue associated with some single type of emotion? And if so, how is it associated with it? Does it overcome the emotion? Is having the emotion itself regarded as fulfilling, useful, or otherwise good? Or nasty, counterproductive, or demeaning? In any case, under what conditions does the evaluation hold, and what is the rationale for it? What kind of object of the emotion is characteristic of the virtue?

5) What kind of trait is the virtue, psychologically? Is it, for example, an emotion-disposition, a behavioral disposition, a skill of self-management — or something else, or some combination of these?

6) To what kind of situation of life does the virtue apply? Financial transactions? Verbal or quasi-verbal reports? Situations of danger? Situations in which other persons depend on the individual in question? Situations offering physical pleasure, personal honor?

7) What are the prepositions governing the virtue term and what is their import? What kind of object does the virtue take? For example, for what is it virtuous to hope? Towards whom is one appropriately just? compassionate? generous? grateful? honest? kind? loyal? friendly? ironical? About what is one appropriately courageous? generous? honest? proud? humble?

8) What kind of actions, if any, does the virtue issue in? In what kinds of situations are the actions characteristic of the virtue in question overridden by actions belonging to some other virtue?

9) What range of motives is proper to actions exemplifying the virtue? For example, what motives are proper to generosity, and how do these compare with the motives proper to justice or loyalty or truthfulness? Why do courage and self-control seem to be more separable from any particular range of motives than, say, compassion and generosity and forgivingness and justice? What about practical wisdom? Are its acts motivated by a characteristic range of motives? If not, why not?

10) What is (are) the counterpart vice(s) of this virtue in this moral outlook, and what are its relations to it (them)?

11) Is the virtue in question central or peripheral, essential or dispensable, to the moral outlook? And whichever it is, why is it so?

12) What is it about the trait that qualifies it as a virtue? That is, how would an insider to the moral outlook answer the question, Why do you consider *V* to be a virtue?

13) How does the moral outlook explain how someone fails to have the virtue in question? That is, what are the diagnostic concepts in the outlook, and how do they bear on the particular virtue in question?

14) What are the strategies within the moral outlook for inculcat-

ing, maintaining, or restoring the virtue in question (pedagogical strategies, moral disciplines, therapeutic interventions)? Can you discern any internal relation between these strategies and the structure of the virtue?

15) What are some traits that are likely to be mistaken for the virtue in question, and how are they similar to it and how do they differ from it? For example, how does Christian humility compare with obsequiousness, submissiveness, self-effacement, obedience, and deference? See Aristotle's discussion of courage (1116b16-1117a29), where he distinguishes his version of courage from several traits that can be mistaken for it.

These are of course just examples of questions. They overlap, and there are no doubt others that could be fruitfully asked. One question tends to lead to another, so some of the most interesting questions are peculiar to one virtue or another, and may not occur to the philosopher until the conceptual analysis is well under way. A good grammarian or mapper of the virtues has a sense for which questions to ask about the virtues, questions that will really break open the moral outlook in its psychological dimensions and show features of it that will increase moral understanding. With practice, one will get better at this inquiry. But it is also mind-expanding to ask "weird" questions. Some of the above questions might be ones that would not occur to us to ask in connection with some virtue or other that we may be investigating. It may be enlightening, then, to consult the list and ask intentionally those questions that seem not to be very natural or promising, and be tenacious enough in our pursuit of answers that we really see what an answer to them might look like, or perhaps gain a clear understanding of why the question is inappropriate.

As I see this central task of the virtue ethicist, it is like that of an exploratory cartographer who starts, not with a theory about what the land he is exploring must be like, but nevertheless with some suppositions about the likelihood that the sorts of things he will run into are woods and meadows, rivers and their valleys, lakes and mountain ranges, and is sensitive enough to notice and identify differences between one river valley and another, one kind of forest and another. Wisdom will be promoted by our having little theory, a lot of sensitivity to our moral outlook, acquaintance with some other outlooks, a range of fruitful questions, a willingness to ask weird questions, and a disposition to formulate more questions as we go along.

Indispensable to the approach to moral philosophy that I am commending is *examples* of people who possess the virtues and vices. I don't think we will get very wise if our grammar of the virtues remains quite abstract and formal. It certainly has a formality, and that is expressed in the idea of a grammar or logic; but we are talking about formalities that are the shapes of real moral personalities. In doing this kind of analysis, one needs to think about oneself, about family members and friends and other people one has known well. A nearly indispensable aid is fine literature. A great deal can be learned about moral personality from such authors as Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Jane Austen, Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor

Dostoevsky, William Faulkner, and Joseph Conrad. These authors understand the virtues and vices very well — though mostly not from the kind of analytical angle that the philosopher takes — and they present richly developed, or at least suggestive, characters in a narrative context.

Now I want to give you an example of the kind of work in moral philosophy that seems to me more likely than any other to promote the kind of understanding that I am calling moral wisdom.

*Example: The Virtue of Gratitude*

In some, but not all moral frameworks, a disposition to feel grateful to other persons in appropriate circumstances and to act on this emotion is a virtue. Christianity is one of these frameworks. The following remarks are examples of the conceptual mapping of a virtue, and you will notice that each remark “places” gratitude relative to other concepts, some of which are part of the analysis of gratitude and some of which are contrastive with the version of gratitude that I am trying to identify and delineate. To give a bit more of the impression of the skeletal or schematic or mapping nature of what I am doing, I’ll number the main remarks. The sentences following in the context are usually best taken as elaboration or explanation of the numbered sentences. Identifying the skeleton in the way these numbers do serves not only to display the shape of the skeleton, but also the way in which the skeleton by itself is not really wisdom, or if it is an expression of wisdom it is not the form in which it is most likely to be conveyed or absorbed as wisdom. Beyond the skeleton is needed the flesh that is created by imagination-captivating examples (important among which are narratives), repetition in varied terms, clarifying metaphors, and the utterance of the remarks in the living contexts of life and counsel.

1) To say that gratitude is a virtue is to say that it is an important dimension of the well-formed or mature person. If what I have said about mapping the virtues is correct, then we ought to be able to identify those features of gratitude that make it a virtue in Christianity though not in some of the other frameworks. Conceptual analysis of the virtue should help Christians understand more articulately this aspect of Christian existence and consequently to feel the “call” to live this way. In this way, philosophy may contribute to Christian wisdom.

2) Gratitude the virtue is a disposition to feel the emotion of gratitude in appropriate circumstances. 3) To experience the emotion of gratitude is gladly to perceive some agent<sup>21</sup> as *giver* of some *benefice* (gift or favor) to oneself, and thus gladly to perceive oneself as a *recipient* of some benefice from a benefactor, and thus as a kind of debtor. The concepts of giver, recipient, gift, and debtor, in the particular ways they come together in the concept of the virtue of gratitude, set the parameters for the grammar of gratitude as a virtue. Let us continue with some remarks explicitly about these foci of the perceptual state called gratitude, and move from there to some other remarks.

4) One cannot be grateful to an agency construed in completely non-personal terms. Thus if one is grateful to a thunderstorm for watering one’s spinach, the storm must be (irrationally, as it may be) “personified”. The



reason for this is that 5) the gift is construed not just as something good, but as a mark of the giver's generosity towards the recipient.<sup>22</sup> And of course thunderstorms and the like do not intend to do us favors. Further, 6) there must be a distinction of property between giver and recipient, such that the giver of gift or favor can deserve gratitude, and the recipient of gift or favor can give it. So Ralph Waldo Emerson denies the propriety of gratitude between friends because "When the waters are at level, then my goods pass to him, and his to me. All his are mine, all mine his. I say to him, How can you give me this pot of oil, or this flagon of wine, when all your oil and wine is mine, which belief of mine this gift seems to deny?"<sup>23</sup> 7) Even more fundamentally, there must be a distinction of agency between giver and recipient. As Thomas Aquinas says, "...no one can really be thankful to himself, since thanks seems to pass from one person to another".<sup>24</sup> It also seems to follow from the concept of a gift or favor that 8) to the extent that the giver's act is construed as exacting gratitude from the recipient as an obligation, gratitude becomes impossible. To return a favor out of a sense of duty is not to exemplify gratitude, though it may be to exemplify justice, because the motive of duty goes with justice but not with gratitude. Obviously, 8) rules out the virtue of gratitude for anyone, or any moral tradition, that sees all moral issues as matters of rights and duties. Nevertheless, 9) the grateful recipient construes himself as in debt to his benefactor, that is, in a debt of gratitude.

We can distinguish debts of gratitude from debts of justice in the following ways. 10) A debt of justice is one that the creditor can demand to be paid; a debt of gratitude is a debt that only the debtor can "demand" that he pay. Thus it is a freely and gladly assumed debt. 11) A debt of justice is of a *determinate amount*, established by the value of something or other, by agreement, or in some other way; a debt of gratitude is not characterized by determinate amount, but by a "spirit" of reciprocity. Thus a debt of gratitude can be paid with some very small token, as long as the "spirit" is right, or even just by some token of this spirit, such as the tone of voice or the look of a smile. 12) A debt of justice, when paid, is paid off or discharged, and thus dismissed by the (former) debtor; while a debt of gratitude, when paid, seems to the grateful person to remain. 13) A debt of justice binds one *to pay*, while a debt of gratitude binds one *to the benefactor*. 14) Despite rules 10)-13), gratitude can be regarded as an obligation, in the sense that people ought to be grateful for what they receive from others. Not only is ingratitude as a trait a moral deformity that "ought," in the interest of mature personality, to be corrected; ingratitude as a recurrent attitude or omission is a kind of injustice to the benefactor.

Further, 15) the recipient must be glad to be recipient of *this gift*. If he finds the gift repugnant, gratitude is not possible, though an emotion neighboring on gratitude is compatible with disliking the gift: If a dear friend, out of manifest affection, gives me a gift I hate (say, a velvet Elvis framed in a \$700 carved Brazilian rosewood frame with built-in lighting, that must be prominently displayed because of her frequent visits to my home), while I cannot be exactly grateful for the gift, I can be glad for the "thought" — which is to say, glad of my friend's good will and the meaning this has for our relationship. Likewise, 16) the recipient must be glad to receive this gift

from *this person*, and thus to be bound to this person by the debt of gratitude. If the recipient finds repugnant the prospect of being indebted to this particular giver, then gratitude is not possible. In this case, the recipient can be glad to have the gift, though anxious about or repulsed by or indifferent or oblivious to the meaning that it has for his relationship with the giver. For example, Will Ladislaw, in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, is indebted to the "generosity" of his cousin Mr. Casaubon, but because he hates him wishes he could dispel the debt after the manner of a debt of justice:

"He's a cursed white-blooded pedantic coxcomb," said Will, with gnashing impetuosity. His obligations to Mr. Casaubon were not known to his hearer, but Will himself was thinking of them, and wishing that he could discharge them all by a cheque (about half way through chapter 22).

So persons who do not like to be bound to anyone in a relationship of indebtedness or dependency cannot have the virtue of gratitude, for they will lack a basic aspect of this disposition. 17) It is possible to be *fully* grateful to someone for something, without being *properly* grateful. For a gift or favor may appear to be good, and a benefactor may appear to be a good one to be dependent on for some gift, without these appearances' being veridical. 18) Practical wisdom, as it arises in connection with one virtue or another — e.g. justice or chastity — allows a person to discriminate proper from improper objects of gratitude. After a public reading of a version of this paper, one audience member asked whether, if one of the participants at the meeting should offer herself sexually to some male participant, he should feel grateful. In this case, if we are speaking within a context of Jewish or Christian virtues, the virtue of chastity rules out the candidate objects of gratitude. A friendly offer of this kind by an attractive person can seem to present a genuine benefice by an appropriate benefactor, thus justifying the two gladnesses required by 15) and 16). But the chaste person will see that what is offered is in fact not good, and that the proposed benefactor is not a good one to receive this benefice from. Thus he will not be able to feel grateful for this favor, except as a moral lapse, and irrationally. The capacity to perceive as good what is good and as not good what is not good is part of practical wisdom, and in the present case is a dimension of the form of temperance called chastity.

19) Gratitude, being an emotion-disposition, can supply a motive, in contrast with some other virtues. One can, for example, act out of gratitude, by way of expressing one's gratitude; but there is no such thing as acting out of courage or self-control (one acts *with* courage or self-control). 20) To have the virtue of gratitude it is not enough to feel gratitude once or very occasionally. The virtue of gratitude is a settled *disposition* to feel the emotion of gratitude on appropriate occasions; thus a regular failure to feel the emotion, in situations that call for it, betokens a lack of the virtue.

The above remarks are probably true in every morality in which gratitude appears as a virtue. But it is not a virtue in every morality, and where it is a virtue it may have special grammatical features that are not shared between moral outlooks. For example, in Christianity 21) all gratitude,

even to human benefactors, is normatively also gratitude to God, since all benefits are ultimately referable to God. Thus, rigor will require that some remarks displaying the grammar of gratitude be indexed to some particular tradition.

Gratitude is not in Aristotle's list of virtues, since it is incompatible with the central Aristotelian virtue of magnanimity. Gratitude is a happy acknowledgment of indebtedness to another, while Aristotelian magnanimity is an awareness of and insistence on self-sufficiency. Aristotle even tells us that "the magnanimous are thought to have a good memory for any benefit they have conferred, but a bad memory for those which they have received (since the recipient of a benefit is the inferior of his benefactor, whereas they desire to be superior)" (1124b13-14).<sup>25</sup> Aristotle's view leads us to formulate another remark: 22) Gratitude is not a virtue unless it is sometimes good to be a debtor, to be dependent on the freely given benefits of another. A virtue resembling gratitude might exist in an outlook in which being indebted to another is never good in itself. For example, a mere disposition to acknowledge debts verbally (a form of politeness) might be a good trait in such a morality, because by gratifying creditors it promotes helpfulness in the community. But this virtue will differ from gratitude, which is a disposition to be glad *about one's indebtedness to certain other people*. Such an emotion would have to be irrational and thus vicious in strict Aristotelian ethics. Conversely, the Christian will regard the magnanimous man's disinclination to acknowledge his dependency on and indebtedness to others as signaling the vice of ingratitude. Thus what is a virtue in the Aristotelian scheme is a vice in the Christian one, and vice versa. Christianity is more aggressive than most moral outlooks in stressing the goodness of being a debtor inasmuch as according to the Christian scheme people are creatures of a personal God; our very life is a gift, and we are created to be indebted to one another and to enjoy that mutual indebtedness.

Gratitude has an even more elemental supposition than that expressed in rule 22), namely that 23) gratitude cannot be a virtue unless it is possible for one person to be indebted to another for significant goods. Aristotle thinks it possible but demeaning to be so indebted; a rigorous Stoicism thinks it impossible. Stoics think things that can be transferred from one person to another — what I have been calling gifts and favors — are neither good nor bad, since the only things that are good or bad are attitudes and states of character.<sup>26</sup> It also follows from the Stoic commitment to the virtue of *ἀπάθεια* — a disposition not to feel emotions in response to "externals" — that gratitude, as an emotion-disposition, would not be a virtue.

Our exploration of gratitude has shown it to be a response to circumstances that meet certain normative criteria. Thus it does not fit all circumstances, but only ones in which some gift is given or favor done to oneself, and in which the motive of the giver is generous. But in Christianity 24) it is fitting in all circumstances to feel gratitude, since the circumstance of God's having given us eternal life in Jesus Christ prevails in and transcends all the lesser, daily, changing circumstances of our life. The Christian is disposed to give God thanks for what in almost any outlook would be regarded as goods — adequate food and shelter, physical safety, health, the well-being of family and friends, meaningful work, and free-

dom of movement and speech — but the Christian sees the goodness of such goods in the enhanced light of God's generosity in Christ. In the spiritually mature Christian the sense of God's generosity is so pervasively transforming that even when the "ordinary" goods of life are wrenchingly absent — when physical dangers beset us, when we are oppressed by enemies, when our children are destroyed — we may be able to see God's goodness upholding us. Heartfelt gratitude in such contradictory circumstances is rightly thought to be a special grace of God's holy spirit, beyond anything that merely human devices of moral formation could achieve.

#### *Sources and Form of Wisdom*

I have sketched a way of thinking philosophically about ethical topics that may have some promise of helping moral philosophy to be a source of wisdom. Two assumptions lie behind this hope: First, conceptual clarity about the nature of the virtues is a significant part of moral wisdom. And second, philosophical work, when applied to virtue concepts, can remind us of the nature of the virtues, bringing to articulate awareness features of the moral life, as our tradition understands it, of which, through poor training, we may be only dimly aware, or about which we may have become forgetful or dulled.

Moral wisdom, as I have referred to it throughout this paper, is a *keen understanding of the moral life*. 'Keen' is a nicely ambiguous word for my purpose, inasmuch as it can mean both *finely discriminating* and *passionately interested*. The edge of a knife is keen when it can cut a fine slice, and a person is keen on something when it grips her. Morally these two kinds of keenness are inseparable. To be finely and appropriately discriminating, one must care deeply about the objects of virtue; and one cannot care deeply about the *very* objects of virtue, without being pretty discriminating. I have suggested that the virtue concepts of any moral tradition supply a basis for the needed discriminations, and many of the virtues are themselves forms of moral interest.

Philosophical analysis is better suited to refining conceptual powers than to engendering moral enthusiasm, and so even analysis that is focused on the virtue concepts does not guarantee a contribution to moral wisdom. Aristotle holds that only those whose desires and habits of action are ethically well formed will benefit from ethical knowledge (1095<sup>a</sup>5-10), and that therefore a person's early upbringing is crucial (making, as he says, "all the difference") to the formation of character (1103<sup>b</sup>7-25). I think that philosophy's conceptual reminders, if expressed well, can arouse dormant moral interests and thus activate character that is already there, and so contribute, in an auxiliary way, to our moral enthusiasms. But Aristotle's point remains: Unless we have picked up the basis for wisdom before we come to philosophy, philosophy will not help us to be morally wise.

The basic sources of moral wisdom are the gentle guidance and correction of parents in a setting of supporting love, membership in a moral community where the language of the virtues and vices is spoken well and the reality of the virtues is manifest in senior models, the individual initiative and action of the moral learner in deeds that exemplify the virtues, and

the mysterious special working of God.

A few times in this paper, I made one mark of moral wisdom the power to “call” the thinker or hearer to virtuous action and feeling. And the examples I cited from Socrates, the Stoics, Dr. Johnson, and George Eliot all have an element of rhetorical appeal, sometimes very simple and sometimes not so simple. The *style* of the thought and language seems to lend itself to the calling function; it speaks to the heart. In particular the use of narrative, and of examples and references suggesting fuller narratives, seems to play a key role in this power to arouse the moral sentiments and motives without which moral communication is incomplete.

By contrast, my twenty-four grammatical remarks about the virtue of gratitude seem rather thin, formal, intellectual, dry-bones analytical, and unedifying, despite being very much about a “matter of the heart.” They remind us more of St. Thomas Aquinas than they do of Søren Kierkegaard. This points to the limitation of maps and grammars. Grammar is no substitute for the fullness of living language, and reading a map is no substitute for exploring a region in person. Indeed, a map is not even a substitute for a well written travelogue. Yet the map gives us an orientation in the region it depicts that very large amounts of wandering and exploring that region at ground level might not give. And delineations of the kind that St. Thomas specializes in can provide an analogous orientation in the regions of moral space.

The point is that wise discourse is a *synthesis* of the abstract and the concrete, of the map and the travelogue, of logic and rhetoric, of the grammar of the virtue concepts and the narrative examples that put discursive flesh on that grammatical skeleton. Prerequisite to the *highest* sort of moral wisdom is to be both a philosopher and a story teller. I conclude, then, that philosophy, if it is directed at the central questions of ethics — questions like “what is gratitude?”, “what is justice?”, “what is faith?”, and “what is truthfulness?” — can be an essential discipline in the development of moral wisdom. But it is not the whole story, for it needs to be accompanied by moral passion and concrete moral imagination.

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#### NOTES

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2. New York: Harper and Row, 1972, p.x. I am not suggesting that philosophers who did ethics in the criticized style were motivated only by conceptual gamesmanship. Many were serious people who regarded their philosophizing as serving morally important ends.

3. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, editors, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963), p.16.
4. *Ibid.*, p.572.
5. The quotations are translated by T.C. O'Brien in volume 41 of the *Loeb Classical Library* edition (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1972).
6. Selections, introduced by Sir Sydney Roberts (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1953).
7. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995.
8. *Philosophy* 33, 1958, pp.1-19.
9. *Character* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
10. Mr. Farebrother would like to wed Mary Garth himself, but in an impressive act of generosity has facilitated her relationship with Fred Vincy. Fred learns of Farebrother's affection for Mary, and feels he is a rival, hardly noticing his generosity. During a visit to his house Farebrother contrives that the couple should be alone together to talk, and Fred, again not noticing Farebrother's generosity, uses the occasion to vent his jealousy. Mary says to Fred, "I don't know whether it is more stupid or ungenerous in you not to see that Mr. Farebrother has left us together on purpose that we might speak freely. I am disappointed that you should be so blind to his delicate feeling" (*Middlemarch*, chapter 57). Mary notices the perceptual implications of generosity and its absence.
11. H. Rackham's translation (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), p.91.
12. *ibid.*, p.93, altered.
13. Note too that Aristotle's stipulation that the mean be "determined by reason such as a wise person employs" would hardly be necessary were it possible to define virtue in quantitative terms.
14. Rackham's translation, altered.
15. The exceptions are virtues like justice, to which the theory of the mean applies in a rather different way.
16. *The Metaphysical Principles of Virtue*, trans. James W. Ellington, in *Ethical Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), p.53.
17. See the footnotes at pp.400 and 421 of the Akademie edition of *Grounding for the Metaphysic of Morals*.
18. *The Metaphysical Principles of Virtue*, p.56.
19. *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Jerome Schneewind (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1983), Section I, near the end (p.16).
20. See *ibid.*, Conclusion, Part I (p.73).
21. Philosophers' intuitions differ on this point. Claudia Card remarks, "Gratitude is not always to someone, although it is for something. I may be grateful that the weather 'cooperated' with plans for the picnic..." ("Gratitude and Obligation", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 25:2 [1988], p.117). But most of Card's paper is about gratitude that is directed to someone, and it can be argued that while people sometimes use 'grateful' in this way, they will usually acknowledge that what they really mean is that they are glad that the weather cooperated..., and that this is distinguishable from being grateful. George Nakhnikian, despite discussing a kind of gratitude that might tempt him to make the "to whom" optional, does not do so. See his "On the Cognitive Import of Certain Conscious States", in *Religious Experience and Truth*, ed. Sidney Hook (New York University Press, 1961).
22. This point is strongly emphasized in Fred R. Berger, "Gratitude," *Ethics* 85 (July 1975): pp.298-309; but Berger writes of benevolence rather than of generosity.
23. "Gifts" in *Essays: Second Series in Emerson: Essays and Lectures* (New

York: The Library of America, 1983), p.537. Emerson thinks (counterintuitively) that when friends are very close all their property is in common. In my moral outlook, an important part of friendship is the gratitude that friends have and express to one another; and so it is important that friends have things (of their own) to offer one another.

24. *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, 106, ad.3. A few lines later he formulates an odd rule, which perhaps derives from this one: "A slave has no claim to gratitude, since in his very person he belongs to the master." The idea seems to be that the slave as agent is just an extension of his master's will, so that when he does good for the master it is as though the master is doing good for himself.

25. Rackham's translation, p.223, altered. Contrast Seneca's rule: "The rule for doing favours is that one person quickly forget what he has given, and the other long remember what he has received" (quoted in Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* 2a2ae, 107, 3).

26. We must not attribute an artificial consistency to people's moral lives, and it is possible that people may have the virtue of gratitude "irrationally," that is, without the kind of warrant from a morality that Christian gratitude has. Thus a Stoic might be a grateful person. In friction with my thesis about Stoicism, Seneca has many perceptive things to say about gratitude. See his *On Benefits (De Beneficiis)*, volume III of *Moral Essays* tr. John W. Basore (Cambridge, Mass: The Loeb Classical Library, 1975).