Learning to Live and Love Virtuously

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Abstract

John Stuart Mill and Immanuel Kant authored two of the most famous pieces of work in ethical theory (Utilitarianism and Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, respectively), yet both fail for various reasons to give us direction by way of living good lives. This thesis begins by outlining those shortcomings, before offering Aristotelian virtue ethics as the solution. Virtue ethics, as conceived by Aristotle, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Julia Annas, delineates a process – grounded in our real lives – by which we may improve as people and therefore flourish, or live good, moral lives: the habituation of the virtues. Importantly, virtue ethics is a process, (not a set of outcomes) and is teachable, which distinguishes it from the other two theories. In developing the virtues, we are able to discover goods internal to the practices that define our lives, whether those are our work, our school, our relationships, or something else entirely. Furthermore, the virtue-ethical approach helps us learn from and grow in our emotional lives, as opposed to casting emotions aside as a skewing force contrary to morality. Virtue, as I will show, lays the groundwork for love, and therefore for flourishing relationships across our lives. In the final chapter, I examine a place where virtue and virtuous love are effectively taught and embraced: Camp Lanakila, in Fairlee, VT. I conclude by offering some takeaways from Lanakila that we may incorporate in our schools, our places of work and worship, our families, and our lives.
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Introduction

Convenience pervades our modern lives. When we want a book or a pair of noise-canceling headphones, we can order them on Amazon, and they will arrive within days at our doorstep. If we want to get somewhere but do not have a car, we can call a Lyft or an Uber, and one will be there to whisk us wherever we please. If we are hungry but do not want to cook, and also do not want to go to a restaurant, DoorDash and UberEats promise essentially whatever food we want, delivered to our door as quickly as possible. Almost any song in the world is available via a quick search of whichever music streaming service we prefer, and more and more, we don’t even have to use our hands to do this, as our technology understands voice commands. Other forms of entertainment, like television shows and video games, can be accessed more easily online than ever before. More and more employers offer remote jobs, where we need never leave our houses or apartments to go to work. Perhaps most notably, our social lives have been made considerably more convenient by the advent of social media. When we want to interact, all of our friends are instantaneously available by way of Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. We do not even need to speak to another person – we can text or dictate and have our phones transcribe for us what we want to say. If we do not want to interact with other people, we almost never
have to. In so many words, convenience has entered into our lives further than ever before, and as a result, those lives are so much easier.

What is more, leisure is much more widely accessible than it has ever been. “What makes today different [from the past, when there was a distinct leisure class] is the fact that so much high-quality leisure activity can be accessed by all at low average cost and near-zero marginal cost.”¹ So, there may also be equity benefits to the increase of convenience, in that it allows people all over the socioeconomic spectrum to access entertainment and socializing at the touch of a button, or the sound of their voice. More people can add their voice to political debates, organize for social justice, and meet likeminded people than ever before. The benefits of convenience are many, and perhaps more equitable than previous advances have been.

In a recent editorial for the New York Times, Tim Wu mused on the impacts of convenience on our lives. He wrote about the way that convenience makes choices we might have once considered straightforward and rational seem outlandish.² There are many examples of this: cars have made buggies seem ridiculous; the internet has outmoded the physical encyclopedia (as well as so many other things); Toys ‘R’ Us recently announced its closing,³ as Amazon, Walmart, and Target have shown us that we can do all our shopping (from toys to groceries to clothes) in one place, often online. Convenience has wholly changed the ways we go about our lives, for better or for worse. Because it has

¹ Mokyr, Vickers, and Ziebarth, “The History of Technological Anxiety and the Future of Economic Growth: Is This Time Different?” 44.
made almost everything easier, it has made us challenge-averse – if something takes work and there is a convenient alternative, we will almost surely take the alternative, and this has its cost, Wu says:

> Today’s cult of convenience fails to acknowledge that difficulty is a constitutive feature of human experience. Convenience is all destination and no journey. But climbing a mountain is different from taking the tram to the top, even if you end up at the same place. We are becoming people who care mainly or only about outcomes. We are at risk of making most of our life experiences a series of trolley rides.⁴

In accepting convenience into our lives unflinchingly, Wu argues, we endanger meaning.⁵ The solution, he writes, is to “embrace the inconvenient – not always, but more of the time.”⁶ If we do not, we will, as he suggests, lose sight of the work necessary to find meaning in our relationships and daily activities, in the name of “better” outcomes.

Convenience can be wonderful. We can connect with friends we haven’t seen in years, even if they are across the world. We can even book a flight to go visit them in a matter of minutes. But, in doing so, we must remember that convenience is a tool and not a solution, that while it makes contact between us (no matter how far away we are) easier, what we do with that contact, especially once we are up close, is what has the potential to bestow real meaning on our lives. If we fly across the world to see our friends and simply embracing the convenience of our phones, we will be no better off than if we had not made the trip at all; in fact, we will probably be worse off.

> “Sometimes,” Wu writes, “struggle is a solution. It can be the solution to the question of who you are.”⁷ Now more than ever, as convenience has reached what seems

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⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid.
⁷ Ibid.
like an all-time high, we need to learn to embrace the challenging, inconvenient struggles that give our lives meaning. Per Wu:

> Embracing inconvenience may sound odd, but we already do it without thinking of it as such. As if to mask the issue, we give other names to our inconvenient choices: We call them hobbies, avocations, callings, passions. These are the noninstrumental activities that help to define us. They reward us with character because they involve an encounter with meaningful resistance — with nature’s laws, with the limits of our own bodies — as in carving wood, melding raw ingredients, fixing a broken appliance, writing code, timing waves or facing the point when the runner’s legs and lungs begin to rebel against him.8

These activities and relationships are what build our character, but only if we know how to approach them. It is the goal of this thesis to identify and elucidate an ethical theory which does exactly that.

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This thesis seeks to answer several questions. How can we live good lives? Is there a particular ethical theory that will allow us to do so? Is that theory applicable to our lives or is it an unreachable ideal? Is it congruent with what we believe about human nature and how human nature should be? Does it allow some influence of our emotional selves or is it purely rational? Is it teachable to the next generation? In examining three ethical theories, I attempt to answer these questions (and others) about each of them.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I focus on two of the prominent ethical theories: utilitarian and Kantian ethics. While each has unique, intuitive appeal, both are ultimately insufficient to help us lead good lives, in large part due to the alienation they induce.

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8 Ibid.
between our rational selves and our emotional selves. Moreover, neither is teachable, making it difficult to understand how they can persistently promote the good.

The second chapter looks at an ethical theory that purports to solve this issue. Virtue ethics, from Aristotle through contemporaries such as MacIntyre and Annas, is an ethical theory that focuses on specific characteristics, called the virtues, which we learn through habituation. We become more virtuously capable people through practices and a constant effort of striving toward the good, always pushing ourselves further. When we participate in a practice virtuously, we enter into relationship with other practitioners, past and present, as well as our mentors and mentees in that practice. Each of us begins at a different moral starting point, and the nature of practices and the discovery of internal goods is such that any of us can access them, thus allowing us to improve upon ourselves and upon the traditions to which we have been exposed, regardless of our origin or identity. All three authors, and especially Annas, underscore the importance of a good teacher. Annas argues that the teacher is essential to help the student understand the reasons why something is virtuous; understanding the student and their environment is critical to get them pointed in the virtuous direction, and to help them through the practice. What is unique about virtue ethics is that the right thing to do often overlaps with what a person wants to do, because the virtuous person enjoys doing the right thing. Internal goods make it so; these are the greatest goods to which we have access, and they fundamentally change the way we think about the world, so that the right thing to do is also what we genuinely prefer to do. In living virtuously, we discover goods internal to practices, and seek to improve and grow as people. In so doing, we flourish. Importantly, virtue ethics is about a process, and not a

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9 I use the words “teacher” and “student” here loosely, not in the purely academic sense.
specific outcome; this differentiates it particularly from utilitarianism. Thus, the chapter concludes: virtue ethics is the ethical theory that best answers the above questions.

The third chapter examines love, our strongest positive emotion. In this chapter, I demonstrate the necessity of structuring love of any kind – romantic, platonic, familial, self-oriented, occupational or vocational, practical, and radical – with virtue; only love structured as such will lead to the lasting flourishing for which we as humans strive. Virtuous love across our lives is a key part of what gives us meaning, and when we develop a virtuous, loving outlook, that forms a positive feedback loop between love and virtues, wherein one strengthens the other and vice versa. When we do this, we flourish in the most brilliant way imaginable.

The fourth chapter is an ethnographic case study on a place where the virtues and virtuous love are effectively taught: Camp Lanakila, in Fairlee, Vermont. Lanakila is a place that emphasizes the internal goods that come from embracing close relationships and challenging practices. It is a place that asks each camper and counselor to bring their genuine selves, yet also reach for their best, most virtuous, most loving selves, and celebrates doing so. Lanakila is a model institution for the teaching and learning of the virtues and of virtuous love.

I conclude with an exploration of what makes Lanakila effective at inculcating these life lessons, and some takeaway points that may be helpful for other institutions, from the family and the school to the workplace and even our online communities. In a world that grows more convenient by the day, it is easy to focus on outcomes, and particularly the ones that are readily available, for which we do not have to work. But if we are to grow and flourish as people and as a people, then we need to shift our focus, as Tim Wu has
suggested. In our families, our schools, our places of work and worship, and even online, we need to focus on goods internal to whichever practices we participate in, and on the virtues that make those internal goods possible. This will require considerably more communication and consistency between the different spheres. If we are able to find that focus consistently across the different arenas of our lives, we will be able to take on and even thrive in the inconvenient, find meaning in our lives, our work, and our relationships with those around us, and flourish.
1

Why Mill and Kant Can’t Help Us Flourish

I. How Can We Learn to Live Good Lives?

I’ll begin with a pretty uncontroversial statement: most people want to live a good life. The controversy, especially among philosophers, rests in the follow-up question to that statement, which asks: how can someone do that? Humans have hugely varying ideas of what, to them, a good life will entail, and how to live one, and often have strong opinions on the topic. Some people long for financial success, others for stimulating and rewarding careers, and still more for fulfilling personal relationships. Are any of these right or wrong? While many of us would not want to be moralizing and tell people to their faces that they are wrong, we often say these sorts of things behind others’ backs. Furthermore, it is becoming increasingly easy to pass public judgment over the internet, whether through social media or public fora, as well as through traditional news sources, in their opinion pages and, more often, on their front pages as well. However, the way in which we tell others that they are wrong is beside the point. What is salient here is that, regardless of what we think is acceptable to share, we each tend to have strong opinions about what is right and what is wrong, especially when it comes to lives other than our own. Philosophers are no exception – that is exactly why the field of ethics was created. In this chapter, I will examine two of the most prominent ethical theories to see what merits each may have for
helping us to live good lives. I am also interested in the way that these theories connect with people. Are they unachievably high standards that no human could realistically reach? Or, are they excessively broad, unable to give us meaningful direction in how to live good or moral lives? Do they connect to us not only as rational but also emotional beings, giving us good reason to follow them even when it is against our immediate interests to do so? Finally, can they be effectively taught?

I begin with classical utilitarianism, which at first glance seems to give us incredible flexibility – it allows for the pursuit of all three of the examples from the prior paragraph, as “utility-maximizing” activities – but which also creates a difficult gap between what is individually rational (what maximizes one’s own utility) and what is moral (what maximizes the utility of the collective). This high moral standard struggles to connect with people and ultimately is alienating. I then look at Kantian ethics, which sets an attractive and widely agreed-upon ideal, but also struggles to connect with the individual, in terms of the reasons it gives for following it as well as in the way it can be taught. At the end of the chapter, I conclude that if one wishes to inculcate utilitarian or Kantian moral theories, they will essentially default into virtue ethics.

II. In the Pursuit of Utility, but Whose?

The central concept of utilitarianism is a compelling one. That our morality is just what serves the greatest overall happiness seems intuitive; if we’re being moral, why would we want to do anything but make the greatest number of people happy? It obviously follows that two people being happy is better than one person being happy, and better yet if seven billion people are happy, right? Is anything wrong with this picture? At first glance, it does
not seem like it. Eminent intellectuals like John Stuart Mill and Peter Singer have made strong arguments in favor of this view. After reading Singer, one might even wonder why they haven’t been working on behalf of the greatest overall good all along. After all, there are many people who are starving, or whose communities have been ravaged by war, all around the world. There is misery and pain and suffering, and we, especially in wealthy, developed countries, with all the resources available to us, ought to help those people with the resources we have.\textsuperscript{10} We have all seen advertisements imploring us to donate some nominal amount to feed a family for a week or send a child to school for a year or buy vaccines for a village, and why shouldn’t we do these things? Our money will go much further spent on any of these causes than the same amount spent on, say, a fancy meal at a restaurant. Better yet, to truly have an impact, why don’t we use our resources to go, ourselves, to one of these communities in need and give our time in addition to our money – after all, if we all did this, it seems almost certain that the massive resources of the wealthy would be able to dramatically alter the outcomes of nearly everyone in the world.\textsuperscript{11} That sounds wonderful, does it not? A world without economic suffering, with the ability to respond to natural disaster because of the rapid mobilization of resources possible when we all commit ourselves to the greatest overall happiness is the classical utilitarian ideal. This is the world Peter Singer imagines, where each of us is willing to spend ourselves down to subsistence to better the lives of others. This is also the world to which classical utilitarian morality commits us. And it leaves us with a simple question: why not?


\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
Just as easily as utilitarianism provides us with the moral imperative to take actions that enhance the greatest overall happiness, it gives us strong reasons not to do so. The driving belief of utilitarian rationality is that each person takes the actions that will bring about the greatest amount of utility, or happiness, for themselves.\textsuperscript{12} So, while someone in another place might very well be starving, poorly educated, dying from disease, that fancy dinner is so much more immediate, and it will bring such wonder to one’s taste buds – how could someone say no? At the same time, if the person in question derives utility from helping out that person in need, they very well might do so! Maybe it is even the case that this person derives utility from the sense that they are acting morally. After all, every human is different, and utilitarian thought recognizes that each of us has different motivations for acting in any given scenario; we will do the action that we believe will give us the most utility, even if that means giving someone else happiness (or food, education, or vaccines). There is nothing, however, about the utilitarian conception of morality that necessitates that we direct our own utility maximization one way or another; there is no compulsory normative device to direct our actions. So, whether we want to help others, ourselves, or some combination of both, utilitarianism holds that whatever gives us utility is what it is rational to do. Humans, after all, have direct access to just one viewpoint: our own. With that as our perspective of the world, how could we be expected to make decisions from any other? We feel our emotions directly, our wants, desires, sadness, anger, and fears, and it is from these feelings and a desire to maximize the good ones that we act.

Because of its flexibility for each person, classical utilitarianism seems to offer the remarkable luxury of moral relativism. Anyone who buys into this mode of thought is able

to say, “Hey! In that part of the world\textsuperscript{13}, what gives them utility is different than what gives me utility, and that’s okay!” Classical utilitarians thus appear able to take a dramatically progressive stance on different cultures, a benefit which lends itself to the flexibility of this mode of philosophy. However, it is unclear that classical utilitarians could ever truly label something as irrational, even if they believe that it is fundamentally wrong or to the great detriment of the greatest overall happiness. They are committed to saying that the pursuit of whatever brings a person utility must be rational for that person, thus potentially creating a deep divide between what is individually rational and what is moral, depending on a given person’s inclinations. While utilitarians (especially John Stuart Mill and Peter Singer) endorse the greatest overall happiness theory of morality, they must respect that each person rationally acts to enhance their own utility, and thus has no truly compelling reason to consider the greater good, unless it falls within their preferences. With regard to that greater good, Mill writes: “As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator.”\textsuperscript{14} This seems a far cry from utilitarianism’s deep commitment to individual rationality. Clearly, something must be done to bridge this gap.

In order to approach the utilitarian ideal, Mill proposes the idea of educational and other social institutions as the solution. Said institutions must be structured so as to bring individual and collective utility into line with each other in each person’s mind:

As the means of making the nearest approach to this ideal, utility would enjoin, first, that laws and social arrangements should place the happiness or (as, speaking practically, it may be called) the interest of every individual as nearly as possible in harmony with the interest of the whole; and secondly, that education and opinion, which have so vast a power over

\textsuperscript{13} Or: “In that community,” or “In that family,” etc.
\textsuperscript{14} Mill, Utilitarianism, 17.
human character, should so use that power as to establish in the mind of every individual an indissoluble association between his own happiness and the good of the whole, especially between his own happiness and the practice of such modes of conduct, negative and positive, as regard for the universal happiness prescribes, so that not only he may be unable to conceive of the possibility of happiness to himself, consistently with conduct opposed to the general good, but also that a direct impulse to promote the general good may be in every individual one of the habitual motives of action, and the sentiments connected therewith may fill a large and prominent place in every human being’s sentient existence.  

This passage and the connection it creates between individual and collective utility raise two particularly compelling questions, upon which I have begun to touch above.

First, if our individual utility tells us to do what is best or will create the most happiness for us, what incentive, aside from other-regarding preferences, do we have to set up our institutions in that way? Surely it makes sense, according to the utilitarian logic behind the prisoner’s dilemma, to want everyone else to benefit the greatest overall good and to free ride off of the actions of others? But, as with the prisoner’s dilemma, if everyone acts this way, it is of course mutually defeating, and there is no way for the social institutions Mill mentions to get towards his conception of morality. However, as mentioned above, utilitarians may use other-regarding preferences to solve this issue. Even then, how can we be sure that most, or even some, people will take into account this type of preferences? If they are just preferences, they cannot be mandated one way or another; you cannot just tell someone what to prefer and what not to prefer, because whatever it is that they prefer, it will be rational for them to pursue. But if they are also the basis for our action, which Mill (and Singer) argues that they are, then it is unclear that our social and educational institutions will come to be set up such that they realign our interests towards

15 Ibid, 17.
the greatest overall happiness. Is it not more likely that, on this account of rationality, the principles agreed upon will be those held by whoever is designing or holding power in these institutions? Furthermore, what happens if the designers or the powerful fundamentally disagree? Disagreement happens all the time at all levels of decision-making, from the household to the government. If two people or groups disagree such that their views cannot coexist (for example, one group believes that it would be most beneficial to overall utility to enslave or annihilate the other\textsuperscript{16}), how might we aggregate their preferences to serve the greatest overall utility? Utilitarians are not able, then, to take such a progressive approach after all. In this situation, Mill and other utilitarians must reach beyond their typical toolbox into the realm of virtue ethics or objectivist theories of morality, if they are to successfully teach other-regarding preferences, but more on that later.

A second question follows the first: is Mill’s ideal of enjoining individual and overall utility even desirable? If everyone is always acting on behalf of the greatest overall utility, is it possible to pursue one’s own ends at all? Mill would likely respond that in his ideal, our individual ends are simply those of the collective – there is no separation – and in this sense he almost seems to harken forward in time to the Marxist species-being. He would argue that the goal is to reach a point where we genuinely desire just to benefit the greater good.\textsuperscript{17} Yet this implication strikes me as incredibly off-putting and misses a key part of what it is to be human – to understand what will make oneself or others around oneself happy and to pursue that, at least within the constraints of what one feels to be

\textsuperscript{16} This, of course, has serious real-world corollaries, both past and present – surely, we want to condemn such actions!

\textsuperscript{17} Mill, \textit{Utilitarianism}, 17.
right. Let us consider an example that will help to show the misalignment of utilitarian morality with the way any of us actually want to live.

A question we often hear in business or political negotiation is: “What will my company/constituents get out of this?” It seems a rational or reasonable enough line – after all, if a business is profit-maximizing, or a politician seeks to benefit their constituents, which most businesses are, and most politicians do, isn’t that the exact question they should be asking? It may be, but it strikes me as definitively wrong to think this way in our personal interactions with others. When we enter into committed relationships, if the question we ask ourselves is just what we will get out of it, we are looking at it the wrong way. We favor the outcome over the process. What if there are diminishing returns on the relationship? Do we simply ask our partner to increase output, or do we opt out the second our utility begins to dip? On the other hand, if we take the utilitarian moral approach, and ask what is best for the greatest overall good, we remove the human connection inherent in the relationship. If this is how we see relationships, then we have set ourselves up for a dystopian future where our partnerships only exist insofar as they are useful to the greater society.

Considering interpersonal relationships from either the individual or social utilitarian perspective prohibits any sort of truly meaningful relationship that we might have, as each decision becomes a cold and disconnected moral calculus. As Peter Railton eloquently points out in “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality,”

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18 It may also not be. Patagonia is an excellent example of a company which consistently asks what is best not only for their bottom line but also for the environment, for its communities, from supply chain to consumer, for nonprofit partners, for social and environmental justice and for threatened indigenous groups (see bibliography for examples).
there is something distinctively off-putting about the husband who takes care of his wife when she is sick simply because “it is the right thing to do,” (this could be reinterpreted as “it is the utility-maximizing thing to do”) and not because he loves her.\textsuperscript{19} Certainly, there is a place for morality in relationships,\textsuperscript{20} but our emotions seem to ask for more. That two people should be together because they will be enhancing the greatest overall utility, whether on average or absolutely,\textsuperscript{21} misses the point of why two people enter into a committed relationship to begin with: that they love each other. Before exploring this point too deeply, I shall offer some interim conclusions on utilitarianism and then consider another ethical theory that perhaps holds some of the solutions to the utilitarianism’s issues.

As we have seen, utilitarianism has many intuitive strengths and weaknesses. It seems perfectly natural to say that each of us should pursue what makes us happy, or gives us utility, whether that is contributing to another’s happiness or going surfing. However, this leaves open the obvious gap of what to do if that which gives us utility harms another. To address this, Mill offers an account of morality built upon the greatest overall utility, which essentially asks the question: “what will bring the most good to the greatest number


\textsuperscript{20} Jean Hampton gives a compelling case for this in “Feminist Contractarianism,” which I discuss in footnote 165.

\textsuperscript{21} Classical utilitarians are often caught between whether morality requires promotion of the greatest average or absolute utility, each of which leads us to conclusions that make us squirm. If we’re concerned about the former, then we can commit all sorts of atrocities, and be morally justified in doing so. For example, if the presiding belief is that being physically disabled makes someone worse off and is a drag on society, then it might follow that, on behalf of overall average utility, we should systematically reduce the disabled population, perhaps by means of genocide. It’s unclear that, given strong enough arguments by those in power, any minority rights would be protected. On the absolute utilitarian side, it seems to follow that we should continue having children at high rates; as long as they add to the overall wellbeing in some way, shape, or form, then we should have them, that is, until the marginal benefit of an additional child hits zero. Either way, everyone else becomes merely useful for the achievement of social ends, and while this might be better for everyone than being useful merely for individual ends, it also seems further from the heart of the relationship.
of people?” In doing so, Mill creates a divide between what is individually rational and what is good – in outlining what is good for the whole of society, he so constricts what is rational for a given person (i.e. in their self-interest), so as to nearly eliminate that from the moral ideal entirely.\footnote{See the quoted excerpt on pages 5-6 in which Mill argues that the ideal is that a person does not even consider what is good for themselves, but rather defaults to thinking on behalf of the social good.} To fully separate morality and rationality is antithetical to the point of morality: to live good lives. There must be some overlap between the two; otherwise we would struggle to have good reason to be moral, or teach others to be truly moral, and not just to do what is in our own interest. Mill’s solution, of using social and educational institutions, will come back to bear on the answer to this divide, though not in the way he invokes it.

Before delving into education, we will look at Kant, who presents morality as the ultimate manifestation of rationality, or pure, practical reason. For Kant, morality comes about not as a set of utilitarian preferences (and therefore not entirely dependent on outcomes), nor as something that is influenced by our emotions, “passions,”\footnote{David Hume, \textit{A Treatise of Human Nature}, ed. David Fate. Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 266.} or “inclinations,”\footnote{Immanuel Kant, \textit{Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals}, ed. Mary J. Gregor and Jens Timmermann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 15.} but as actions based on the universal imperative, which forms our objective duty to others as humans. Unlike utilitarianism, Kantian morality is totally independent of what we happen to prefer in any given scenario because it comes from an objective, unchanging standard. As a result, it is free from many critiques of utilitarianism, but, as we will see, runs into its own set of obstacles, and, in the end, has a similar issue with alienation as utilitarianism does.
III. Acting from Duty: Possible on the Playground?

As a child, I heard the Golden Rule over and over: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” This always seemed like a good rule to me – in fact, fairness was so important to me that I often argued for it vehemently on the playground when my friends and I would decide teams for sports. For example, if the best player in our grade was one of the captains, I felt that the next best player should be the other captain, so they could not choose each other and demolish the other team. To me, doing so felt antithetical to the activity at hand – did fun and competition not diminish on either side when the teams were so heavily stacked one way? What I longed for at the time was the consideration of an impartial rule for deciding teams, something like Rawls’ Veil of Ignorance: I wanted the better players to take themselves out of the situation for a moment and consider what decision they might make if they were not the best, or even did not know where their skill level might fall. Of course, this is not how the interaction would normally go down. The best players would often choose each other, and I, along with the other mediocre players on the court or the field, would lose by wide margins, unless we were on the same team as the two best players, in which case we would usually not touch the ball much at all.

Though of course I did not know this at the time, what I hoped for in terms of fairness from my classmates, which I above called an invocation of Rawls, was treatment as a member of a Kantian community of ends. I wanted to be treated by my classmates how I thought they would want to be treated if the roles were reversed. According to Kant, all

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25 This might have had something to do with the fact that I grew up with a priest as one of my parents.
27 My fascination with Kantian ethics, though I did not know it at the time, also began then. It has only been in the last year or so that I have, in Kant’s own words about Hume, awoken from a Kantian “dogmatic slumber,” in which I thought such a rule might be a feasible and realistic ethical theory. This is, of course,
of morality can be distilled down to a simple rule, which he calls the categorical imperative. Effectively, what the categorical imperative calls for is this: I may pursue my ends insofar as they do not encroach on anyone else’s ends (which I must recognize they have a legitimate right to pursue equal to my own); therefore, I may not treat anyone else as a means to my ends.  

In less jargon-heavy terms, this means that my actions must be universalizable; they cannot be exclusive of everyone else taking those same actions, nor can those actions treat anyone as merely useful and not another person worthy of dignity and respect. For example, I cannot litter, for if everyone littered, our world would be covered in trash and unlivable for everyone. Furthermore, I am using whoever cleans up after me and whomever is inconvenienced or even harmed by my actions as a means to my ends, since I take for granted the fact that I cause extra work for them. Per the Kantian standard, nothing I do can be an exception to how all humans should be allowed to act. Kant is resolute and steadfast in this rule: “Everyone must admit that a law, if it is to hold morally, i.e. as the ground of an obligation, must carry with it absolute necessity.” Such a law must be based not in “the nature of the human being, or in the circumstances of the world in which he is placed, but a priori solely in concepts of pure reason.” In other words, what is good must be good independent of the cultural or situational value we assign it in different parts of the world or in different times throughout history. Unlike Mill, Kant makes no presumption of moral relativism; in fact, he would be abhorred at the idea.

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not to say that it is not a good ideal. It certainly is, but as this thesis will show, it is alienating and difficult to absorb without some measure of character development, as well as a genuine love of every other person.

29 Ibid, 5.
The categorical imperative is a simple rule, and it makes a lot of logical sense. It seems easy enough to ask how I can justify doing something if I could not justify my friend doing the same thing back to me. Kant’s categorical imperative is fair and treats everyone exactly alike, much the way the United States’ founding documents hope to do.\textsuperscript{31} It also fulfills key lessons that many of us were taught as children about respect and responsibility to others, such as the Golden Rule. Applied to the above example, it is easy to see how the categorical imperative would make for a better scenario, in which there would be more balanced competition, fewer hurt feelings (on my part!), and fairer teams. One possible solution using might be that two roughly equivalent players skill-wise would pick the teams, agreeing ahead of time on the rules for doing so and dividing skill evenly, allowing for equality of opportunity for each team. There could be many different ways to do this, but the point is that whichever rule is used to divide the teams should be agreed upon ahead of time and should allow for equality of opportunity to begin the game. After setting the teams, they could compete as usual, and while one team would still beat the other, it is much more likely that the competition will be fair and fun for all this way.

Returning to our example, imagine now that a teacher comes out to the playground, and notices that a child is upset about the teams. If this teacher wants to deploy the Kantian educational method, they would emphasize rule-following in accordance with the universal maxim; to this end, Kant writes, “Character consists in readiness to act in accordance with ‘maxims.’”\textsuperscript{32} The rule is the most important thing, and requires strict adherence in all situations. According to Kant, if this teacher is doing their job well, they will use this

\textsuperscript{31} At least, for all men who are not enslaved.

opportunity to instruct how one might adapt the categorical imperative in this situation; “having once made a rule they must always follow it.”33 After teaching this maxim once, and taking every opportunity to reinforce it without any wiggle room, the teacher, Kant says, will have effectively instructed the children on the playground in the development of their good character.34 In the case of moral transgression, the teacher must punish the children, so that if they continue to make teams in such an unfair manner, they will learn that this is unacceptable and that they have a duty to treat each other fairly, according to the categorical imperative.35 On the part of the children, Kant believes that this methodology will help to inculcate in them an important obedience, and will teach them not to act from inclination, which (he says) would encourage to make up the teams however they see fit, but rather from duty to each other, which will guide them towards the right decision consistently.36 When they make the right decision, that is, the one in line with their duty to others and themselves as ends, they are building character, Kant says.37 In this process, however, Kant emphasizes that the child will likely not understand duty as such from the outset; at first, what is important for Kant is that the child has the maxim repeated to them over and over again.38 If the maxim is repeated, Kant believes that the child will eventually begin to act in accordance with the categorical imperative. This pedagogy of repetition poses a problem for Kant to which I will return after a brief elaboration on two relevant aspects of his theory: the good will and duty.

33 Ibid, 85.
34 Ibid, 85.
36 Ibid, 86-87.
37 Ibid, 85.
38 Ibid, 86-87.
At this point, I will examine the sources of the categorical imperative and how it comes to be a genuine form of morality. As I have noted, Kant argues that morality (or the determination of what is good and how to act) must not rely in any sense on experience, circumstances, time, culture, or anything that can change over time, but rather must come from pure reason and be impervious to all the above forces.\textsuperscript{39} So how then, can morality arise, if not from experience or circumstances? Where exactly does morality come from?

For Kant, morality begins with the good will.\textsuperscript{40} The good will cannot be a “talent of the mind,” such as “understanding, wit, [or] judgment,” nor a “quality of the temperament,” like “confidence, resolve, and persistency of intent”; the good will cannot be any “gift of nature,” as the above are, no sooner than it could be a “gift of fortune,” such as “power, riches, honor, [or] even health.”\textsuperscript{41} The good will must be good without qualification, must be incorruptible; each of the above characteristics are inherently corruptible.\textsuperscript{42} Understanding, wit, or judgment may each be used to take advantage of others; confidence, resolve, and persistency of intent may be used in the pursuit of evil ends; power, riches, honor, or health may be abused to elevate oneself unfairly above others. On the other hand, some of these might be useful towards building the good will in someone, but are only good insofar as they do so, or are expressed as a result of that good will, and not for any intrinsic reason.\textsuperscript{43} The person of good will exercises all of these things in moderation, so that they may regulate their actions along the basis of the categorical

\textsuperscript{39} Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, 5.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, 9.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, 9.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, 9.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, 9.
imperative. This moderation can also be thought of as reason, which allows us to parse for and put into practice exactly what a good will is: namely that which is “good, not for other purposes as a means, but good in itself.” Our reason, Kant argues, leads us to the concept of duty.

Duty is something that we ought to do, i.e. what the categorical imperative dictates. Kant distinguishes acting from duty from acting in conformity with duty, as the latter entails doing what duty requires solely because one knows that that is what duty requires, or for any other non-intrinsic reason (for example, out of fear or inclination).

For example, if a person follows the rules because it is in their best interest to do so (even if the rules dictate that this person must treat everyone equally as ends), then that person is acting merely in conformity with duty and not genuinely from duty. The person who truly acts from duty does so regardless of what reasons they have to do so. So if it is no longer in the aforementioned person’s best interest to act in accordance with the rules about treating others as ends, acting from duty requires them to continue to do so anyway. It is at this point that I wish to pose two related questions.

First, how does this duty that we are taught as children go from a rule we follow without genuinely understanding it to one which we understand by reason? Second, how is it that we come to learn the practical reason which we may use to evaluate for ourselves how to act from duty and not simply in accordance with it? These questions, I believe, point to the first flaw in Kant’s argument. If the only mechanism by which he proposes to

44 Ibid, 10.
48 Ibid, 14.
teach duty is repetition, then the way in which people act will only ever be repetitive – there will be no moral worth to their actions, along his own definition, because people acting in such a way will be doing so merely in accordance with duty. It is unclear how repetition can help people learn and come to understand the reasons underlying duty and incorporate those genuinely into their actions. Kant wants people to act from duty but only offers a mechanism for acting in conformity with it. It is my contention that if teachers want to inculcate the categorical imperative in their pupils, then they must build their pupils up to that point. This leads into my second (forthcoming) critique of Kant’s framework: repetition of a rule that is unreachable from one’s current state is alienating; rather, a teacher must guide their students to that rule by helping the students understand the reasons for doing so.

This second issue for Kant is similar to one facing utilitarian morality: the categorical imperative is alienating. Going back to the playground, if the teacher simply repeats for her pupils the rule by which they must act, she will go on repeating forever. Much more likely that the teacher is met with rolled eyes from their students than with a genuine understanding of why the rule exists and how to apply it across differing scenarios. What if the two best players turn to the teacher and ask why they should follow this rule, if they are much better-off constructing the teams as they see fit and crushing their competition? How can the teacher respond to this? Surely, repeating the categorical imperative will not inspire genuine understanding. I posit that in repeating the rule as a universal, unbending maxim, the teacher makes it vanishingly difficult to act from duty, as opposed to solely in accordance with it. It is not enough to tell a student, especially a

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49 Kant, *Education*, 84-85.
young one, that another human being deserves a certain treatment just by virtue of the fact that they are a human being. They must learn the reasons why they should treat others as ends in themselves through iterated interactions and experience, and must be helped to the realization that pursuing their own ends is only morally legitimate if they simultaneously allow others to pursue their ends as well. Kant cannot provide for this; neither character nor reason appear in children without deeper understanding. Furthermore, it is plain to see that human beings do not consistently act from duty, nor even all the time in accordance with duty. In presenting duty as a rule to be followed always, with perfect consistency, we make morality an unreachable ideal without grounding it in our lived experience. To this end, I would ask Kant, how does it come to be that a child sees reason and duty not just as rules or infeasible ideals but rather as something which they may incorporate in their everyday lives? In teaching people and particularly children, how do we give them good reasons and the necessary understanding to act from duty?

It is my intuition that some degree of self-interest or inclination must be present, at least at the start, in order to help children begin to understand pure practical reason, duty, and the categorical imperative. Kant himself recognizes the power of happiness as the most powerful inclination that we as humans have; it is in happiness that “all inclinations unite in one sum.”50 Kant even goes as far as to say that “to secure one’s own happiness is one’s duty,” but argues that the pursuit of happiness can only be moral insofar as it is done from duty and not just from inclination.51 What he means by this is that happiness can be morally justified only if it is pursued with respect for others’ likewise pursuit of the same

51 Kant, *Groundwork*, 14.
inclination; we need the categorical imperative as a rule to guide and regulate our pursuit of happiness. This is all well and good – certainly duty should help shape our inclinations toward happiness and our subsequent pursuit of happiness if we want them to be moral. Yet this structure separates our reasons for action into “cognitive and affective halves,” and thus further alienates those children on the playground, for whom emotion is likely an important force in driving their decisions and actions.

Kant, however, speaks out against the use of emotion and instead identifies it as a skewing force of morals. This is evident from his writing about love and beneficence: “Love as an inclination cannot be commanded, but beneficence from duty itself – even if no inclination whatsoever impels us to it, indeed if natural and unconquerable aversion resists – is practical and not pathological love, which lies in the will and not in the propensity of sensation, in principles of action and not in melting compassion; and only the former can be commanded.” In response, I argue that, particularly on the playground, if a teacher is to be successful in inculcating morality into their students, then they must tap into the depths of inclination, emotion, and love in order to do so. If they do not, or present those as fundamentally opposed to morality, their students may follow the rules, but the underlying sentiment will more likely be one of resentment than egalitarianism, respect, or magnanimity. In order to build lasting character, the teacher must first get at the underlying reasons why doing so will be good for the child. If a rule is the end goal, they must build towards by first establishing the emotional scaffolding for doing so.

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Kant offers a brilliantly simple rule for how we should live if we are to be moral. We must pursue our own ends and treat everyone else with the respect to allow them to do the same. No action that we take may infringe upon another’s pursuit of their ends, and every action that we take should be able to be universalized: everyone else should be able to take the same actions as me without causing society to crumble. We each have a duty to each other as human beings to uphold and carry out this categorical imperative, in our thoughts, words, and deeds. Our actions must come from duty itself, however, and not simply in accordance with duty – in other words, our dutiful actions must come from the good will deep inside us to treat others as ends, and we may exercise this good will through practical reason. This account is incredibly compelling and addresses how we can identify what is good not simply according to a calculation of utility, but it misses the mark in terms of accessibility. There is a logical gap between the way that Kant wants us to exercise our duty and the way he believes that we learn it. This gap, I argue, can only be addressed by meeting people where they are in the moment. The teacher on the playground, then, must not merely repeat the imperative to the students until they are all blue in the face, but rather must seek to understand those children’s motivations, emotions, and inclinations, in order to bring their actions into alignment with what is good. In so doing, the teacher will begin to lay the foundation for a flourishing life, will close the gap between the affective and the cognitive, and will make morality accessible to anyone, regardless of their innate ability to conceptualize the universalizable ideal. Only through an account of the virtues may we arrive at such a methodology of teaching.
IV. Beyond Alienation: Finding Reason to Build Virtuous, Loving Character

In “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality,” Peter Railton introduces us to the cases of John and Helen. Each of these two selflessly takes care of someone else: John of his sick wife, Anne, and Helen of her depressed friend, Lisa. Both John and Helen do so according to a differing but similar set of moral principles. Asked about this, John says: “I’ve always thought that people should help each other when they’re in an especially good position to do so… Just think how awful marriage would be, or life itself, if people didn’t take special care of the ones they love.” Helen, meanwhile, remarks: “It was the least I could do after all you’ve done for me. We’re friends, remember? And we said a long time ago that we’d stick together no matter what. Someday I’ll probably ask the same thing of you, and I know you’ll come through. What else are friends for?” John (utilitarian) and Helen (Kantian) essentially take the two approaches discussed thus far in this chapter, and each runs into a similar difficulty: their reasons for caring for others are alienating and impersonal. John seems to treat his wife benevolently for the sake of promoting utility for himself and for their relationship, and this strikes Railton as particularly uncomfortable: “It is as if John viewed [his wife], their relationship, and even his own affection for her from a distant, objective point of view – a moral point of view where reasons must be reasons for any rational agent and so must have an impersonal character even when they deal with personal matters.” In Helen’s case, Railton writes: “While we understand that the specific duties she feels toward Lisa depend upon particular

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56 Ibid, 136.
features of their relationship, still we would not be surprised if Lisa finds Helen’s response to her expression of gratitude quite distant, even chilling.”

Railton points out that what is uncomfortable about John and Helen’s words is that they are disconnected from any emotion, and any personal connection with his wife and her friend, respectively. He explains: “It is as if the world were for them a fabric of obligations and permissions in which personal considerations deserve recognition only to the extent that, and in the way that, such considerations find a place in this fabric.” What Railton is getting at is that John and Helen’s reasons for caring selflessly for others are mostly or even entirely separated from the people for whom they care: for John, it seems that we could replace Anne with anyone else and he would care for that person in the same exact way that he cares for Anne, because that is how to ensure the best marriage; for Helen, her friendship appears as a contract between Lisa and herself, that each of them continually upholds because they owe it to each other to do so, but as with John, it looks like we could replace Lisa with anyone else. There is nothing special or unique about John and Helen’s feelings for Anne and Lisa, if they could even be called feelings. As Railton says, it seems more accurate to categorize their actions as “obligations,” removed from specific emotional connection.

Railton correctly identifies one of the primary troubles with both classical utilitarian and Kantian ethics. These forms of morality are so stringent, so bound up in rule-following – completely independent of circumstances – that they fail to connect with people as feeling, emotional beings, and fail to appreciate the emotional basis upon which we

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57 Ibid, 136.
58 Ibid, 136.
generally build relationships with other people. When we truly love people, our reasons for love do not take the form of “tit-for-potential-tat” or “this will bring about maximum utility in our relationship,” as John and Helen’s do; rather, in flourishing relationships, our reasons for love often come from a deep emotional base rooted in the person we love themselves. These are the deepest and most personal relationships we have in our lives, and often form the basis of what we think of when we think about what makes life meaningful; they cannot be simplified to a moral framework from a utility-maximizing or duty-following rule.

In Railton’s terms, reasons based in utilitarian or Kantian ethics demonstrate a deep alienation from one’s own emotional life. This calls into question the real goodness and applicability of the ideals that Mill and Kant lay out; on both accounts, it is unclear that they could give any guidance in terms of building genuine relationships. Since morality governs how we are supposed to interact with others, should it not be well-equipped to help us create thriving relationships? Railton, though he goes on to defend a consequentialist framework for deep personal relationships, helps us identify a serious shortcoming faced by both utilitarian and Kantian approaches to morality: they are out of touch with who we are as people and what constitutes meaningful interaction with others, or with one’s work, hobbies, or vocation. In short, utilitarian and Kantian ethics give us no insight into how we might develop and maintain these most vital of relationships with the people around us and our work, which are fundamental to what gives our lives meaning. This alienation from our emotions is a serious shortcoming common to both utilitarian and Kantian ethical theories.

I hope I have made clear during this chapter that something more than a simple rule is required of a useful or convincing ethical theory. Such a theory must give good reasons for following it, especially to those learning to be moral beings (i.e. children). Classical
utilitarianism does not do this, despite Mill’s best efforts: in the fourth chapter of *Utilitarianism*, Mill argues that all of the reasons one needs to be virtuous and promote the greater good are found in rationality; people often desire to live virtuously, but this is only because they have been habituated to do so.\(^6\) In so doing, he still does not offer a reason why virtues would be taught in the first place. He attempts to work in an account of virtue ethics that conforms to individual rationality, and in so doing certainly makes some headway toward the tools necessary to living a flourishing and good life, full of rich relationships between self, others, and our various projects. However, he falls short in terms of giving good reasons to begin on the path toward virtue, as virtues often entail the giving up of pleasure in the name of the pursuit of virtue. On the other hand, Kant’s categorical imperative gives clear direction about our duty to others, but his theory offers no mechanism for achieving the ideal it prescribes. It offers a normative standard by which we may evaluate our actions as moral or otherwise and tells us what it is to act from duty, but only ever gives us, especially as children, the tools to act in conformity with duty. To move beyond this limited application, to truly act from duty, we need a theory which not only helps us identify what is good, but also gives us a path to that ideal, and gives us good reasons for acting by it sincerely. Once the teacher on the playground is equipped with such a theory, they may be able to bring those two athletically inclined students into the fold, along with the ones who asked for more fair teams in the first place.

Aristotelian virtue ethics, as I will demonstrate in the coming chapter, has the capacity to meet us where we are, identify our emotions not as anti-moral inclinations but rather as crucial to flourishing (if they are structured by the virtues), and be taught in a

comprehensible way. Furthermore, it offers sound, compelling advice for how to live our lives ethically and flourish.

If we want to flourish, we need an ethical theory that can help us live full, vibrant lives marked by deep relationships with those around us and with our work. We need an ethical theory that, when we are taught it, can help us act from, think with, and feel virtuous love. We need an ethical theory that allows us to learn, understand, and build towards its ideals instead of simply imposing a rule, an ethical theory that focuses on the process instead of solely on outcomes. The coming chapter will demonstrate how Aristotelian virtue ethics gives us just such a theory.
I. An Ethical Theory not at Odds with Emotions

I began the previous chapter with the declaration that most people want to live a
good life, and the fact that most people go about that project in different ways. In this
chapter I ask: if it does not make sense to adopt classical utilitarian or Kantian ethics as our
system of morality and decision-making, how can we live a good life? What theory will
help us do so? What does it even mean to live a good life to begin with? A fatal flaw of
both aforementioned theories is that they are unable to connect to the emotional human
being (i.e. the vast majority of us, especially as children). They offer straightforward
mechanisms by which we may make decisions morally, but do not give compelling reasons
for following those theories, particularly to young people learning to be good human
beings. Furthermore, they struggle to give us guidance as we navigate interpersonal
relationships, instead alienating us from the emotional part of our nature and thus
disconnecting us from those around us. In this chapter, I hope to show why Aristotelian
virtue ethics do not fall prey to the same disconnectedness from one’s emotions, and that,
instead, can be built to teach young people to learn and grow from their emotions, and
develop strength through trained emotional responses. Unlike utilitarian and Kantian
ethics, virtue ethics recognizes the importance of emotions to our lives, and helps us
structure those emotions so that they contribute to and become constitutive of our flourishing. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle emphasizes interpersonal relationships as a key component of virtue and a flourishing life;\(^6^1\) this, too, will be an essential piece of the theory I develop in this chapter, and a key differentiator from utilitarian and Kantian ethical theories, as learning to be in meaningful relationship with others (as well as with our work) is critical to connecting our ethical theory with our real lives.

II. How We Flourish: Aristotelian Virtue Ethics and Our Lives

Virtue ethics begin with the recognition of what Aristotle addresses as the final, best, intrinsic good, toward which all other action leads, either directly or indirectly: *eudaimonia*, which for these purposes I will translate to human flourishing, though it is often translated as happiness.\(^6^2,6^3\) What I posit in is this: to live a good life is to flourish; to flourish requires building one’s character by nurturing the virtues, with a particular focus on laying the groundwork for love. When we build our character from the virtues, act from that character, and help teach our young people to do so as well, we flourish and they do, too. With virtuous character at the heart of our system of morality and therefore the basis of our interactions with each other, our greater society can flourish, too. Admittedly, when defined in such terms, a good or flourishing life sounds a bit like hogwash. My goal in this chapter is not only to elucidate what the above paragraph means and what relevance it has

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\(^6^2\) Ibid, 3.
\(^6^3\) The reason I do not use happiness is not that it is not an accurate term but rather that it is easily misconstrued with the ends of individual utilitarianism. As I will show, the ends of Aristotelianism are a well-considered, full sense of happiness, but require a much different approach than what is advocated by utilitarianism.
in our lives, but also to provide a general framework for how we might go about teaching such an ethical theory.

In building this argument, it will first be essential to understand human flourishing. Having done that, we will then need to understand the mechanism by which we may live out that ultimate good, which Aristotle calls the virtues. Finally, after defining human flourishing and outlining Aristotle’s account of the virtues, I will endeavor to explain why such an account is the most unified, coherent method of working toward human flourishing. To that end, I will also show why the virtue ethical approach succeeds in the ways I showed Kantian ethics and Mill’s *Utilitarianism* cannot in the previous chapter.

As mentioned above, Aristotle’s account begins with the idea that flourishing is the ultimate good and subservient to nothing else. To get an idea of what Aristotle means by the ultimate good, it is useful to understand some that do not qualify. For example, money cannot be the ultimate good, because it can only ever be a means to whatever else makes someone happy; in the end, money can only purchase other things, and even then, cannot bring about those that are lasting or emblematic of true human flourishing. The same could be said for fame, or health, or particular skills. That is not to say, however, that these are not ends in themselves or could not be part of a greater conception of that ultimate good, flourishing; they certainly could be. However, what Aristotle is saying is that those alone, or even all put together, would be insufficient for flourishing. He warns against simplifying the good to any one of these:

> Good is spoken of in as many ways as being [is spoken of]: in what-it-is, as god and mind; in quality, as the virtues; in quantity, as the measured amount; in relative, as the useful; in time, as the opportune moment; in place, as the [right] situation; and so on. Hence it is clear that the good

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cannot be some common and single universal; for if it were, it would be spoken of in only one [of the types of] predication, not in them all.\textsuperscript{65}

Good comes in many forms, often relative to that which one is doing (e.g. business), as an end of those activities (e.g. wealth, innovation, or improved efficiency or production). And yet, if the good were relative to every singular action, there would be an infinite number of ends, and it would be impossible to discern what exactly is good and what is not; there would be no ultimate end. The ultimate good must be relative to the action of living, or the conglomeration of all of our other actions.

It is important here to note that not every end from action is a good one; it is clearly not the case that just because an action has an end, that that end is good. For example, while part of the end of a burglary might be that the burglar’s family has enough to eat on a given night, another part is that the person from whom they stole is now worse off without whatever it is that was stolen. It could be the case that an end is good but an action is not, as with the case of the so-called virtuous thief (or Robin Hood).\textsuperscript{66} Both actions and ends can be good or not, so our ethical theory must allow us to distinguish between good and bad ends, as well as giving us direction when it is not totally clear, or there are countervailing ends. Sometimes a decision about a specific end or good may be quite difficult, and our ethical theory should give us guidance in those situations. But the ultimate good, unlike relative goods, must be completely, intrinsically good by definition, and, so says Aristotle, “happiness, more than anything else, seems good without qualification. Because we always choose it because of itself, never because of something else.”\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid, 5.
\textsuperscript{66} This thought experiment asks us to imagine that the burglar in question is like Robin Hood, and they take from the wealthy and corrupt to redistribute amongst the poor.
\textsuperscript{67} Aristotle, \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, 8.
words, we don’t choose the sort of well-considered happiness to which this thesis refers thinking, *this happiness will lead to some other, greater good*, but rather choose other actions such that our thoughts are: *If I do this, I will be happy*, or *If I do this, I will make someone else particularly happy*. Regardless of whatever else we pursue, our ultimate end, lest we have been convinced otherwise by media or another external force, is a robust form of happiness, which as I have mentioned we will call human flourishing.

While one might from this conflate the ultimate end of happiness with the seeking of pleasure or utility, as classical utilitarianism advocates is individually rational to do, Aristotle is quick to point out that a life dedicated as such would reduce a person to the status of cattle, merely following pleasure, as cattle follow their food source, unthinkingly and without any true purpose.\(^68\) Regardless of the validity of this analysis of bovine cognitive capacity, the point is: no adequate sense of flourishing could come purely from following pleasure.\(^69\) If we did so, what would stop us from stealing whenever we wanted to, or more generally, acting without regard for those around us? This would inevitably be mutually destructive, as nothing guarantees that two people – and certainly all the people in the world – would seek the same pleasure, and conflict would certainly ensue.\(^70\) If we are to take a longer-term approach to our utilitarian calculus, we risk the subjugation of others to the coldhearted impersonality Railton derides. A further important distinction is that classical utilitarianism cares only about the ends of action and not the action itself, and

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\(^{68}\) Ibid, 4.

\(^{69}\) This alludes to the importance of the unity of a human life, which I will explore in the section on MacIntyre.

\(^{70}\) For example, as mentioned earlier, one essential aspect of flourishing is relationship; pursuing one’s own pleasure relentlessly would make it exceedingly difficult to develop these. What is more, it seems that ultimately, the flourishing life would also likely be quite pleasurable, but not as a result of pleasure being the end all along – pleasure is an added benefit or byproduct.
as I have just mentioned, actions themselves can be good or bad, and therefore warrant our attention. True happiness and flourishing must clearly come from something more than each of our own pleasure or utility maximization if we are to call them the ultimate end.

Another challenge to the idea human flourishing is something that can be learned is to ask if happiness or flourishing might be something intrinsic to oneself at birth, defined by nature alone and not nurture. Surely, some things may be determined arbitrarily for us, either by genetics or by some other force outside of one’s own choice, such as depression, abject poverty, or a violent household, which might diminish or enhance happiness. Just as surely, we would not want to consign someone to a life without the possibility of flourishing by factors outside of their control. Aristotle writes of “happy” young children: “If he is called happy, he is being congratulated [simply] because of anticipated blessedness; for, as we have said, happiness requires both complete virtue and a complete life.” On a related note, some social psychologists have argued that the way we act is defined by our environment. However, while one’s environment is certainly important, what I am interested in is how we are able to take lessons from one environment to the next; I am interested in ongoing, applicable virtue, which may be built regardless of circumstance. Although there are strong opinions that this sort of virtue or character does not exist and cannot be built, a complete argument against those is not within the scope of

71 I set aside for now questions of free will and determinism. This thesis assumes free will or at least the perception of it and action from it. For more on this, see Peter Strawson’s “Freedom and Resentment.” I will say something quickly on the topic: if we consign ourselves completely to determinism without at least the perception of free will, we also consign ourselves to a total lack of accountability. This is as good an argument as any – if we don’t at the very least perceive ourselves as having free will, we face a slippery slope towards amoral chaos. See footnote 72 for more.
73 Examples include the Stanford Prison Experiment, Milgram Obedience experiments, and Gilbert Harman’s writings. See bibliography.
this thesis. For the sake of this thesis, my primary argument is this: surely, our environments play some role in our actions, for if it were otherwise, part of my alienation critique of Kant and Mill would be invalid. However, if we only look at environments and not at the traits that those environments instill in the individuals in them, we will lose all ability to evaluate virtue and vice, not only on the level of the individual, but also on the environmental level. Such a proposition seems to entail a difficult cycle to break that consigns us to total moral relativism and the destruction of our ability to evaluate what we think is morally good or not. So, we are left with the question: if not from fulfilling immediate desires, nor from birth, nor entirely from our environment, where does flourishing come from?

Aristotle argues that human flourishing comes directly from a life of virtue. The person who exercises virtue across the different areas of their life builds good character, and the person with good character lives a flourishing life. So, what exactly is virtue? How does one come to act virtuously, and thus build good character? What does it mean to then

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74 For example, Gilbert Harman writes: “There is no reason to believe in character traits as ordinarily conceived.” Further, he writes: “If there are no character traits, there is nothing one can do to acquire character traits that are more like those possessed by a virtuous agent,” and “We need to convince people to look at situational factors and to stop trying to explain things in terms of character traits. We need to abandon all talk of virtue and character, not find a way to save it by reinterpreting it.” Yikes. Clearly I am doing something completely against the good of humanity! Luckily for me, it’s not as if this is a case of me having bad or vicious character – it’s my environment that forms my attitudes and actions, after all! I guess the Claremont McKenna College Department of Philosophy is to blame for me creating such a social evil as this thesis. Enough of the sarcasm, though. My main point in questioning this point of view is that it bears the uncomfortable implication that we can’t hold individuals accountable for their actions, and instead must hold their situations accountable. But aren’t situations really just a conglomeration of the actions of individuals? And if so, don’t we run into the trap of being unable to evaluate the virtue and vice of those situations? If that’s the case, then we are in for a pretty tough go of it if we want to improve our society at all, or even if we just want to tell someone we did not appreciate the way they did something with any validity – their actions would only be a manifestation of their environment, which of course they cannot control. Double yikes!


75 For more on this, refer back to footnote 72.
live a flourishing life? There are a few key components of each of these themes, which I will unpack in the coming paragraphs.

To answer the first question, and address what virtue is, I use a simple comparison. If I play a sport, it follows that I want to play that sport well. If that sport is running, running well would entail running fast or far, and my improvement in running would consist in improving my ability to run faster or farther. Similarly, if I am a painter, I want to paint well. I hope to create beauty with each brush stroke, practicing this over and over to become a better and better painter. For Aristotle, virtue is similar. Simply put, virtue entails being a human well, doing the distinctive activity of living well. This comes from a combination of things, including partially from our circumstances, but primarily from learning to balance between the vices of excess and deficiency in our various activities, thus reaching what Aristotle calls a virtuous mean. So how do we learn to do that, and what are the virtues that Aristotle speaks of?

To answer this question, I now turn to the beginning of the second book of *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which Aristotle comments on pleasure and pain. As humans, we commonly act with some regard to our senses of pleasure and pain. As I have already mentioned, a virtuous person does not simply follow either of these, but rather exercises their reason to make the right choices, regardless of what would bring pleasure or pain. However, the virtuous person also comes to derive pleasure from doing the right or virtuous thing. One cannot, on one’s own, intuitively learn to act contrarily to one’s senses of pleasure and pain. A baby, for example, cries when it is in pain, and giggles or smiles when it experiences pleasure. Utilitarians often base their theories of rationality in our desire of

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76 This notion of improvement will be critical to the concept of flourishing, as I will show later in this chapter.
pleasure and avoidance of pain,\textsuperscript{77} and while there is certainly some merit to this idea, a
theory of morality asks how we \textit{should} act, not how we are programmed to act, and
furthermore, a self-interested rationality (that is, a pleasure seeking one) paradoxically
blocks us off from some of the greatest pleasures in life.\textsuperscript{78} On this point, Aristotle
comments: “For pleasure causes us to do base actions, and pain causes us to abstain from
fine ones. That is why we need to have had the appropriate upbringing – right from early
youth, as Plato says – to make us find enjoyment or pain in the right things; for this is the
correct education.”\textsuperscript{79} If people want to live well with others and flourish in our society,
they must be taught the virtues from early on.

Aristotle divides virtues into two categories: those of thought, such as “wisdom,
comprehension, and prudence,” and those of character, such as “generosity and
temperance,” among others.\textsuperscript{80} Primarily, I will focus on virtues of character, for it is those
that are primarily what we refer to when we talk about morality (or how to make good
decisions and live good lives), since they govern our interactions with others.\textsuperscript{81} Aristotle
writes that virtues of character arise from \textit{ethos}, which translates directly as habit.\textsuperscript{82}
Flourishing must come from virtuous \textit{action}, not just a virtuous disposition or environment;
one must actually go out and act virtuously in order to live a flourishing life.\textsuperscript{83} And since
that capacity is not defined by birth alone, it must be the case that it is possible to develop

\textsuperscript{77} Bentham and Mill are excellent examples of this. See Bentham’s \textit{Principles} and Mill’s \textit{Utilitarianism}.
\textsuperscript{78} More on this in my discussion of MacIntyre’s concept of goods internal to practices later in this chapter.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid, 18.
\textsuperscript{81} Of course, virtues of the mind are of use to us if we seek to live good lives as well, but these are focused
heavily by schools as it is. The purpose of this thesis is to illustrate how we may teach the virtues of
character so that we are not only growing intellectually intelligent pupils but also socially responsible and
responsive ones.
\textsuperscript{82} Aristotle, \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, 18.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid, 10-11.
the capacity to flourish at some point. This capacity is predicated on our learning of the virtues, which, Aristotle argues, must be cultivated with a good teacher, “for playing the harp makes both good and bad harpists, and it is analogous in the case of builders and all the rest; for building well makes good builders, and building badly makes bad ones. Otherwise no teacher would be needed, but everyone would be born a good or a bad craftsman.”

As with learning any skill or craft, virtues must be thoughtfully and constantly habituated and repeated: “we become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave actions.” When we act in one way or another repetitively, those actions, the ends we associate with those actions, and critically, our reflection on those actions, form our character. When those repetitive actions are virtuous ones and we begin to understand why they are such, our character becomes good.

Part of what it means to develop good character is the ability to determine what Aristotle calls the mean, which is the balance between excess and deficiency of each virtue. This mean is much more easily discoverable through repeated action, and through instruction of a good teacher. When a person does this in mind alone, they are unable to receive any feedback from those that surround them, whereas actions are perceived by the world, which allows for practice and approximation towards the mean. Yet at the same time, the way a person structures their mind, not just their actions, is incredibly important; the same way someone who happens to guess the correct answer to a mathematics problem does not actually understand mathematics, a person cannot simply act in a way that happens

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84 Ibid, 19.
85 Ibid, 18-19.
to be virtuous, and genuinely be virtuous; for after doing either, they would have no greater
knowledge about how to repeat it, or more importantly, to act upon it in even a slightly
differentiated situation. Thus, people must reflect upon and learn from their actions as they
go along in order to improve as moral beings as they move through their lives.

Habituation is a key piece of building virtuous character; when the time comes, and
there is no chance to consider alternatives, a well-habituated, virtuous person makes the
virtuous decision nearly automatically, by instinct, the way an elite runner is able to extend
each stride automatically when they need to. Obviously, most decisions are not split-second
instantual reactions, and so our ethical theory must be responsive to decisions that require
more thought as well. The painter, for example, considers each brush stroke carefully,
before moving on to the next; if our theory of living a good life did not help us to make
good decisions when a prior calculus is required, it would not help us do much in the way
of living well intertemporally. Aristotle offers another framework for these more
temporally extended decisions, which fits perfectly into the framework of habituation. We
must learn to find the mean between the vices of excess and deficiency, and the way we do
that is through voluntary action: we choose. Aristotle writes: “[actions] receive praise or
blame if they are voluntary, but pardon, sometimes even pity, if they are involuntary.”86 In
clearer terms, when we do something virtuous or vicious of our own volition, we are
responsible for that action. Yet it is also important to note that while Aristotle allows for
the possibility of an action being out of a person’s control, ignorance on that person’s part
does not qualify as such; building character is exactly what defends against such ignorance.
So, when there is an opportunity for voluntary action and we have more than a second to

86 Ibid, 30.
consider our course of action, we have a choice, and a chance to build character. That choice, then, consists in three primary steps, so says Aristotle: wish, deliberation, and decision. When there is an end which we identify as something good, we wish for it. Upon wishing for that end, we deliberate about the best means to achieve that end, weighing the different routes we could take. Finally, after deliberation, we decide upon the correct action and take it.

So, in wishing, deliberating, and deciding, we identify the good end and make our way toward it very intentionally. This path is what builds character, and the tools we use (wish, deliberation, and decision) are best learned from a virtuous teacher, for if we learn to use the same tools viciously, our character will be vicious. Our habituated skills are then put to the test, so that in all situations of voluntary action, particularly those in which we do not have time to use those tools actively, we act in a manner that is consistent with the character we have built in the moments when we have actively used those tools of wish, deliberation, and decision. Both virtue and vice, writes Aristotle, are within our control, but must be responsive to our situations. What we do with those circumstances is up to us, and in choosing virtuously or viciously, we enter into virtuous or vicious states of character, the former conducive to flourishing, and the latter not. What it means to live well varies from person to person depending on their background, but what it means to flourish, to seek the ultimate good, does not. For Aristotle, flourishing consists in making virtuous decisions across the gamut of situations in a human life. The person who chooses and acts

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87 Ibid, 33.
89 Ibid, 37.
90 Ibid, 39.
virtuously, regardless of situation (but, critically, in a way responsive to that situation),
flourishes. Finally, that brings us to some of the specific virtues and vices. For the sake of
brevity and also because the list is infinitely long (including such virtues as patience,
humility, bravery, courage, compassion, temperance, generosity, magnanimity, and more),
I will detail just one of the virtues of character in depth. This should be sufficient to
understand the general concept of virtue and vice, and apply for oneself.

The first virtue Aristotle examines is bravery, and this is the virtue upon which I
will focus. He defines bravery as being a mean somewhere between cowardice and
arrogance; surely, if we are being brave, we do not want to fear things which are trivial,
nor do we want to be confident in situations that do not merit confidence. We do not want
to be so confident that it will lead us to do things outside of our capabilities. For example,
if a person sees another person being mugged, it is not necessarily the brave thing to
intervene no matter what. The brave person considers the situation and is able to act
intelligently based on their capabilities and the perceived necessary capabilities to
intervene; if the mugger is bigger and stronger than they are, it may make sense to call 9-1-1
for help, for example. Simply rushing in blind to the situational variables is not
indicative of bravery but rather of arrogance. Here I diverge from Aristotle a bit, for he
emphasizes that bravery is a rightful confidence particularly when one’s life is in danger,
including walking into a situation of sure death; he focuses on bravery in battle, which
occurs to me to be somewhat less relevant in today’s day and age. Rather, applied today,
bravery may look a little different for each person. For the child on the playground, bravery

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91 Ibid, 40.
92 Ibid, 40-41.
93 Ibid, 41.
may look like standing up to the best players, who only seek to play with each other, though that may make the child unpopular among those better players. As has been the topic of much news recently, bravery in the office may look like speaking out against someone who has committed some form of sexual assault or harassment. In a situation of oppression, the brave person might use their voice to call out inequities and dedicate themselves to improving the situation, though that may have bad consequences for them. Aristotle alludes to such situations, but he degrades “the bravery of citizens” as being something worthy, though slightly less so than bravery in situations involving death, such as those in war. Bravery need not be specifically focused in wartime, for what good is a virtue if it can only be practiced by soldiers and not by the general populace? Certainly there might be situations that evoke more bravery than others, but my key critique here of Aristotle is that the bounds of bravery extend beyond the battlefield.

Furthermore, Aristotle extends strict boundaries on what he considers to be brave action even on the battlefield, which strike me as out of line with what is actually meant by bravery. He writes,

Professional soldiers, however, turn out to be cowards whenever the danger overstrains them and they are inferior in numbers and equipment. For they are the first to run, whereas the citizen troops stand firm and get killed… For the citizens find it shameful to run, and find death more choiceworthy than safety at this cost.

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94 See links in works cited under “Sexual Assault and Harassment.”
95 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 42.
96 This makes sense in the context of the time of course, as Aristotle continuously refers to the war heroes written about by Homer. Today’s society looks a little different; heroes need not be men nor soldiers nor in danger of their lives in order to be brave.
Bravery as I have characterized it has everything to do with intense situational awareness, sense of self and one’s own capabilities, and fear of what makes sense to be fearful of, and less to do with an unquestioning confidence and attitude regardless of the apparent danger of a situation. Of course, bravery might entail exceeding what is expected in a given scenario, for example leading the charge on the battlefield when no one else will, but it does not entail stupidity; if that charge is going to get everyone in your lines killed and make no impact otherwise, then the brave person may be the one who restrains the arrogant person trying to charge, or the one who makes the call for the forces to retreat and recoup. Bravery, and the other virtues with it, entails a responsiveness to what is needed in a situation, in accordance with a learned ethical compass. How exactly might we come to have such a compass? How does bravery (and the other virtues) contribute to flourishing? In the section that follows, I refer to Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue*, which gives us a more practical, applicable account of virtue.

III. How We Improve: MacIntyre’s Practices, Narrative Unity, and Traditions

Aristotle writes that the well-habituated person grows to become both virtuous and continent (self-restraint from excessive or harmful pleasures).\(^98\) They know what the virtuous thing to do is in a given scenario, and they do it, because they have been habituated to do so. Someone might also become poorly habituated into incontinence or vice. That is to say, they might learn what the right thing to do is, but have some weakness of will, and be unable to follow through on that right action; this would be incontinence.\(^99\) On the other

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\(^98\) Ibid, 100.
\(^99\) Ibid, 100.
hand, they might be habituated into believing that the wrong things are right, for example, that one should steal and lie to get one’s way, and thus learn to be vicious. Aristotle speaks of habituation, and of the necessity of a good teacher to guide people to virtue like skill, but he does not go into great depth or elaboration on the specifics of habituation. In the previous section, we looked at bravery, and got some sense of what it means to be brave, but how to become brave in the first place remains somewhat unclear. Aristotle writes, “Whoever stands firm against the right things and fears the right things, for the right end, in the right way, at the right time, and is correspondingly confident, is the brave person.” 100 I do not think that most people would disagree with this, but how can we habituate towards virtues as such? MacIntyre gives an excellent answer to this; he builds virtue beginning from the concept of practices, which allow for the discovery of internal goods.

Remember that the ultimate goal towards which virtue directs a person is living well, much the way the goal of a runner is to run well. For MacIntyre and Aristotle alike, this is likened to the pursuit of excellence, whether the practice be chess or running or something else. This concept of a practice is critical to MacIntyre’s interpretation of virtue and is the first of three logical stages which constitute his full concept of virtue, all three of which build on Aristotle.

To start, I will dig into MacIntyre’s concept of a practice, as it puts a real-world lens on the concept of habituation, which is so fundamental to the flourishing life. MacIntyre defines a practice as follows:

By a ‘practice’ I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially

100 Ibid, 41.
definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to
achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved,
are systematically extended.101

To elucidate this concept, MacIntyre uses the example of the “highly intelligent seven-
year-old”102 learning chess. Making himself the teacher, MacIntyre gets the child to begin
playing by offering candy for each game won. He makes the games “difficult, but not
impossible”103 to win, thus ensuring that the child must either give a solid effort or find an
effective method of cheating to get the reward. Thus, the child begins with the idea that
chess is only a means to the ends of candy, and might consider that latter option to do
whatever it takes to win. However, as MacIntyre makes it more difficult to win the candy,
the child unveils “a new set of reasons”104 for playing. The child comes to understand that
chess has a set of goods internal to it, such as the skill and strategy involved, the
outmaneuvering of one’s opponent, or the cognitive battle with one’s opponent. These
internal goods are circumvented by cheating, which by its nature can only focus on the
outcome of winning.

So, over the course of several (or many) games of chess, the teacher helps the child
to shift focus from the initial external good or reward (in this case candy), to the goods
internal to the practice. In learning to play the game of chess, the child comes away not
only with superior understanding and strategy, but also the beginnings of virtue; they learn
patience, which they can then apply to other areas of life; they gain the ability to logically
work through a puzzle or problem; they may even develop some friendly rapport with their

101 Alasdair C. MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of
102 Ibid, 188.
103 Ibid, 188.
104 Ibid, 188.
teacher and those with whom they practice. By moving past the external goods available, they open themselves up to a world of possible internal goods, a world only becomes available through the virtuous hard work of attaining those internal goods. If the child remains motivated only by the original ends, the candy, or what will bring them immediate utility, they lose out on the patience they might have otherwise learned; moreover, they may never even realize that it was there to be had in the first place, and will likely move on from the game as it gets harder to attain the external goods of winning the candy.

This concept of a practice and the goods internal to it is essential to becoming a more fully formed, virtuous person, and to living a flourishing life. For example, a child may be able to appreciate the goods internal to bravery and honesty when called into the principal’s office. If the child lies, they may get away with what they did, but such a lie ultimately cuts them off from any sort of relationship with the principal. If they tell the truth, they may suffer the immediate consequences of some discipline for their actions, but they will have won a moral victory. Their conscience will likely be clearer for it, and the next time such a situation rolls around, they will know to do the right thing. Their truth-telling establishes trust with the principal, and forms the basis for a relationship that is impossible to build on lies. If they had lied in the first place and gotten away with it, it is all the more likely that they will learn nothing from the scenario, and do the wrong thing once again; if they are caught at a later time, the consequences are likely to be worse, but what is more, they will have habituated a tendency of lying, which precludes them from similar relationships in other walks of their life.\textsuperscript{105} MacIntyre warns against this sort of

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{105} This again begins to get at MacIntyre’s concept of the narrative unity of a human life, discussed next.
\end{footnote}
adoption of external goods as the sole ends of action, and the importance of the virtues to combat that:

The possession of the virtues – and not only of their semblance and simulacra – is necessary to achieve [internal goods]; yet the possession of the virtues may perfectly well hinder us in achieving external goods. I need to emphasize at this point that external goods genuinely are goods. Not only are they characteristic objects of human desire, whose allocation is what gives point to the virtues of justice and generosity, but no one can despise them altogether without a certain hypocrisy. Yet notoriously the cultivation of truthfulness, justice, and courage will often, the world being contingently what it is, bar us from being rich or famous or powerful. Thus although we may hope that we can not only achieve the standards of excellence and the internal goods of certain practices by possessing the virtues and become rich, famous, and powerful, the virtues are always a potential stumbling block to this comfortable ambition. We should therefore expect that, if in a particular society the pursuit of external goods were to become dominant, the concept of the virtues might suffer first attrition and then perhaps something near total effacement, although simulacra might abound.106

What MacIntyre is saying is that we must hold dear to internal goods, for if we supplant them with external ones or make them subservient to external ones in any way (i.e. friendship as a means to gaining political power) then we lose the internality and true worthiness of them. Considered with this example, if the child learns to lie to get their way, they will find it more and more difficult to trust and be trusted and therefore will struggle to form meaningful relationships. They may succeed in their cunning, but they will be worse for it. In this way, whether a person discovers the goods internal to a practice or focuses only on external goods, either may feed back into itself, to lead toward a virtuous character in the case of the former and a vicious one in the latter case. But, once a child understands those internal goods and the exercise of the virtues (i.e. of patience, or bravery, or honesty), they also come to understand the value of each of these to the greater goods in

106 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 196.
life, such as friendship and the other loving relationships that are so critical to flourishing. There is one lingering question: are there some practices that are, in fact, bad? Might certain practices lend themselves, rather than to the building of virtue, to the building of vice? The answer is certainly yes, as suggested above with the example of lying, but a further qualification of the concept of practices helps protect against these: the necessity of relationship to practices, which I will elucidate in an example below, and which will be intimately relevant in later two chapters.

A child at summer camp is exposed to many different practices, from archery to woodworking, swimming to learning a musical instrument, from which they may choose one or many. Any of these has the potential not only to beget to them external goods, such as prizes or ranks or achievements recognized publicly, but also goods internal to that specific practice, such as the distinct satisfaction that comes along with a bullseye after pushing through many misses, the mastery of a specific sanding technique in the woodshop, the overcoming of fear of the water, or a newly gained ability to play a difficult song. Furthermore, these goods, which may only come along with respect to a particular practice, offer different avenues by which one may learn the virtues. Any of the previous examples may lead to patience, resilience, determination, or attention to detail (to name but a few virtues) by exposing a camper to failure, which are arguably the greater internal goods at play. These virtues are not limited to one or another of these specific practices, but they are internal to the practices in that they are not simply sought after as the sole ends of a practice. One cannot, for example, force one’s way into a sense of patience. Rather, in

107 More on love in the next chapter.
108 Shooting a bullseye consistently does not guarantee anything about one’s ability to swim, for example.
trying, failing, and trying again at a certain practice, one is able to habituate the virtue of patience. However, in practicing swimming, or woodworking, or chess, and failing, one could become frustrated, and habituate that frustration. If the latter is the case, it will then have negative impacts on their attainment of external goods as well; if they become easily frustrated, they will have difficulty pushing themselves through hard tasks, thus blocking them from both internal and external goods. On the other hand, if they are able to learn patience and dedication through a difficult project, they can apply this across other areas of their lives, thus unlocking further internal and (potentially) external goods.

This points to the Aristotelian requirement of a good teacher: it is important that someone, especially a child, be directed as they work at a practice, lest they fall into ongoing frustration, or worse yet, into a cycle of cheating to achieve the accolades they desire. To prevent against this, MacIntyre notes the imperative of “a certain kind of relationship between those who participate in [a practice].”\footnote{MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue}, 191.} If a child does not fulfill their part of a practice, or cheats on a test for a rank in swimming (for example), they default on their part of the shared pursuit of goods internal to that practice. In the swimming case, the camper who cheats on a test to achieve the desired rank not only cheats the system, but also the counselor who worked to teach them, as this precludes the future success of the practice in that relationship. Finally, the camper cheats themselves, because they know that they did not deserve the rank (or external good), and furthermore, have cut themselves off from the internal goods associated with the practice of swimming, at least at that moment in time – they are not a better swimmer for cheating, and they know that intimately well. They lose on all fronts except the attainment of the external good; this is especially
detrimental to their ability to flourish. However, if the camper and counselor work together toward the shared goal of the camper overcoming whatever obstacles stand in their way towards improving at the practice, each opens themselves to a great bounty of internal goods: friendship and mutual respect stand out as two possibilities, alongside the individual goods, such as skill and strategy, as well as the learned virtues of patience, dedication, and more. By the discovery of internal goods through practices, what is right or virtuous and what is desired begin to align in one’s mind. The gains to both camper and counselor are enormous, but only truly available if each honors the relationship and everything that entails.

Thus, relationship forms a key part of the discovery internal goods via practices. Strong relationships bolster the learning of practices and likewise, learning a virtuous practice opens all parties up to stronger relationships. Aristotle both notices and emphasizes this: “Friendship… is a virtue, or involves virtue. Further, it is most necessary for our life. For no one would choose to live without friends even if he had all the other goods.”110 For MacIntyre, friendship stands out as a remarkable internal good that comes from the genuine embrace of practices, and is unavailable to those who treat the practice as a means to external goods. And, as MacIntyre writes, “to enter into a practice is to enter into a relationship not only with its contemporary practitioners, but also those who have preceded us in the practice, particularly those whose achievements extended the reach of the practice to its present point.”111 If a person wants to open themselves to the goods internal to a

111 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 194.
particular practice, they are accountable not only to themselves and those with whom they enter the practice, but also to the integrity and legacy left by those who have gone before.

Practices, and the goods internal to them, are an excellent conceptual framework by which to imagine virtue. Through these practices, we come to appreciate and open ourselves to the greatest internal goods available. The next question is: so what? Why do we need a practice to learn virtues? Why bother involving ourselves in these practices to begin with, especially if they are difficult? What do they bring to the rest of our lives? MacIntyre’s answer is the next step in his account of virtue: the narrative unity of a human life. This is an essential concept to virtue because it requires that the lessons we learn from practices do not go unused in the rest of our lives. The previous paragraphs allude to this in two ways: first, the latter set of goods internal to practices (patience and other virtues) are ones that may (and should) be applied across one’s life (for example, patience developed in learning archery may be applied in learning woodcraft, or in working to understand another person in a disagreement); second, entering into the relationships necessary to reaping the goods internal to a given practice incurs an accountability that makes inconsistency across the practice difficult (for example, one cannot truly achieve goods internal to a practice if they lie to other practitioners selectively). MacIntyre gives a sense of the narrative unity of a human life as following:

The liquidation of self into a set of demarcated areas of role-playing allows no scope for the exercise of dispositions which could genuinely be accounted virtues in any sense remotely Aristotelian. For a virtue is not a disposition that makes for success only in one particular type of situation. What are spoken of as the virtues of a good committee man or a good administrator or of a gambler or a pool hustler are professional skills, professionally deployed in those situations where they can be effective, not virtues. Someone who genuinely possesses a virtue can be expected to manifest it in very different types of situations, many of them situations
where the practice of a virtue cannot be expected to be effective in the same way that we expect a professional skill to be.\textsuperscript{112}

So, for the camper who has learned to be patient when shooting archery, that patience, or the way that they learn to release the tension in their body and center themselves by exhaling before each shot, is not a virtue unless they are able to apply it to other arenas of their life. They must learn to extend that beyond the archery range, and for this, as I have mentioned multiple times and Aristotle emphasizes, a good teacher is imperative.\textsuperscript{113} MacIntyre uses the word “narrative” here quite intentionally: a person is “not only an actor, but an author.”\textsuperscript{114} Thus, through the instruction of a good teacher, we learn the virtues through practices and apply them readily throughout our lives, determining our own path or narrative to the extent we can.

Referring back to the other example, of bravely being honest with the principal, the child who lies in some scenarios but tells the truth in others violates this principle of virtue according to the narrative unity of a human life. Truthfulness becomes for them something to be used as a tool when it is necessary and loses its value as a virtue. If we are only truthful when it is convenient to us, then that truthfulness is not a facet of our character; we are creating a discontinuity in the narratives of our lives. Rather, we must learn to strive for truthfulness across our lives, in all but the most extenuating of circumstances. I intentionally use the language of striving here, as it becomes important as well to understand both the intentions behind one’s actions and the circumstances belying those actions. Certainly, a lie told accidentally under the belief that what they were saying to be

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, 205.
\textsuperscript{113} One way this can be done pedagogically is forthcoming in the fourth chapter, on summer camp. Also, more on teaching virtue in the discussion of Julia Annas’ \textit{Intelligent Virtue} in the next section of this chapter.
\textsuperscript{114} MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue}, 213.
true is different as lying with full knowledge of the consequences of that lie, even if those consequences turn out to be the same. The liar in the first case, if they are virtuous, upon discovering that they have lied, might seek out the recipient of said lie to correct the mistake, having come to understand the goods internal to telling the truth, most especially strong relationships. A further example to help us understand the importance of intention and circumstance might be lying on behalf of another person’s well-being;\textsuperscript{115} doing so is quite evidently a different (and potentially more virtuous) scenario than lying solely for personal gain.

So, our situation and our motives matter; MacIntyre qualifies his earlier statement about authorship with the following caveat: “We are never more (and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our own narratives… We enter upon a stage which we did not design and we find ourselves part of an action that was not of our own making… Each of our dramas exerts constraints on each other’s, making the whole different from the parts, but still dramatic.”\textsuperscript{116} In using this analogy to the theatrical stage, MacIntyre outlines the idea that we all exist within the constraints of our situations and other people’s actions, and cannot control those, but that we still “write our own histories,” so to speak, and are accountable for the decisions we make and their impacts on others. In other words, whatever the differences in our constraints, it is imperative that each of us take control of what we can: our own actions and reactions to those constraints. The virtuous person is the one who, relative to their constraints, responds in accordance with such virtues as patience, bravery,

\textsuperscript{115} Take the Murderer at the Door – if a known murderer shows up at your door with the intent of killing someone you are harboring, it seems abundantly clear that lying that the person is not there is the virtuous course of action.

\textsuperscript{116} MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue}, 213-214.
and honesty to the extent they can, and who pushes that extent further as they move throughout their personal narrative. MacIntyre alludes to just this idea in his discussion of unity:

In what does the unity of an individual life consist? The answer is that its unity is the unity of a narrative embodied in a single life. To ask ‘What is the good for me?’ is to ask how best I might live out that unity and bring it to completion. To ask ‘What is the good life for man?’ is to ask what all answers to the former question must have in common. But now it is important to emphasize that it is the systematic asking of these two questions and the attempt to answer them in deed as well as in word which provide the moral life with its unity.117

He adds, furthermore:

The virtues therefore are to be understood as those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices, but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations, and distractions which we encounter, and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good.118

So, in continually asking ourselves the two questions from the first selection, we are able to take an active stance in our own lives,119 which involves a constantly improving understanding and application of the virtues. When ask these questions and act on the answers, we flourish, necessarily in conjunction those around us. Those answers depend on our situation and narrative history. This helps us get at the final piece of MacIntyre’s conception of virtue: the moral tradition in which each of us operates along our narratively unified quest for the flourishing life.

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119 More on this in the discussion of Annas in the subsequent section as well.
Each of us, so says MacIntyre, begins our lives at our “moral starting point[s],”\textsuperscript{120} which are defined by the city, state, or country where we were born and lived, the family in which we grew up, etc.: in essence, our moral starting point is constituted by our environment. This is the initial standpoint from which we may begin to ask questions about the good. It is necessarily wrapped up in the history and future; “the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity.”\textsuperscript{121} Therefore, white people in the US must be cognizant of the history of slavery, segregation, and ongoing discrimination in the country, just as Aryan Germans must be cognizant of the Holocaust and the oppression of the Jewish people.\textsuperscript{122} Because each of us is the “co-author” of our own narrative, we bear some responsibility for fixing it and making it better; these constraints “[do] not entail that the self has to accept the moral limitations” of one’s historical or cultural location, but rather must recognize and be responsive to it.\textsuperscript{123}

So, each of us inherits some moral tradition, or many, depending on the different environments in which we grow, and which have contributed to our moral starting point. Moral traditions are passed down, often through institutions, whether those are formal, as in a school or governmental body, or informal, as within a family.\textsuperscript{124} As MacIntyre writes, “traditions, when vital, embody continuities of conflict,”\textsuperscript{125} meaning that, if they are virtuous, they are on a constant course of improvement. On such a course, they, and the individuals that comprise them, must continually ask the same sorts of questions that

\textsuperscript{120} MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue}, 220.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid, 221.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid, 220.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid, 221.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid, 222.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid, 222.
individuals ask themselves: “What is the good for this institution? What is the good for the individuals involved in it and whose lives it touches?” Further, practices are often defined by the moral traditions that carry them into the present.126 Practices, and the virtues they require and build, carry the capacity to change and update moral traditions, thus bringing those traditions to life and helping them evolve. This is a critical difference from Kantian or utilitarian moral theory. Whereas with either of those the history of an institution and its traditions are irrelevant and what is important is that the rule is followed, along MacIntyre’s conception, such moral traditions are a key part of each member’s moral development, and as such must push themselves in a similar way to how those members push themselves.127 Moral traditions define our moral environment, and give us the context from which we improve as moral beings; because the greater world is constantly changing and evolving, and we with it, our moral tradition must not be a stagnant, unchanging rule, but something that evolves and improves along with that world and its inhabitants.

MacIntyre thus provides a more concrete framework through which we may understand virtue ethics. It is simultaneously idealistic, in that it focuses on human flourishing, and realistic, as it takes into account our background and gives us mechanisms by which to identify what it means for us to flourish both individually and collectively and how to act on it. Practices help us, particularly as young learners, to identify internal goods and the virtues necessary to achieve those, and help us, quite literally, to practice those virtues and incorporate them into our character. A good teacher can then help us to understand that virtuous action is not limited to particular practices. By pointing our

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126 Ibid, 222.
127 Ibid, 223.
learned virtues outward from specific practices, we come to understand the narrative unity of our lives, and our position as a co-author of that narrative. Our moral tradition writes the other part of our narrative: it defines our moral starting point, or the basis from which we may improve, and also defines the practices to which we are typically exposed as we grow. Throughout each aspect of MacIntyre’s theory, we are pushed to ask the questions: “What is the good for me? What is the good for others? What is the good for this institution? How can I/we improve and push that good further?” MacIntyre thus gives a comprehensive and applicable account of the virtues that is accessible to anyone, from any starting point. It does not hold the same standards of outcomes across different situations as utilitarian theory might, nor does it hold a rule to be paramount to all else, as Kantian theory does. Rather, it simply asks each of us, regardless of our setting, to take note of our status quo, question how we may improve it, and move toward that improvement. MacIntyre notes that this is often done in relationship with others, and through a process of deliberation akin to Aristotle’s. These relationships and deliberative processes are a crucial part of practices and the discovery of internal goods. In the section that follows, I look to Julia Annas’ *Intelligent Virtue* for some further clarification on the interrelatedness of virtues conceived as similar to practical skill-building and as constitutive of flourishing.

IV. Putting it All Together: Annas’ Skill-Building Analogy and Human Flourishing

Julia Annas’ concept of the virtues is as follows:

A virtue is a lasting feature of a person, a tendency for the person to be a certain way. It is not merely a lasting feature, however, one that just sits there undisturbed. It is *active*: to have it is to be disposed to act in certain ways. And it *develops* through selective response to circumstances. Given

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128 Which, as we will see, is somewhat similar to MacIntyre’s practices, but adds a
these points, I shall use the term *persisting* rather than merely lasting… A virtue is also a *reliable* disposition… Further, a virtue is a disposition which is *characteristic*—that is, the virtuous (or vicious) person is acting in and from character when acting in a kindly, brave, or restrained way. This is another way of putting the point that a virtue is a *deep* feature of the person.129

Virtue for Annas is comprised of a number of the things I have noted: it is consistent (in good situations and bad) and as such, takes active input and questioning. It cannot, for example, be reduced to mere passive habit or routine, but rather must be actively and thoughtfully applied and reapplied.130 This echoes much of what MacIntyre brings to our understanding. Further, she notes the importance of development to virtue (and which distinguish virtue from routine); this is the part of her work upon which I will focus.

Crucial to Annas’ conception is this distinction between learning the virtues like skills contrasted with simple routine. A good example of routine, she argues, is driving to the university every day: she does this unthinkingly, without any intention or *telos*; there is no end aside from arriving at the university parking garage.131 Virtues, on the other hand, require all the aspects mentioned in the above quotation: they must be active, causing one to question them and develop them further, and they must be reliable characteristics deeply integrated into one’s self. She uses the example of learning the piano to provide the groundwork for her conception of learning and using a virtue: in learning the piano, we must begin by consciously pushing ourselves (or being pushed) to improve, and then practice over and over, thoughtful as to what we are getting wrong and how to improve it; however, if we reach a point at which we have mastered a certain piece, simply playing it

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130 Ibid, 13.
131 Ibid, 13.
over and over will not help us to become better pianists.\textsuperscript{132} Left alone to simple routine or repetition, piano playing – and virtue – will “ossify and decay.”\textsuperscript{133} Rather, the brilliant pianist and the virtuous person exist in a state of perpetual improvement without ceiling. Furthermore, practical skills and virtue, as mentioned in the sections on Aristotle and MacIntyre, require adaptation in novel situations, and routine alone cannot prepare us for anything unexpected.

Why strive to be better though? Certainly, it makes sense to strive to become better at practical skills, whether those involve the playing of an instrument or a sport, as the ones that incite passion in us have their own rewards; these are the internal goods about which MacIntyre focuses his theory of practices. What gives us the “drive to aspire” to become more virtuous, which forms a central part of Annas’ theory? What are our motivations for doing so? How can we learn the reasons \textit{why} we should be virtuous? MacIntyre presented the model of practices, like chess, through which internal goods are revealed through the learning and application of relevant virtues, and which constitute a part of the motivation for acting virtuously; they are accessible only through the genuine exercise of those virtues. Annas echoes this sentiment and emphasizes the importance of the good teacher.\textsuperscript{134} Especially with respect to skills of significant complexity (i.e. which cannot be applied solely through routine but require consideration and adaptation), a teacher must be

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid, 13.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid, 14.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid, 19.
sufficiently articulate\textsuperscript{135} to explain the underlying reasons why learning a given skill matters.\textsuperscript{136} Annas writes:

The learner in virtue, like the learner in a practical skill, needs to learn what she is doing, to achieve the ability to do it for herself, and to do it in a way that improves as she meets challenges, rather than coming out with predictable repetition. This comes about when the virtue is conveyed by the giving and receiving of reasons.\textsuperscript{137}

Those reasons, as alluded to by MacIntyre in his theory of practices, often come through the learning of other lessons or practices.\textsuperscript{138} Virtues become apparent and necessary as we work through other problems, like learning to swim or paint or converse. We realize that in order to solve these problems, we must be patient and persistent, pushing ourselves through periods of boredom and difficulty, or honest, even if it is against our immediate interests to do so, or brave, continuing on even in a state of discomfort. The good teacher understands that the way they teach skills has implications for their pupils’ learning not only of those skills but also of the way the relevant virtues may then be applied outside of the specific context in which they are taught. Moreover, the good teacher knows their student and can adapt the lesson, practice, or explanation to be relevant to a given pupil.

\textsuperscript{135} This is not necessarily only meant in a verbal sense but is often meant in that sense. Annas writes: “Learning as explicit as this requires the conveying of explanation from the parent, and upshot on the part of the child. Many people have stressed that a lot of this is not, especially with small children, explicitly articulate. We certainly don’t have to imagine the parent always spelling out every time the point that acting in such and such a way is brave, generous, or whatever; a lot of learning takes place by the child’s efforts simply being rewarded or discouraged. Nonetheless, parents are engaged, in a lot of what they do, in explaining to their children what it is that is brave in chasing off a dog or generous in spending your time for other people, and the importance of achieving that by acting differently in a different context, rather than mechanically repeating the original action. An important aspect of this is getting children to see that they are learning to be brave or generous is, as with mathematics or writing, conveying that they still have a way to go. Doing what your role model does is not repeating that action, but coming to understand what they were doing, in performing that action, and being able to do \textit{that} yourself, perhaps in a quite different way.”\textsuperscript{*}


\textsuperscript{136} Ibid, 19.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid, 20.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid, 21.
Finally, the good teacher must also be a model of the behavior they seek to teach the student; this helps the student observe what the virtues look like in practice and helps them envision themselves doing the same things in their own way (not just by rote), but also is essential, because if the teacher does not do this, then they will not be able to credibly explain to the student why it is important. Each of these points further underscore the importance of a strong relationship – founded on mutual respect and support, as well as other virtues – between teacher and student.

Provided a good teacher, a pupil (especially a child) may come to understand relevant virtues and their broad, varied application. But what about those who do not have good teachers? What about those who are not interested in learning to act virtuously? Annas calls this person “ethically lazy”139 – if this is meant to describe the person who has not had good ethical role models, I do not like this term. It does not seem to me to be the fault of a person that they have not had these people in their lives. I will avoid using this term, though it does certainly does apply to some people. In turn, I prefer to emphasize the importance of making good teachers as broadly available as possible. All that aside, Annas argues that if a person does not readily apply the virtues, their “rigid dispositions… will be ill-suited to coping with the world.”140 In other words, if someone does not aspire to apply their virtues in different scenarios, they will be ill-equipped to respond to the different things that life throws their way. Annas argues: this person “may come to learn that her reactions are inadequate the painful way, in encounters with the world which may end up driving her to aspire, if only to avoid the ethical disasters which come from routine

139 Ibid, 24.
140 Ibid, 24.
mimicking of role models."\textsuperscript{141} While this may be the case, I am not totally sure that such a situation alone will drive a person to dispositional change. In my assessment, this underscores the importance of the good teacher; a person who struggles to apply the virtues may have difficulty learning to do so faced simply with the fact that whatever they are doing is not working. So, part of Annas’ account is the practical skill analogy. The second part ties virtue back into flourishing.

In addressing the second part of Annas’ theory, I begin with a potential critique. On the account I have outlined, it looks like Annas, MacIntyre, and I may fall into a utilitarian or consequentialist trap, as if the virtues are just whatever brings about internal goods, and eventually flourishing. This is not the case; Annas emphasizes (and I do, too) that virtue is aspirational:

[The virtues] are inspiring, not just useful or agreeable, because exercising virtue is a commitment on the part of the virtuous person to goodness because it is goodness: goodness is not just the outcome. The different virtues appear to be focused on different values, but the virtuous life consists in the living of a life, not its circumstances, and so the diversity of ways of life and the values they focus on is not a barrier to the unification of the virtues, and thus an aspiration to a good life overall.\textsuperscript{142}

Thus, the virtuous life is one in which we are constantly aspiring to become better people, to treat others with more respect and patience, to exercise more honesty and generosity, to practice presence, thoughtfulness, and responsiveness to others and our circumstances, novel or otherwise. It consists in the way we structure our thoughts and the actions themselves, not just the outcomes of those actions. For if we have put hard work, persistence, and dedication into some activity, which has an external good attached to it,

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid, 24-25.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid, 116.
like an athletic championship, we will paradoxically end up with the better outcome than if we had solely pursued the external good in the first place. In the latter case (the consequentialist one), if our ends are that good, the championship, and we don’t achieve them, then we are left with nothing; success for us becomes binary. But if we come to appreciate the goods internal to such a pursuit, then we are not left empty-handed if we do not win the championship. Instead, we have become better athletes and competitors, better bonded with our teammates, and more determined for the following season. Even without the external good in hand, with the bitter taste of defeat in our mouth, which admittedly is not fun in the moment, we are flourishing. We have come to understand that external and internal goods do not necessarily always go together. Ironically, this is unequivocally a better outcome than the resentment that would ensue if the only good we recognized was the external one. Furthermore, in the event that we do win, we will also be better off, for we will have both the external good as well as the internal goods as opposed to the external good alone. So, flourishing is a part of life, something that, in constantly aspiring to it, we live out in the everyday. In so doing, we live virtuously, and begin to see the great value of the application of virtue not only in the pursuit of one practice or skill or another, but across the different arenas of our lives.

Annas thus offers a beautiful synthesis of what we have learned in this chapter. Flourishing is necessarily wrapped up in the learning and subsequent improvement of the virtues, as Aristotle emphasized thousands of years ago in his discussion of habituation. Much the way MacIntyre emphasizes practices in the discovery of internal goods, Annas presents virtues as analogous to the learning of practical skills: in engaging in practices and under the guidance of a good teacher, we come to the realization that flourishing is not just
an end ideal but something that we live out every day when we live virtuously. Like MacIntyre, Annas notes that a sense of virtue is useless if we cannot apply it across many different areas of our lives. Her discussion of moving beyond rote learning, which fits perfectly with his regarding the narrative unity of a human life, puts this particularly emphatically. We cannot think of ourselves as different actors in different situations; though our application of the virtues must certainly be environmentally responsive, it is essential that we see our virtuous action in one scenario as linked to our action in all others and part of our whole character. And, like MacIntyre, Annas recognizes that our learning of the virtues is partially defined by our environment; she calls this our “embedded context.”\textsuperscript{143} In concluding this chapter, I hope to bring together these different aspects and respond specifically to what I identified as the shortcomings of utilitarian and Kantian ethics in the previous chapter.

There are two crucial points at which both utilitarianism and Kantian ethics fall short. The first is each theory’s unteachable nature. Both theories clearly outline ideals: for Mill and other utilitarians, like Singer, the ideal is the greatest good for the greatest number of people; for Kant, the ideal is the categorical imperative, which means that we can pursue our own ends only insofar as we understand and respect the rights of everyone else to do the same, thus acting \textit{from} duty and upon the universalizing principle. Given mature, exceptionally other-regarding adults, these might be reasonable ideals to hold, though I believe that the second (forthcoming) critique casts that into doubt. This chapter has been particularly concerned with this primary critique. Annas puts this clearly and beautifully:

\[\text{The crucial point about skill under discussion is a point about how it is taught and learnt, and so the context to examine is the analogous one for}\]

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid, 21.
virtue, namely contexts of teaching and learning. This also does justice to an important point about virtue ethics, as opposed to other kinds of ethical theories. Understanding the process of ethical education is a part of virtue ethics. Ethical education is not something ‘merely practical’ and so extraneous to theory. We cannot understand what virtue is without coming to understand how we acquire it. Virtue ethical theories are thus not theories which recommend themselves on other grounds—economy of basic terms, simple structure, and the like—and leave us to find out for ourselves whether such a theory can be put into practice.¹⁴⁴

Unlike the other two ethical theories discussed here, virtue ethics is intimately interlinked with how it is taught.

Even if we were to decide that we might rather use utilitarianism or Kantian thought as the basis of our ethics, we would need some way to learn to do so; because neither is able to give a satisfactory account of learning, either defaults into virtue ethics. For Mill, we need to learn the virtue of being other-regarding and incorporate it into our utility functions. As we have seen, this turns into a chicken-and-egg problem going back to the question of why someone would want to teach other-regarding preferences in the first place, and gets at the question: if utility-maximizing actors somehow manage to inculcate other-regarding preferences in others, is it not still to one’s advantage to renege on those on those preferences so as to take advantage of others and maximize one’s own utility? This leads to dizzying contortions of adapting our preferences to suit the greater good, and ultimately is difficult to comprehend in practice, especially when utilitarian literature emphasizes individual rationality as being inherently self-interested. Kantian thought, on the other hand, runs into the issues previously discussed of how one gets to acting from duty when all he really offers by way of teaching results in us acting solely in conformity with duty. For any ethical theory, learning is an absolutely essential aspect if the theory is

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 21.
to be passed on. Virtue ethics, as I have shown in this chapter, is the only theory that fully integrates that aspect.

Not only does virtue ethics as conceived in this chapter account for the necessity of learning ethics, it also gives concrete mechanisms by which we may do so: MacIntyre’s concept of practices and Annas’ skill analogy help us to understand the ways in which children (and also adults faced with a turning point in their lives) may learn to live virtuously. This account of virtue ethics takes into account one’s background and moral context or tradition, and meets people where they are, instead of relating their action to an unchanging ideal, with a strict declaration of whether or not an action is moral. In learning according to this virtue-ethical account, children flourish as they go; there is no outcome set by an infeasible ideal. This ties into the second primary issue with the other two theories.

The second critique of utilitarian and Kantian ethics, along Peter Railton’s account, is that both are alienating to humans as we know ourselves to be: emotional and reliant on interpersonal interaction. Neither utilitarian nor Kantian ethics give us any sense of what it means to interact lovingly with other human beings. Part of the virtue-ethical account of flourishing, on the other hand, is that this theory necessitates interpersonal interaction and learning, and the discovery of internal goods often entails such things as friendship and loving relationship. Virtue ethics, as presented here, moves past the pursuit of particular ends or the following of an impersonal rule to emphasize that living virtuously means a constant improvement without a necessary ceiling or a specific outcome – striving is, in and of itself, human flourishing. This theory, while not easily distilled to a simple rule,145

145 See Annas’ remarks on this as quoted on page 38.
is remarkably applicable in our lives, no matter how different our culture or upbringings may be.

In the chapter that follows, I will look at an integral aspect of flourishing: love. In the sense that I intend it, it is intentionally excluded from Kant’s theory of ethics and impossible to account for in a classical utilitarian approach; it is identified as being strictly opposed to rationality in both. Yet it infuses our lives, as well as the lives of those around us, with meaning; in its very essence it connects us meaningfully to others, and by extension, gets us closer to the Kantian ideal of practical love than Kantian theory even can. As a critical part of human flourishing, it is perfectly at home in Aristotelian virtue ethics, and in the following chapter, I will show how the virtues both support love and can, in turn, be pushed forward and improved upon by that love.
I. Laying the Groundwork for Love

When many people think about love, they think about Romeo and Juliet, the Notebook, and the like, about some irrational, uncontrollable, romantic force that compels us to do things we would never otherwise consider. We can also love things that we do, perhaps our jobs, our studies, or our side hobbies, and occasionally our love for these things can blind us to the amount of ourselves we are giving over. When we are in love, we sacrifice for others, go out of our way to make another person happy, and what is more, sometimes do these things completely at the expense of our own health, wellbeing, and even happiness. Love sometimes puts us in distinctly unhealthy, harmful, or otherwise bad situations: abusive relationships are one example; giving every waking hour to our work without time for our family or our sanity is another. When it is healthy, love can give us great joy and fill our lives with meaning in a way that we might think of as imminently close to what I have described as flourishing in this book. In this chapter, I will focus less on the passionate, romantic love we see in movies and feel strongly, and more on the factors that underlie a sustained, healthy, balanced love. As intimated in the first chapter, such a conception of love has no home in Kantian or classical utilitarian theories. Rather, love in its many different forms is a key part of a flourishing life, and, as I will show in this chapter,
is intimately interwoven with and supported by the virtue-ethical theory laid out in the second chapter. Love builds up who we are, is manifested in our daily choices, and involves hard, thoughtful work and improvement on our part. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the hypothesis that the cultivation of a loving attitude, which comes from an inculcation of the virtues, creates a positive feedback loop back into a person’s character, helping them to continue to strive towards improving it.

Love comes in many forms, each of which helps to make our lives meaningful. Of course, love can be between two people in a romantic sense, as it is commonly thought of, though I will spend less time on romantic love than its popularity perhaps warrants. I am also interested in such forms of love as platonic love between friends, the essential love of oneself, familial love within families, a love of what one does, and the moral love that connects us to all things, places, and people, even those things, places, and people we do not know and will never encounter. This chapter will even go as far as to touch on the love that compels us to care for those who harm us, though of course this is a complicated case, and requires particular attention to the virtues.

Thus, I speak of love generally, but I think that the above descriptions share an underlying characteristic: they detail the way that love connects us deeply to each other, to the things around us, to our world. This meaningful connection is what makes love distinctive and helps it find its home in virtue ethics, particularly when considered against such theories as utilitarianism or Kantian thought.\textsuperscript{146} This chapter will go on to detail a further aspect of virtuous love, which distinguishes it from desire and dutiful beneficence:

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{146} It is worth noting here that other emotions can and should be characterized by the virtues as well. Though this chapter focuses on love, the virtues help us tune all of our emotional responses, not just loving ones.
\end{footnotesize}
it involves a sort-of loving principle of charity, which pushes us to see what is around and within us in the best light possible, and to react as such. This is not to advocate a naïve approach to life in which we ignore shortcomings in ourselves, others, and the world around us; rather, this principle of charity defines how we respond to those shortcomings. It asks us to respond lovingly and in accordance with the virtues to ourselves and others in imperfect situations. So, what it means to love virtuously is three-pronged: first, it necessarily involves meaningful connection between ourselves and something else;\textsuperscript{147} second, it requires the loving principle of charity; third, it is an essential ingredient of a flourishing life. When we act, think, and feel virtuous love, we flourish in the most brilliant way imaginable. Before I go into these characteristics, I will briefly touch on why love in the robust sense to which I refer cannot be properly accounted for in Kantian or utilitarian ethical theories.

II. Pathological Emotion, Master of Reason, or Neither?

In the first chapter of his \textit{Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals}, Kant separates love as inclination (the emotional love which I claim is essential to flourishing) from ethics: “For love as an inclination cannot be commanded, but beneficence from duty itself – even if no inclination whatsoever, indeed if natural and unconquerable aversion resists – is \textit{practical} and not \textit{pathological} love, which lies in the will and not in the propensity of sensation, in principles of action and not in melting compassion; and only the former can

\textsuperscript{147} You may object at this point that self-love does not fulfill this requirement, but it does, if in a roundabout way; perhaps I could have stated this in clearer terms. As I will detail later in this chapter, self-love involves honesty (as well as other virtues) with oneself, and is the basis for other types of virtuous love.
be commanded.”148 While Kant does argue that every person has an imperative to “secure [their] own happiness,” this happiness, and the pathological, or emotional, love that may be a part of it, find their home outside his ethical theory.149 For Kant, ethics are all about pure reason and acting from one’s duty to others as described by the categorical imperative. They have nothing to do with following one’s inclinations, for each person’s different inclinations could lead them in a whole host of directions if taken to be the basis of their ethical theories. With emotions, it is clear that there can be no overriding rule, no categorical imperative, for everyone experiences their emotions differently, and these emotions cannot be controlled, whereas pure reason and a universal principle are fundamentally within the grasp of anyone, at any point in time, anywhere in the world, provided they use their practical reason. There is nothing fair, just, or dutiful about emotions, per Kant’s analysis, and therefore, they should not guide the ways in which we interact with other people.

As I hope has been clear from the first chapter, this is quite clearly far removed from the way that we actually interact with each other, as well as the way we want to interact with each other. While Kant can give us a rule that can inform us as to whether an interaction follows his moral principles, that rule tells us nothing about how to interact when faced with emotions, whether our own or belonging to the person with whom we are interacting. Kant advocates a practical love of other people that extends to every other human purely on the basis of being human – per the categorical imperative, every human is just as much deserving of our moral actions as every other. Yet this ignores the

149 Ibid, 14.
importance of emotions in our lives. We often have intensely close emotional connections from early on in our lives with our family members, and many of us seek out emotional connections with other people as we move through our lives. Regardless of the soundness of Kant’s logic, because it gives us no guidance as to what to do with these emotional relationships, it doesn’t really give us much of a guide to navigating our own lives. A person, after being treated according to a sense of duty, will not come away from an interaction thinking, Wow! My friend really cares about me! Rather, they will be much more likely to have feelings of alienation from that friend, an emotional distance that Kant cannot cross. Kant emphasizes the impersonality of practical love, but in so doing, he focuses only on practicality and removes any notion of love as we know it: emotional and integral to meaning and flourishing in our lives. Virtue ethics, on the other hand, offers us concrete ways to structure our love with the virtues, so that it actively brings meaning to our own lives and the lives of others, and therefore helps to bring about mutual flourishing.

Though it is not perfectly parallel with utilitarianism, on the opposite end of the moral spectrum from Kant’s work sits Hume’s, and the two are importantly connected. Kant credits Hume with having awoken him from a “dogmatic slumber,” after which he was able to create the ethical theory summarized in the *Groundwork*, amidst his many other works. Hume is important to briefly include in this discussion because while Kant focuses entirely on reason and the categorical imperative in structuring our interactions with the

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150 Later in this chapter, I will also endeavor to show that only through love in the robust sense may we actually get close to the practical love Kant outlines. Even then, this love will be much more emotional than Kant accounts for.

world, Hume wants to structure them as coming from the “passions.” Essentially, by Hume’s view, we follow our passions, our feelings of pleasure and pain, and our reason is secondary to these senses. This, too, cannot possibly be constitutive of our ethical theory, for while it gives us room to follow our emotions, such as love, it puts them squarely in the driver’s seat, and casts the virtues, or any sense of reason, into the backseat, with little control over where our actions may go. They may only plead with our passions, but in the end must always defer to them.

Humean thought and utilitarianism do share at least one important and relevant detail in common: they both relate worldly interactions to one’s self. For Hume, those worldly interactions incite the passions, which lead us to act, meanwhile for utilitarians, worldly interactions bring about some sense of utility, thus causing us to pursue them. As with Kantian ethics, utilitarianism fails to appreciate the emotional value of connections. When actions are taken so as to bring about the greatest utility, either individually or as part of a collective, they misread emotional connection as a rational calculation of value; Aristotle writes:

Those who love for utility or pleasure, then, are fond of a friend because of what is good or pleasant for themselves, not insofar as the beloved is who he is; but insofar as he is useful and pleasant. Hence these friendships as well [as the friends] are coincidental, since the beloved is loved not insofar as he is who he is, but insofar as he provides some good or pleasure. And so these sorts of friendships are easily dissolved, when the friends do not remain similar [to what they were]; for if someone is no longer pleasant or useful, the other stops loving him.

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153 Ibid, 266.
This denies that connection the possibility of being genuinely emotional, because it places the focus on the usefulness of the relationship instead of the love of each other as people; the external goods of the connection take precedence over the more important internal ones. Even if modified to consider the utility of the whole, that utility may change or go away, and if it is not there, what will hold a relationship together? It seems that classical utilitarians would be committed to the idea that a relationship that no longer brings utility should end.

What Kant, Hume, and utilitarians have in common, and what makes them inadequate as far as helping us live our lives, is that they imagine rationality and emotion as fundamentally opposing forces. Virtue ethics, on the other hand, does not equate reason and virtue with emotion, but rather allows and encourages the former to help structure the latter. This collaboration, if you will, allows for a greater understanding of our emotional connections with one another, and for love’s central contributions to human flourishing.

III. Connection, Meaning, and the Loving Principle of Charity

An essential ingredient of love is our emotional connection to the object of our love, whether that is another person, a project, or ourselves. In this section, I will endeavor to show the ways in which virtue ethics actively supports such an emotional connection. In doing so, I refer to Susan Wolf’s *Meaning in Life and Why It Matters*. Her theory overlaps in many important ways with this thesis, and though I will not detail all of them here, I believe it provides a near-perfect framework for the first aspect of virtuous love: meaningful connection. In a sense, virtuous love actually fixes a difficulty in her framework: Wolf spends some time characterizing objective worth, but might do well to
use the virtues for this, as that seems to be the direction in which her theory is headed anyway.

For the sake of brevity, I will move relatively quickly to her theory before adding an amendment that will tie it into my purposes in this section. Wolf begins with a discussion of what she calls “reasons of love,” which are exactly the sort of reasons which I have demonstrated are out of reach for Kantians and utilitarians. To this exact point, Wolf illustrates a story about staying up all night sewing a Halloween costume for her daughter:

[In this case] I act neither for egoistic reasons nor for moral ones. I do not believe that it is better for me that I … forgo hours of much-wanted sleep to make sure that the wings will stand out at a good angle from the butterfly costume my daughter wants to wear in the next day’s parade. But neither do I believe myself duty-bound to perform these acts, or fool myself into thinking that by doing them I do what will be best for the world. I act neither out of self-interest nor out of duty or any other sort of impersonal or impartial reason. Rather, I act out of love.

Acting for such reasons bring meaning in life, Wolf argues, in such a way that a moral framework founded on maximizing utility or acting from duty cannot grasp. However, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, love alone does not guarantee virtue or flourishing. To say that it does would be naïve and lean toward a Humean argument. Rather, for Wolf, meaning in life comes from what she calls her Fitting Fulfillment View. I will now proceed to outline that argument, and tie it back into virtuous love.

Wolf’s criteria for a project to be meaningful to the person who undertakes it are the following: the project must be something for which they have a deep personal interest or attraction, which has some value independent of themselves (about which they might be

156 Ibid, 4.
157 Ibid, 25.
158 I will use this term rather loosely, to refer to a hobby, a relationship, or another thing entirely.
mistaken); these two must be brought together by emotional engagement.\textsuperscript{159} I’ll begin with the subjective fulfillment requirement, as Wolf does. She outlines the Fulfillment View: simply put, it states that if a person has a passion, then they should pursue that passion to the best of their abilities. As Wolf mentions, this is different from pure hedonism, in that it’s not strictly a pleasure-seeking way of living life, but rather, could entail setbacks and disappointments. The idea here is that, if someone is doing something they really love, then they’ll likely be willing to put up with some difficulties to do it. As Wolf writes, “the fact that most of us would willingly put up with a great deal of stress, anxiety, and vulnerability to pain in order to pursue our passions can be seen as providing support for the idea that fulfillment is indeed a great and distinctive good in life” (15). This begins to get at MacIntyre’s idea of internal goods. When we really dedicate ourselves to something, be it chess or swimming or something else, we begin to realize the great benefits to ourselves of doing so, for us. We realize that we feel more accomplished, satisfied, elated, at having discovered those internal goods and at the process of self-improvement. At this point, however, Wolf starts to wonder, and I with her, why do we think that this life stops short of meaning? While subjective fulfillment and the personal attainment of internal goods (“loving what you do,” to use a clichéd idiom) is important, these cannot adequately constitute meaning or virtuous love; the individually gratifying nature of these activities alone means that they are, at best, a part of the picture, and at worst, motivation to do things distinctly meaningless and even vicious.\textsuperscript{160} For example, to love swimming or chess without a concept of the virtues and how those should structure that love might lead a

\textsuperscript{159} Wolf, \textit{Meaning}, 34-35.

\textsuperscript{160} An example of this might be a kleptomaniac: they love the strategy, satisfaction, and rush they get from robbing a grocery store, but clearly this is something that is disconnected from other people flourishing.
person to cheat or do whatever else is within their means to secure their ends in the game. Think of any of the examples of professional athletes using performance-enhancing drugs; surely, something is missing from their love of their sport that leads them to make such decisions. In the way that subjective fulfillment needs objective worth to be constitutive of meaning, passionate love requires the virtues to be constitutive of virtuous love. I now turn to that aspect of Wolf’s argument, and to the completion of the picture of virtuous love.

Wolf’s requirement of objective worth is relatively open-ended: “the point is to recommend that one get involved … with something the value of which is independent of and has its source outside of oneself” (19). Meaning can’t only be about oneself, and projects that are individually fulfilling; it must reach beyond, to projects whose value is separate from one’s involvement in it. For example, one could think about high school United States history teacher: their work as a teacher clearly has some value outside of whatever it gives them individually. Each of their pupils likely learned about the history of the Atlantic slave trade; without that, those students would be considerably less well-equipped to understand many culturally-ingrained and ongoing aspects of modern racism in the US, which find their roots in the slave trade. According to Wolf, this teacher’s project of educating their students has objective worth, value that was clearly outside of themselves. At this point, Wolf brings in mention of engagement. If this history teacher were teaching simply because they loved the sound of their own voice, without any care for the development of their students, Wolf argues that we would be inclined to write their actions off as considerably less meaningful, or perhaps even meaningless, even if their students still left with a better understanding of slavery. The objective worth of this teacher’s class (the student’s improved understanding) on its own cannot be constitutive of
meaning. Thus, Wolf writes, it is integrally important for meaning that the teacher be “emotionally engaged with the people or things or activities that make what [he was] doing valuable” (21). This notion of engagement combines the concepts of subjective fulfillment and objective worth to form her Fitting Fulfillment View: one without the other does not create meaning, and engagement ties them together.

Likewise, we can think about virtuous love this way: the acquisition of internal goods in a loving relationship between any two things cannot be one-sided, but rather must be intimately intertwined in the relationship between the two things. Virtuous love entails not only one’s love of a project at work, a hobby, or a relationship, but also the engagement that one has with the relevant virtues. It cannot be solely about taking and learning what the good is for oneself but must involve actively and persistently asking, what is the good for this relationship? Virtuous love, and therefore the type of love that is partially constitutive of flourishing, cannot simply be the passionate kind that we feel, or our own internal connection to what we are doing, but must involve a commitment to virtues like patience, humility, thoughtfulness, and more. On the other hand, a connection characterized only by the virtues will not be part of a person’s flourishing. To go back to the swimming or chess examples, all the awards and victory in the world would not be meaningful to a swimmer or a chess player if there were not a substantial degree of subjective fulfillment that each got from their respective activities; likewise, if they exercise the virtues in their activity but have no love of said activity, then it is unlikely to contribute to their flourishing. The exercise of the virtues is what makes a loving connection meaningful and what gives it external value.
As alluded to in the above paragraph, neither subjective fulfillment nor objective worth on their own would be sufficient for Wolf’s Fitting Fulfillment View of meaning. Fulfillment alone would be vapid, self-serving, and ultimately meaningless due to its lack of value to anyone outside of oneself, meanwhile if someone is not passionate about something that’s objectively valuable, Wolf would argue that it’s unlikely to give them a great deal of meaning in their life. Both must be present to be meaning-giving. Similarly, with virtuous love, it can neither be a singular love of a project, for this entails blindness to any sense of what that love means for others and is not too far removed from hedonism, nor can it be solely of value outside oneself, for that would be more akin to Kant’s unfeeling sense of duty. The two must be woven together to form the fabric of virtuous love, thoughtfully connected to each other, so that the virtues inform the love and the love, in turn, gives great reason for the virtues. Virtuous love might be construed as a virtuous positive feedback loop that brings benefits, amidst shared struggles, to both entities. In other words, the internal goods one uncovers in a loving relationship must be considered through the lens of the virtues; considered as such, it will be impossible that those goods are internal to only one half of that relationship.

In Wolf’s Fitting Fulfillment View, she argues that there must be an important causal link between the passion that we derive from a project (our love of that project) and its worth outside of what we assign to it ourselves (the virtues that we use to structure that love).\(^{161}\) We need to see our project as worthwhile from an external perspective (to be “proud” of ourselves, as Wolf writes) in addition to having our own strong passion for it. Furthermore, she writes: “Our interest in living a meaningful life is not an interest in a life

\(^{161}\) Wolf, \textit{Meaning}, 31.
feeling" a certain way, but rather an interest that it be a certain way, specifically, that it be one that can be appropriately appreciated, admired, or valued by others; that it be a life that contributes to or realizes or connects in some positive way with independent value."\textsuperscript{162} So, in Wolf’s view, it’s vitally important that these be actively connected, because if they’re not, we may only feel like we lead a meaningful life instead of genuinely living a meaningful life, which comes from the life’s value outside of ourselves. It is easy to see the parallels with Aristotle, MacIntyre, and Annas here: Aristotle wrote that happiness is an “activity of the soul,”\textsuperscript{163} emphasizing the active nature of both happiness and virtue; MacIntyre’s concept of practices and Annas’ of skill-building both do as well. So, we may conceive of the virtues as providing the objective value of a loving relationship, and both sides of a relationship must be actively engaged in those virtues in our love. A relationship must genuinely be virtuous, from both sides, i.e. characterized by patience, humility, thoughtfulness, courage, and honesty, in order to be truly constitutive of virtuous love and therefore a part of human flourishing.

At this point, a clarification of one of Wolf’s points is in order. Wolf spends a significant portion of her book making the argument that a project is made meaningful in part by its objective worth. Because of this, she identifies objective worth quite widely, as value from outside of oneself.\textsuperscript{164} I suggest that she would do well to use the virtues as the source of this objective worth. A virtuous person’s projects will be valuable to others because the virtues necessitate this; the virtuous person recognizes that their own flourishing necessarily happens in concert with those around them. While no one is a

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid, 32.
\textsuperscript{163} Aristotle, \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, 16, emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{164} Wolf, \textit{Meaning}, 37.
finished product, the mere fact of working to be more virtuous, to better embody patience, courage, and the rest of the virtues, will ensure that a project has value outside of oneself. Taking a third-person view on our loving relationships may help us to see them as they really are and understand the degree to which they are or are not representative of virtuous love, and thus how we may improve them. Thus, I agree with Wolf’s argument, and think it is imminently applicable to the theory of love which I have tried to detail here: love and subjective fulfillment, at their roots, come from our own desires, but must be shaped by an active engagement with the virtues so as to create value outside of what we assign them; a commitment to the virtues are what give projects objective worth.

Through this discussion of Wolf’s work, I believe I have outlined the first aspect of virtuous love – meaningful connection – and begun to touch upon the second, which is the loving principle of charity. I will now elaborate on that second point. In philosophy, when we critique the argument of another author, this principle is integral to treating others’ ideas respectfully and also strengthening our own argument. It ensures respect of others’ arguments because it asks us to assume the best from them. If another person’s work is not perfectly clear, the principle of charity asks us to interpret it as if it were clearer. Doing so prevents us from the making others’ arguments into straw men, that is, the misrepresentation of their arguments as unduly weak. Preventing this means that we take their argument seriously and are respectful of the work and thought put into it. In turn, putting ourselves up against the strongest argument possible makes our own arguments stronger, because it asks us to find better reasons and more coherent logic than we might use against a straw man.
The principle of charity I introduce is a bit different, but it is in the same vein. When we apply the loving principle of charity, we choose to take others in the best light possible. The loving principle of charity calls on us to see the possibilities that another person’s actions toward us are not necessarily as bad as they might first appear. Consider an excerpt from David Foster Wallace’s 2005 commencement speech at Kenyon College, *This Is Water*. In the speech, Wallace asks us to think about the banal existence of everyday life and the petty frustrations that go along with it, particularly with regard to the way we see other people. Before the following excerpt, he has just listed off a number of unlikely possibilities about why the other people around us are acting the way they are (that is, imperfectly):

> Of course, none of this is likely, but it's also not impossible — it just depends on what you want to consider. If you're automatically sure that you know what reality is and who and what is really important — if you want to operate on your default-setting — then you, like me, will not consider possibilities that aren't pointless and annoying. But if you've really learned how to think, how to pay attention, then you will know you have other options.\(^\text{165}\)

Wallace puts the point a little more strongly than I would like to, but the point he makes is salient here and generally encapsulates what the loving principle of charity asks us to do: when another person acts in a way that we do not like, it is on us to pause before reacting, to take a second to consider the underlying reasons why a person might have said or done that thing that way. Essentially, the principle of charity asks us to make a significant attempt to understand those with whom we interact instead of leaping to snap judgments; it asks us to imagine the best from other people and respond in a way that is reflective of

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\(^{165}\) David Foster Wallace, "This Is Water" (address, Kenyon College Commencement, Ohio, Gambier, May 21, 2005).
that. In this sense, it is really just an extension of the virtuous characterization of loving connection, leaning particularly on the virtues of patience and humility, to not assume that we know exactly what a person means or intends the second we hear them speak or see them act and thus to give ourselves a second to really consider what actually might be underlying their action.

One worry might be that this principle opens us up to abusive relationships, to being taken advantage of, but this is not the case. When we step back to really try to put ourselves in another’s shoes and make a genuine attempt to understand them, it also works to help us understand when another person might be manipulating or abusing us. By considering the relevant history and background, as well as giving ourselves time to react, we can come to understand that someone’s actions really are malicious toward us, if they are. At the end of this chapter, I will get back into this idea, applied to situations when virtuous love might call on us to love someone who is transgressing or oppressing us even through those forces. For now, the key takeaway is this: the loving principle of charity calls on us to search for a deeper understanding of another’s actions, or of a situation, and to postpone judgment and reaction until we have done so. In much the same way that the philosophical principle of charity makes our argument stronger, the loving principle of charity strengthens our response to others and to adverse situations by helping focus our virtues.

In this section, I have touched upon the first two aspects of virtuous love: meaningful connection and the loving principle of charity. Wolf’s thoughtful characterization has helped formulate the structure of virtuous love as meaningful connection, involving passion for a project – be it a relationship, a hobby, or work – intimately connected with the application of the virtues to that passion. Discussion of
Wolf’s framework as well as an improvement to it – using virtue as the mechanism for objective worth – led to the loving principle of charity, which further structures our interactions, particularly loving ones, with virtue. The intent has been to paint a picture of virtuous love, not as an oxymoron, as it might be if we were to adopt a Kantian, Humean, or utilitarian perspective, but as the latter necessitating the former. In the next section, I apply this framework to different types of love, to help illustrate the ways in which virtuous love forms an essential part of flourishing.

IV. Loving and Flourishing

Recall from the previous chapter a few things: first, remember that relationship, and particularly friendship, is a key part of the concept of practices. When we learn to be honest in the principal’s office, an internal good of that practice – which is going to the principal’s office and telling the truth, even though it may result in disciplinary consequences – is the possibility of relationship (and therefore the likelihood that the child will not break the rules and get in trouble again) that opens up upon the genuine embrace of that practice, and is inaccessible otherwise. Further remember the necessity that Aristotle places on friendship, “for no one would choose to live without friends even if he had all the other goods.”166 Friendship is emblematic of the virtuous love discussed in this chapter. Third, and finally, remember the idea, as touched upon in the previous chapter and again in this one, that flourishing comes from striving to be more virtuous, and that virtuous love strives to be ever better and therefore flourishes itself. Virtuous love, or a meaningful connection that involves passion shaped by virtue and the loving principle of charity, is

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166 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 119
one of the greatest ways we can flourish. In what remains of this chapter, I will go through some examples of different kinds of love to show that virtuous love makes possible a brilliant human flourishing unlike any other. Like the virtues, the different types of love feed off of and reinforce each other; also like the virtues, to love virtuously is to work at loving virtuously, to constantly seek to better that love in concert with the object of that love. Hopefully, an exploration of the different kinds of love will help to draw out more specifically the theory of this chapter.

First, take the example of romantic love. This evokes perhaps the most powerful passions that we can think of. This sort of love, in so many stories, in film and on paper, is constantly invoked to make us think of the sacrifices that a partner makes for the other, the pain and suffering that one endures for the other, an emotion so strong that one person would go to the end of the earth for the other and likewise. While sacrifice on behalf of one’s partner is not inherently bad, we need to identify whether they are virtuous, and therefore are part of the good for the relationship. When we apply the virtues to love, they ask us to be patient, to treat our partner with the loving principle of charity, and to be courageous and vulnerable with our partner. But the virtues, especially patience, humility, thoughtfulness, courage, and honesty, help us to form our loving relationship. When we are patient, thoughtful, and we make use of the loving principle of charity, we are mindful to not form immediate judgments, but rather to thoughtfully step back from the object of our love and ask the questions in the above paragraph: what is the good right now? Is what I am/we are doing helping us toward that? If the answer to the second question is no, then self-sacrifice may not be the best or most virtuous option. On the other hand, if the answer is yes, then sacrifice may be warranted, provided it does not always fall on one partner or
the other to make that sacrifice. It is not as if a relationship is a series of one-off game-theoretic interactions, in which we separate one from another. Relationships are a continuum of decisions, and if that continuum is not virtuous, i.e. if it is unbalanced, requiring sacrifice from one partner and not the other consistently, then it cannot possibly be a flourishing relationship. Inevitably, romantic relationships are imperfect. They will be unbalanced in some way or another. But the virtues ask us to continually evaluate them, to press forward toward what is mutually defined as the good for the relationship, as opposed to solely for one partner or the other. Love in romantic relationships often begins with an intense passion, yet it requires the ongoing, virtuous efforts of both partners to be sustain it, to make it healthy, and help it flourish; it cannot be a one-sided effort.

Much of the same could be said for one’s platonic love of a friend: it is maintained and improved with the virtues and a consistent re-evaluation, and, if necessary, re-habitation toward flourishing. Sometimes that will require one person or another to make

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167 In the first chapter of The Intrinsic Worth of Persons, titled “Feminist Contractarianism,” Jean Hampton advocates the use of the following test to determine the moral legitimacy of a relationship: both people should ask: “Given the fact that we are in this relationship, could both of us reasonably accept the distribution of costs and benefits (that is, the costs and benefits that are not themselves side effects of any affective or duty-based tie between us) if it were the subject of an informed, unforced agreement in which we think of ourselves as motivated solely by self-interest?” While she bases her theory in Kantian logic, I think this gets at some of the ideas in this paragraph. Essentially, this is a way of asking, “Does each of us believe that this relationship is allowing us to flourish individually?” However, I believe that its unfeeling nature subjects it to the same issues that it does for Kant. People are emotional, and while of course I would not advocate deferring to emotions to make decisions in a relationship, I think that it is important to take a forward-looking lens on this. When we structure our love with the virtues, it asks that we continue to be improving that love. If one person takes advantage of the other, the relationship may still be possible if they put in the work to improve. However, this may be entirely impossible. If a person has given no indication that they are willing to change or will change, then it is clear that the relationship will not be a flourishing one, or that either party will be able to truly flourish. This is why the consideration of each other’s history, made possible by the longer-term focus of the loving principle of charity is so important. Virtuous love requires work from both people, and if that is not put in, or worse, if one person abuses, neglects, or otherwise takes advantage of the other, especially if it is on a consistent basis, then that is not a relationship constitutive of virtuous love.

changes to themselves to be more patient, more thoughtful, or otherwise more virtuous in the name of helping the relationship to flourish and the other person with it. Of course, no loving relationship would be possible without honesty – each person must share openly with the other, and only when they do will the internal goods of the loving relationship (namely, the feeling of deep connection, trust, and belonging with the other person) be open to them.

Next, think about love of self. Clearly, infatuation with oneself is not what I wish to advocate here. This sort of unflinching, unquestioning love would not be healthy, nor would it help a person to flourish, as it would cut off genuine relationship with others, as well as preventing the person from realizing the internal goods that come from a healthy, virtuous relationship with themselves. Such a relationship will be defined by many of the same virtues that define a virtuous romantic or platonic relationship, such as humility or courage, but in important ways, forms the basis on which those relationships rest. Virtuous love of other people is something that comes out of virtuous love for oneself. For example, a person must first be honest with themselves if they are to be honest and vulnerable with others, both of which are conditions of loving relationships; if they do not know themselves, they will not be able to genuinely share themselves with others. Self-love, then, can be thought of in much the same way as the other forms of love, but with perhaps an even higher importance, for those other loves must have as their basis a love of self from both parties. Virtuous self-love also calls on us to be kind to ourselves, to be patient when we make mistakes instead of automatically admonishing ourselves; at the same time, it requires that we constantly seek to improve that self-love: we must simultaneously accept ourselves as we are and also strive to improve as people. It is that self – the self that is self-
loving through the lens of virtue – which we must then reflect outward if we are to truly discover the internal goods of loving relationship. So, whether love is between two people or for oneself, it must hold true to the structure laid out in this chapter: it must entail meaningful connection (in the case of self-love, a genuine liking of oneself and the virtues that underlie that), the application of the principle of charity, and the striving for improvement that is constitutive of flourishing.

Another form of love that is important for our lives is familial love. This might seem to represent an issue for this framework, as there is no choice involved in who one’s family is, but if this is an issue, then it also applies to self-love, as we have no choice but to live with ourselves. It would certainly be an issue for the sentimentalist, who, like David Hume, argues that our ethical theory comes from our passions. But if we cannot choose our family but rather grow up with them, and our ethical theory comes from our passions, then it seems like we forgo all choice in how we treat our family. I reject this; I do not purport to argue that we choose to love our family, but rather that that love will be most meaningful, most constitutive of flourishing, when it is virtuous. As with our partners, friends, and ourselves, familial love is improved when it is underwritten by the virtues. This might be the easiest type of love to take for granted, because it is often there without any work on our part. However, this is precisely why it is paramount to exercise the virtues in familial love. If love within the family is not virtuous, it will be most conducive to abuse because of the assumption that it will always be there. As with the other kinds of love already discussed, familial love must be virtuous to be maintained and improved, and therefore to flourish.
Love of what one does, as discussed in the section on Wolf, must be structured by the virtues in the same way as any of the above types of love. The example of the athlete using performance-enhancing drugs shows one side of a vicious love for one’s work; another, using a similar example, would be if an athlete’s love of their sport leads them to pour everything they have into it. Normally, this is regarded as a good thing by sports announcers, as they say things like: “Her life is the game.” Yet, this sort of love could not be virtuous as it entails blinders to the goods across one’s life. If someone loves only their sport, it could eat them alive, causing them to forgo all the other important aspects of their life, most especially relationships. A star soccer player might be excellent on the field, but if their love of the game leads to a neglect of the other areas of their life, it will be nearly impossible for them to flourish. Thus, while the athlete may focus especially in one area or another, the same way anyone with a passion does, they must do so virtuously, applying the lessons learned on the field to the other areas of their life. Relying on one’s teammates or sharing the ball, so to speak, is just as important in life and in one’s relationships as it is on the soccer field. Furthermore, virtuous love, as I have argued, allows love to be sustainable. Leading a balanced, virtuous life can feed a steady flame of an athletic career or another demanding profession, while the large flame of a sole focus is more likely to burn out quickly, consuming all of a person’s fuel without allowing it to replenish.

The different forms of love, while indicative of differing circumstances, positions in life, and degrees of accessibility based on the prior two factors, share in common the need to be structured by the virtues. If they are not, they are susceptible to obsession or abuse, to excesses and deficiencies, as Aristotle would say, and as such cannot be constitutive of flourishing. Moments of joy, pleasure, elation, and other strong passions are
valuable, yes, but enduring flourishing will not be possible without the virtues. Before examining two more types of love – the moral love of all things and the love of those who harm oneself, or radical love – I will consider the type of loving outlook that can arise from virtuous love, and the ways it can feed back into itself, thus putting us in the position for more moments of (as well as lasting) joy and elation. Critical to this loving outlook will be the concept of habituation, of learning and progressive development.

V. Learning to Love

An important aspect of flourishing has been largely left aside in this chapter. In the examples at the end of the previous section, I argued that love of all kinds must be structured by the virtues. I made arguments along the lines of: “virtuous love must be honest,” and “virtuous love must adhere to the principle of charity,” and “virtuous love must strive to improve at these things.” This may seem obvious to the point of being unnecessary to write. It is perhaps less obvious, however, how exactly we may get to virtuous love, but virtue ethics gives us the answer. It reminds us that, because virtuous love is characterized by the virtues, like honesty and humility and patience and courage, it must be learned. This point is imminently easy to forget; it is easier to say that virtues must be this way or that than to think about how they come to be that way. Yet virtuous love is not just an innate way of being. It requires successes and failures, the way any practice does. Remember Aristotle’s focus on habituation: “We learn a craft by producing the same product that we must produce when we have learned it; we become builders, for instance, by building, and we become harpists by playing the harp. Similarly, then, we become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave
Likewise, we become better and more virtuous lovers by loving; we realize the mistakes we make and work to correct them, often in conjunction with another person, as well as realizing the goods internal to virtuous love. Once we learn to love virtuously, the internal goods will often speak for themselves, and lead us to love more, but it is critical that we maintain the virtuous basis of that love.

A virtuous and flourishing relationship is characterized by a dedication to constantly making it better. This does not, of course, guarantee that every virtuous romantic relationship will end in a happy marriage. Rather, it may help people to realize that they should not be together after all, that they would actually be better off as friends or otherwise separated. Virtue helps us to flourish as people, and virtuous love helps us to flourish in relationship with other people and things around us; it does not guarantee one specific outcome or another. Love is messy! It involves hurt and heartache and pain, as well as joy and celebration and elation. What the virtues do for love is to help structure it, not to take away the intensity of it or diminish the emotionality of it, but to help us understand it, sustain it (when it is right to do so), and improve it through the process of learning (even if that means ending a specific relationship). Since loving well is a learning process, it also often means that we need mentors or teachers to make our way through that process. Sometimes those may be the person with whom we are in relationship, while at other times they may be someone external to a given relationship, like a parent, sibling, friend, coach, religious leader, or counselor. The point is that, by and large, we do not learn to love virtuously on our own. Others around us often help us identify the internal goods of virtuous, loving relationships and give us guidance in those relationships.

In a way, this constitutes our continuation of moral traditions; when we love virtuously, we honor those who came before in that practice. At the same time, we can inherit moral traditions that lead us astray of the virtues, and upon recognizing this, often through the recognition that our practices are not revealing the internal goods we thought they should, we rehabituate towards practices that will. We often seek guidance in this process of rehabituation; for example, consider the addict who realizes that their love of a drug cannot sustain them nor lead to flourishing, and have led to the destruction of their relationships. This is akin to the type of situation Annas argues may lead a person to develop the will to change their disposition, and thus to seek out the guidance of a good teacher.169 There is a key word in the previous sentence, which ties into the notion of a loving outlook; that word is “will.”

Whether in a difficult situation such as addiction or a good one, like a strong, virtuous relationship, the virtues create a positive feedback loop with love. When a person realizes the internal goods that come only by way of virtuous love, such as a meaningful connection with others or with one’s work, or the feeling of self-confidence or confidence in a relationship that come with the puzzling through of a particularly puzzling issue, they will of course hope to have more of that in their lives, and the lives of those around them. So, the natural next step would be to extend that virtuous love outward, to treat more people with more respect, thoughtfulness, and the other virtues, and to make the effort to see others with the principle of charity, that is, to extend love, to the extent one can, to situations and people ahead of time, much the way the 92-year-old woman does in the parable that began

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169 In this specific case, the addict might go to a rehabilitation center, to a place of worship, or to counseling services.
this chapter. In a way, this “will to love,” so to speak, somewhat resembles William James’ argument in “The Will to Believe.” James writes that religious faith comes from the belief in hypotheses (e.g. that God exists) that strike us as “live”; that is, hypotheses that connect with us as genuinely possible for us. Likewise, for Mrs. Jones, she has two options: she can be sad about moving into the nursing home and do so only begrudgingly, or she can embrace a loving outlook, to choose to believe ahead of time that her room and her experience at the nursing home will be wonderful. And, in doing so, it is much more likely, because she will have embraced the virtues ahead of time, the love ahead of time, that she will be satisfied and that her virtuous, loving outlook will realize in the form of a wonderful, flourishing experience for her.

Before moving onto the next chapter, which will focus on a place in which exactly this sort of loving outlook is cultivated and rewarded, I wish to briefly discuss two more distinct types of love. The first is the moral love which extends to all living things. Kant argues that this comes from reason, and the universal maxim that we cannot engage in any actions that would not be possible for everyone. Yet this is a simply practical love, and has no emotional basis. When we actively choose a loving outlook (probably as a byproduct of realizing the internal goods of experiencing virtuous love), it becomes natural to extend our love to more and more people, regardless of where they come from or what they believe. Embracing a loving outlook comes with the recognition that, when it comes down to it, love is what binds us all together. Take an example from Brené Brown’s research on belonging, in which she discusses the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey in Houston:

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170 William James, "The Will To Believe," The Will to Believe, 1896, 14-17, doi:10.1017/cbo9781107360525.002.
There we are, six feet of water in our street… You have the Cajun navy, which is 400 fishermen and women coming from Louisiana in swamp boats and jet skis and fishing boats, pulling people out of houses. Never once during this tragedy… did someone say, “Hey, I’m here to help. Who did you vote for?”

She then goes on to describe the shared, widespread jubilation throughout Houston when the Astros went on to win the 2017 World Series. At the end of the day, when boundaries like political ideology are broken down, what remains, Brown says, is love. The person with the loving outlook, then, is perfectly prepared for this, and actually helps to bring it about. They understand the primacy of love in our interactions, and the fact that, in order to be sustained beyond the immediate response to a disaster or celebration, to entail the sort of long-lasting flourishing for which we all hope, their loving outlook needs to be supported by the virtues. In similar irony to the above point about Kant, the spread of this loving outlook will also likely ensure the greatest overall happiness. So it seems, for Kant or Mill, the best path, albeit a less straightforward one, to the realization of their moral standards just might be through virtuous love. However, as I have mentioned on numerous occasions, neither of their theories are equipped to guide us to that love.

This brings me the final type of love that I will discuss, which is perhaps the most controversial. This is the example of “love in action,” as United States Congressman John Lewis calls it, which is the love of those who harm you. This notion, also called radical love, extends far back into history before Lewis practiced it in the United States Civil Rights movement of the mid-twentieth century, to Gandhi and Thoreau and, for many, to

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172 Houston’s Major League Baseball team.
of love in the Civil Rights movement, Lewis says:

> The movement created what I like to call a nonviolent revolution. It was love at its best. It’s one of the highest forms of love. That you beat me, you arrest me, you take me to jail, you almost kill me, but in spite of that, I’m gonna still love you.\(^\text{175}\)

How could this love still be virtuous? After all, does it not open a person up to exactly the type of abuse that virtues are supposed to protect against? This is most probably the furthest deviation from what I have typically meant by virtuous love in this chapter. Yet it is still, critically, shaped by virtue, in the most aspirational sense possible. Radical love, as practiced in nonviolent revolutions the world over throughout much of history, seeks to demonstrate the principles of virtuous love even as it is confronted with precisely the opposite. In the face of violence and oppression, radical love maintains respect, honesty, thoughtfulness of response, and especially courage. It is structured as such so as to tear down the type of boundaries we have built up against it (in the context of the Civil Rights movement, these were bigotry, segregation, and racism), and it relies on a firm commitment to the virtues to give it the moral high ground. Because the virtues have been outlined through time and developed and improved, when radical love is grounded in those virtues, it can be identified intertemporally as being in the name of flourishing. It also serves the purpose of calling those who disagree with it to reexamine their own commitment to the virtues; it could be construed as an educational form of love. For example, a white person in the Civil Rights era might have reexamined whether the respect they argue should be

\(^{174}\) Ibid.  
\(^{175}\) Ibid.
afforded only to other white people is really compatible with the virtue of respect, taken on its own. This is by no means the guaranteed reaction, but love is not based on outcomes.

A pair of examples may help to illustrate the workings of radical love and the necessity of virtue in that love. First, consider Timothy McVeigh, the terrorist who bombed the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995, killing 168 people. McVeigh saw himself as a revolutionary, and loved his country, but thought that “the government had declared war against the American people.” His love of the country, while radical, was not virtuous by any means; virtue requires respect of other human beings, recognition that we are all of one yoke, and a consideration of the good in any scenario, all three of which are mutually exclusive with the taking of lives, barring seriously extenuating situations. Radical, virtuous love add to and improve our connection to each other, not destroy it.

A second example may help bring radical love into our everyday lives. Consider anyone who is a parent – day after day, raising their children, they are faced with actions of their children that may be totally thoughtless. Small children may do or say things without intent of hurting their parents, yet due to their lack of filter, may be incredibly hurtful. Adolescents, on the other hand, may do or say things with the specific intent of hurting their parents, and may be successful in doing so. In these situations, and so many more, parents exercise radical love. Despite pain and hurt (intentional or not), they love

178 A life or death situation may possibly warrant this, but even then, virtue would ask us to try to find another way. This is a topic outside the scope of this thesis.
179 I am not, so this example is based on my perceptions and having heard the testimonies of those who are.
their children anyway. If the child is to grow to develop a sense of virtuous love, then that is the parent’s only option: to love anyway, to love patiently and courageously in spite of the words and actions of their children. That does not entail forgoing honesty. It is important for children to understand when they do or say things that hurt their parents, that that pain exists. If it is hidden, then it is born only by the parents themselves. Furthermore, if a parent responds to hurtful language or actions reciprocally, the child will learn that that is the correct or justified course of action. If it is shown, if the parents are vulnerable, the children may learn and improve, becoming more loving. Unless a child is sadistic or abusive, a parent must relentlessly continue to practice radical, virtuous love.

When people act with radical, virtuous love, they help us understand the primacy of love over all other identifiers and distinctions. More than any universal maxim or utility-maximizing calculation, a commitment to virtuous love across all scenarios is the closest we can get to the sort of moral love that recognizes the value of all people. As Bell Hooks writes in *all about love*, “A love ethic [which she defines as ‘showing care, respect, knowledge, integrity, and the will to cooperate] presupposes that everyone has the right to be free, to live fully and well.”

In sum, virtuous love can be characterized by three concepts. First, it can be helpfully broken down as a meaningful connection, which entails not only passionate love but also an active engagement with the virtues. This ensures that love is always growing and becoming more virtuous, leading to ongoing flourishing. The second concept is the

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180 And of all living things, as well as the earth itself. It is incompatible with a virtuous, loving outlook to view other living beings or the earth as being of only instrumental value. If we are truly loving of each other, that extends to a love of all other living things, and if we are loving of all other living things, then we must be loving of the earth.

loving principle of charity, which encourages us to take a step back, particularly when people act in ways that initially frustrate us, to get a clearer picture of why a person may be acting in the way they are. Third, as a summation of the other two, virtuous love is constitutive of flourishing. This is made evident across the many different forms of love, each of which is sustained and strengthened by the virtues. When we love virtuously, we are better partners, better friends, and better to ourselves and our family members. When we allow those loves to grow and flourish, they lead to the development of a virtuous, loving outlook, which extends past those with whom we have close relationships and makes possible a moral love of all humans\textsuperscript{182} as well as the radical love of virtuous revolutionaries and parents alike. Virtuous love feeds on itself, leading us to become more virtuous and more loving all the time.

The next chapter is an ethnographic case study, an examination of a place where a virtuous, loving outlook is taught, cultivated, and habituated. In this place, a summer camp in Vermont, a particular emphasis is placed on exactly what I outlined at the beginning of the final section of this chapter: the idea that virtuous love often includes failure, improvement, success, and more failure. Learning to love virtuously helps us to flourish as people and in relationship, and to do that, we need to learn how. Lanakila is a paradigmatic example of a place that does just that.

\textsuperscript{182} Or even all living beings!
I. Making Time for Growth: A Daily Schedule Designed for It

When the bugle blows, all of the campers flow into the dining hall in a frenzied rush; the energy of the day is well underway, though most of the counselors are yawning and already halfway through their first cup of coffee.\textsuperscript{183} The director, who goes only by his nickname and never by his given name, utters the first words of the morning, a think-piece chosen for that day in particular:

The 92-year-old, petite, well-poised, and proud lady, who is fully dressed each morning by eight o’clock, with her hair fashionably coifed and makeup perfectly applied, even though she is legally blind, moved to a nursing home today. Her husband of 70 years recently passed away, making the move necessary.

After many hours of waiting patiently in the lobby of the nursing home, she smiled sweetly when told her room was ready. As she maneuvered her walker to the elevator, I provided a visual description of her tiny room, including the eyelet curtains that had been hung on her window. “I love it!” she stated with the enthusiasm of an eight-year-old having just been presented with a new puppy. “Mrs. Jones, you haven’t seen the room… just wait.”

“That doesn’t have anything to do with it,” she replied. “Happiness is something you decided on ahead of time. Whether I like my room or not doesn’t depend on how the furniture is arranged; it’s how I arrange my mind. I already decided to love it. It’s a decision I make every morning.

\textsuperscript{183} The following account of a day at Camp Lanakila is the author’s retelling of a day in the summer of 2016. Much of this chapter will rely on a first-person ethnography of the camp, with as much of an eye toward objectivity as possible.
when I wake up. I have a choice; I can spend the day in bed recounting the difficulty I have with the parts of my body that no longer work, or get out of bed and be thankful for the ones that do. Each day is a gift, and as long as my eyes open, I’ll focus on the new and happy memories I’ve stored away – just for this time in my life.184

A silence ensues, some 300 minds pondering on what it means for a 92-year-old woman to make a choice about living her life with a loving attitude. The director asks everyone to enjoy their meals, and like that, the day has officially begun. Loud, joyful chatter fills the dining hall, and thirty minutes or so into the meal, even the sleepiest of counselors is alive with an inexorable sort of enthusiasm that can only be attributed to a combination of pancakes lathered in syrup, healthy doses of coffee, and a genuine excitement for the adventure of the day. The day at Camp Lanakila has begun.185

The words of the story ring true in my ears and at my table, we spend a good ten or fifteen minutes discussing them. The boys around the table have a surprising amount to say about what the parable is telling us. One of them, an eleven-year-old from Los Angeles who happens to live in my cabin, thinks that the story is about being grateful for what you have. A last-year camper, fifteen years old and from North Carolina, thinks for a second before agreeing, then adds: “I think it’s also about making a decision about how you want to feel. Your outlook going into something makes up a lot of how you feel about it.” The

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184 Excerpt from “Focusing the Day: Lanakila Morning Readings.” Author Unknown.
185 To get some sense of the place, I have included photos from Lanakila’s website in the appendix to this thesis. Some quick facts about the camp may also be useful. Lanakila is a boys’ sleepaway camp in Fairlee, Vermont, and during the summer is the home to 170 boys, ages eight to fifteen, as well as around 110 counselors, about three-quarters of whom are men and the other quarter of whom are women. The camp was founded in 1922 and has run continuously ever since; it is part of the greater Aloha Foundation, which is a collection of six organizations which serve different populations: Aloha and Aloha Hive serve older and younger girls, respectively; Horizons is a day camp that serves the local community; Ohana is a family camp that runs for mixed-generation groups throughout the summer; Hulbert is an outdoor center with year-round programming for schools and other organizations. Each summer at Lanakila, campers spend three and a half or seven weeks living at the camp. They are divided into four different age group living units, where they live in tents or cabins, and during the day, have the option to attend many varied activities. For more info, see: alohafoundation.org/lanakila.
other counselors and I look at each other, knowing we have just been part of one of those remarkable moments where the campers understand the philosophy of Lanakila so well that they do our job for us. Before too long, that conversation has given way to a spirited debate about which superpower is the best. One of the youngest campers in camp, an eight-year-old from the Bronx, passionately defends his desire for super speed. The Flash, he says, is by far the coolest super hero. Full stop, end of story. The rest of the table concedes to his vigor, and before too long, breakfast is over and my campers and I head back to Woodside, the second-youngest of the four age-group living units at Lanakila.

Back in Woodside, my campers and I get to work cleaning our individual areas in anticipation of Inspection. They share communal jobs like sweeping the floor, taking out the trash, and cleaning outside the cabin. There is plenty of room for frustration and sometimes even conflict between cabin mates during Inspection; this is wholly intentional, and something that we as counselors anticipate and hope to use as moments of growth. At this point in the summer, though, the boys of Woodside Cabin Three have mostly figured out how to work together, support each other, and get the cabin clean. In fact, this is their tenth day passing in a row, and because of that, they have earned a special event: an overnight! More on that in a bit.

After Inspection, it is my cabin’s turn in the rotation to clean the Wash House, the most dreaded of the Woodside Pride Jobs. These are titled as such to reflect the notion of “Woodside Pride,” which the campers discuss and define at the beginning of each summer. Woodside Pride asks each of us (campers and counselors alike) to ask ourselves, “Can I be proud of the way I am acting right now? Am I treating my cabin mates, friends in the unit, the clubhouse, our shared space, etc. with respect?” The Pride Jobs are shared among the different tents and cabins, so that each rotates through and helps keep the unit clean and healthy. They include cleaning the wash house, the clubhouse, taking the trash and recycling to the dumpster, going around with the Lost & Found, and more.
brushes in the other, the campers and I do not necessarily enjoy every minute of this Pride Job, but we get it done quickly and effectively so that we have time to play Frisbee golf around the unit. Ten minutes before 10 am, we gather our Frisbees and return them to the clubhouse, making sure to put them back neatly, especially since Tent One and Tent Three just finished cleaning it.

The first period of the day today is Assembly, and everyone is there. As usual, we begin by singing. The barn, with all three hundred of us in it, shakes as we sing rowdy classics like “Charlie and the MTA,” “Hi Ho the Rattling Bog,” and “Country Roads.” Then the mood shifts as Donnie Mac, the oldest counselor at camp (he is somewhere in his mid-seventies), describes Bob Love, the music director for Lanakila who manned the keys for forty five years. Love, Donnie explains, came to camp as an adult but embodied everything the place stands for: he never took himself too seriously and at the same time, took everyone, from the director of camp down to the youngest camper, as seriously as can be, because everyone was deserving of his time. With that, we start to sing the next song, which was added to the songbook when Love retired. The refrain goes: “Love changes everything”;187 for me, this belies as much camp philosophy as anything else. Each and every moment, we get a choice about how we want to react to what is happening around us, and if we do so with the sort of loving outlook described at the end of the previous chapter, then our experience of the world really will change.188 After singing “Bob’s Song,” as it has come to be known, a counselor presents on how he uses the physics research that

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187 Camp Lanakila, Songs of Lanakila (Fairlee, VT: Lanakila, 2006), 10. See full lyrics in Appendix.
188 More discussion on camp philosophy and “changing your picture” in the following section.
he does outside of camp to learn about the world; Assembly always offers campers and counselors a chance to learn from each other’s experiences about something new.

The remaining three periods of the day are filled with all sorts of different activities from which the campers can choose. Each of them visits Swimming once every day, where they have a chance to work on their swimming skills, practice and test for their ranks (called “Viking Honors”),\(^{189}\) enjoy the sun, or hang out on the diving raft. Otherwise, they are free to choose from the fifteen other departments at Lanakila. They might spend the afternoon climbing and zipping on the High Ropes course, improving their shooting accuracy in the Archery department, perfecting their fire-building skills or knots in Camp Craft, or learning new footwork techniques in soccer from the Athletics counselors.\(^{190}\) Each and every department works hard to provide the right mix of fun activities and learning opportunities, chances to succeed and fail, and to try again. During a day in the departments, there are ample opportunities for campers to push themselves past what they previously thought was possible, to resolve conflicts, both internal and external, and to enjoy themselves alongside their fellow campers and the counselors that guide them.

On this particular evening, I have promised the campers an overnight because they passed Inspection ten times in a row. However, because of extenuating circumstances, it is not going to be possible, and it cannot happen later, as we are rapidly nearing the end of the summer. Instead, my co-counselor and I have pulled together a hodge-podge plan at the last moment, as often happens at Lanakila, and because our campers are focused on the fact that they will not be going on an overnight, they are pretty upset. We ask them to trust

\(^{189}\) More discussion on ranks in the following section.

\(^{190}\) The departments (other than those mentioned here) are: Arts, Biking, Boating, Exploring, Music/Drama, Photography, Riflery, Sailing, Shop, Tennis, and Tripping.
us, and after some convincing and invocation of the morning reading from breakfast, we start on a hike into the woods. When we get to where we are going, there is a ten-foot-tall wall, on the other side of which, unbeknownst to the campers, are a stash of water balloons. We tell them that, in order to go ahead with the course of action for the night, they will need to scale the wall, and they are initially upset: “We already passed Inspection ten times in a row and now we have to do this, too?” After some encouragement from my co-counselor and me, they finally get together and plan how to get over the wall; clearly, it will involve lots of teamwork, as none of them are nearly large enough to get over on their own (they are all ten to twelve years old). Eventually, they do get over, and when they do, they shriek with joy as they soak their counselors and each other with the balloons.

After we all get dried off and warm, it is time for dinner, and tonight’s dinner is a grab-and-go designed for tents and cabins to spend time with each other. We take our sandwiches down to the waterfront and out onto the lake in a group of canoes. The day has been yet another wonderful, up-and-down rollercoaster of excitement and emotions, and this feels like the perfect way to cap it all off: sitting silently on a glassy lake, watching the sunset, reveling in the moments that combined together to make this day special, each of us proud of ourselves for each of the little victories we had over ourselves in the process. This, I think, as my co-counselor and I exchange a contented smile, is what Lanakila is all about.

A day at Lanakila provides plenty of room for conversations like the one my table had at breakfast that are both fun and reflective, as well as opportunities to apply those conversations to our lives, like my cabin of campers had throughout the day at Inspection, activities, and during the activities of the evening. In fact, the camp is designed precisely
around those conversations and their application. A talk given to parents a few years back famously championed the following slogan: “Lanakila: where you won’t get what you want.” Whereas much of our modern-day society is geared toward convenience and getting exactly what we want as soon as possible, through such services as social media (social gratification) and online shopping (material gratification), Lanakila strives for the opposite. Of course, campers at Lanakila do also get a lot of what they want; they are at summer camp on a lake in Vermont, after all. There is a lot of opportunity for fun and plenty of rewarding activities. What is really important about Lanakila, though, is that it helps boys restructure their priority of wants. The immediate demands and rewards of the outside world are replaced with the internal goods of friendship and skill development, and all the while, the campers and counselors alike develop more and more of the virtuous base for love of themselves, each other, and the activities in which they participate. In the section that follows, I will examine in greater detail that which I have tried to give a sense of anecdotally in this first section of the chapter: the philosophy that goes into making Lanakila a place for campers and counselors alike to learn to love virtuously and expand their loving outlook, grow as people, and build virtuous character.

II. “We Help Create Fine People”: Setting a Virtuous Course

Every summer, as soon as the counselors arrive at Camp Lanakila, the philosophy has already begun. The first order of business is always introductions: name, number of years at camp, and the highlight of your year that you are most proud of. A pin drops, and the respect in the room is palpable; this is no simple order of business but rather a critical moment of getting to know one another. After introductions, the intentional philosophy
gets underway as the counselors head to the barn to chart the course for the summer. The
camp carries traditions that date back to its inception in 1922 (such as the stated mission:
“We help create fine people,” as well as the rest of the six primary core values – see
footnote\(^{191}\)), but something unique goes on in the barn on that first day of “pre-camp.” The
director and some of the senior counselors share for a few moments about a theme for the
summer, but then allow the counseling staff to take that theme and run with it, to define it
as they see it and hope to implement it throughout the summer. In so doing, every
counseling staff inherits some things from the history of the camp but also has the freedom
to direct its system of values in the way it sees fit. What results from the brainstorming
session in the barn is that summer’s “vision piece,” a guiding document put together by
senior counselors. In 2017, the first paragraph of the vision piece read:

\(^{191}\) The six core values are:

1. We create fine people.
   a. This is perhaps the most important of the core values and underlies everything counselors
do. This is why camp exists: to help campers and counselors alike develop the skills to
   flourish

2. There are many ways to be a man.
   a. Each of us is different; some of us are artists, others athletes, others intellectuals, many of
   us some combination of these and others. There are many ways to be, but all of them
   involve a commitment to self-improvement as well as to the virtues.

3. Skol!
   a. Skol is a Norse way of saying, “Cheers!” At Lanakila, it is our go-to greeting, but also a
   reminder to enjoy the moment and each other’s company.

4. We don’t boo at Lanakila.
   a. There are winners and losers in games as well as other situations in life, but this value asks
   us to always maintain respect for others. This is one of the most important virtues for us to
   hold dear.

5. Leave a campsite better than you found it.
   a. While this is a trail ethos that asks us to leave places untouched to the extent we can and
   better when we do leave a trace, it is also an ethos of life. This asks us to move through life
   conscientiously of others, aware of our impact on those around us, always leaving a place
   or person or situation better than we found it/them.

   a. This rule asks us to not take ourselves too seriously. There is some humor, some joy, some
   light in most situations, and there is great power in discovering these things especially in
difficult situations.

Explanation by the author.
If we as teachers and mentors were to hold true to our guiding mission – creating fine people and helping them become their best selves – the Lanakila experience would last far longer than three-and-a-half or seven weeks on Lake Morey’s shores. While other institutions tout their programming as a pinnacle experience for their customers – as the height of what life can be – we hope that our Lanakila summers serve as launchpads, propelling campers and counselors onward and upward, with the skills, outlooks, and beliefs about themselves and the world that we all need to live remarkably.192

Thus, from the very outset of each summer, Lanakila’s counseling staff comes together to produce their shared vision for the summer. This vision, in addition to the enduring themes of camp from year to year, guide the counseling staff’s interaction in each and every interaction with the campers they serve, as well as serving as a basis from which to evaluate one’s own performance as a counselor and a person.

Usually, those vision pieces, as this one does, focus on building the “skills, outlooks, and beliefs about themselves and the world that we all need to live remarkably.”193 That is, the vision pieces focus on building the virtues that campers will need to succeed at camp and afterward. The opening of the 2015 vision piece echoes this focus: “We know that the Lanakila environment provides a rare opportunity to teach our campers some of the most important life lessons they will need to be good, strong, loving and responsible young men.”194 In other years, different aspects of the virtue-ethical framework emphasized in this thesis have been underscored by the vision pieces. In 2016, the counseling staff emphasized striving, with an allusion to practices: “At Lanakila, our predominant tool is love, with enough stress built in to create the necessary desire for

192 “2017 Vision Piece,” Lanakila Staff 2017 to Parents of Lanakila Campers, June 2017, Camp Lanakila, Fairlee, VT.
193 Ibid.
change. The change we speak of involves creating a greater congruency between the people we are at the moment and the people we want to be: the journey to our best selves.”\textsuperscript{195} In 2010, the emphasis was on the relationships necessary for growth, where mentors (or “good teachers”) model behavior in a community “where aspirations and actions align; where honesty, integrity, and humor overcome cynicism and fear; and where our noblest dreams for ourselves and for the world seem not only plausible but can actually come true.”\textsuperscript{196} So, from the outset of each summer, the Lanakila counselors form a commitment to a set of values about how they will treat each other, the campers, and the institution, based on the historical traditions of the place as well as each of their lived experiences. Words alone are not constitutive of virtue; this process of setting the course for the summer is but one of the many practices that contribute to Lanakila’s pedagogy of flourishing. The next section of this chapter will be an exploration of some of the other practices and traditions that make up that pedagogy. Because Lanakila is a complex place with many varied traditions and practices, I will focus on just a few that I see as emblematic of the framework of virtue ethics presented in this thesis.

III. Success Counseling: Teaching Virtue through Practices

At Lanakila, every situation is treated as a chance to grow, to develop the character required to go out into the outside-of-camp world as a “fine person.” Before understanding the practices and traditions that go into this, it is necessary to understand the counseling

\textsuperscript{195} "2016 Vision Piece," Lanakila Staff 2016 to Parents of Lanakila Campers, June 2016, Camp Lanakila, Fairlee, VT.
\textsuperscript{196} "2010 Vision Piece," Lanakila Staff 2010 to Parents of Lanakila Campers, June 2010, Camp Lanakila, Fairlee, VT.
philosophy that undergirds them all. This philosophy is called success counseling, and is based on internal control psychology. It is:

The foundation for how we deal with ourselves, others, and the world around us. It serves as our guiding principle for all of our camps… This approach gives us a framework for creating a community where campers and counselors aspire to serve others as a way to strengthen themselves.\textsuperscript{197}

Success counseling asks six questions, designed to provoke reflection and solution-generation:

1. What do you want?
2. What are you doing?
3. Is it working?
4. What do you see as your options now?
5. What is your next step?
6. Is it closer to what you want and better than what you had?\textsuperscript{198}

This question framework is simple enough for anyone of any age to be able to answer, whether they are a counselor asking a camper, another counselor, or themselves. However, the first thing one might notice about it is that it is based in the language of wants. For this reason, it may appear incompatible with virtue ethics, and better aligned with Humean sentimentalism. This is not the case; virtue ethics are all about developing the virtues of character such that a person learns to want what is right to want in a given scenario. Like MacIntyre’s chess-playing child, who learns to love chess for its internal goods, success counseling is designed to identify what a person wants, then helps to point them toward what they should want, if they are being virtuous. It is essentially habituation in real life as opposed to in theory; it is applicable to any practice, whether a person is frustrated with something their friend did or with their own performance at a given activity. It asks the

\textsuperscript{197} Camp Lanakila, \textit{Counselor Manual}, 59.
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid, 59.
person in question to be reflective about what is truly valuable in a given scenario: internal goods, which often are the relationships involved, either between that person and another, or within themselves. Because success counseling uses the language of wants, it is important that there be a good teacher, particularly for campers, so that they may identify the internal goods present as opposed to just the external ones, as well as the virtues that they must exercise to make possible those internal goods. I will address good teaching at greater length later in this chapter.

This, I believe, is sufficient knowledge of the abstract of success counseling; I shall now attempt to apply that to a pair of practices at camp to draw the process out in more specificity and better relate it back to the virtue-ethical framework.

Usually, the first opportunity of the day for success counseling is during Inspection. This time is infrequently as simple as I portrayed it above. Especially early on in the summer, and especially for campers who do not usually make their beds or clean up after themselves at home, Inspection takes some getting used to. Even for campers who have similar responsibilities at home, it can be difficult to be told to clean up, and to work with their tent/cabinmates to do it.

Inspection involves a score from 0-100 for the entire tent or cabin, based on scores of 0-10 across ten different categories. Upon returning from breakfast, campers must each clean their own areas, as well as the general area of the tent/cabin. For a variety of reasons (maybe they are sad because they got bad news from home, did not get into their first-choice activity, or are in an argument with their tent/cabinmates), campers occasionally would rather sit on their bed than make it, or do anything else. Inevitably, because tents and cabins are small spaces, other campers notice this behavior, and sometimes will offer
encouragement, though often will direct ridicule or frustration at the camper who is doing this. At this point, or before (if possible), the counselor intervenes. Consider the following interaction, between Jimmy (J), who is an eleven-year-old camper, and his counselor (C):

C: “Hey Jimmy, what’s going on?”
J: “Nothing.”
C: “Well, it’s Inspection time. Yesterday you were cleaning up right now – what’s on your mind?”
J: “I don’t want to clean today.”
C: “Okay, is there something else you would rather be doing?”
J: “I just want some space to sit and read and not be bothered.”
C: “Do you feel like you’re getting that space now?”
J: “No, my cabinmates seem annoyed at me, but whatever.”
C: “Do you think that if you keep sitting there, you’ll get the space you want, so you can read?”
J: “I guess not.”
C: “Okay, so if that’s not working, what do you think you could do?”
J: “I mean, I could go somewhere else where my cabinmates won’t bother me.”
C: “What do you think will happen when you come back?”
J: “I guess my cabinmates will probably still be annoyed because we failed Inspection.”
C: “Is that what you want?”
J: “Not really.”
C: “If I had an idea for you, where your cabinmates wouldn’t be angry or annoyed with you, and you would still get your space and time to read, would you be interested in hearing it?”
J: “I guess.”
C: “How about this: I think it might work out that if you help with Inspection and the Pride Job now, you might get some time before first period starts to have some quiet time and read. Does that sound good to you?”
J: “Yeah, I guess I could do that.”
C: “Awesome! Thanks, Jimmy! Let’s check in later to see how you feel like this went.”

Through a bit of success counseling, the counselor (and the other campers in the cabin) and Jimmy get a win-win.\textsuperscript{199} The other campers and the counselor get a clean cabin and a good score on Inspection, and Jimmy gets his space with his book. Of course, there are probably underlying issues here for Jimmy. The point of the check-in later on is to figure those out, and to make a plan for the future, as well as talk through why cleaning one’s area during Inspection is important. If Jimmy is upset, he’s unlikely to be receptive to philosophical points on the importance of working hard to clean one’s area and respecting his cabinmates. However, the above conversation did lay the foundation for that. Jimmy shared that he didn’t want his cabinmates to be annoyed at him. Later, his counselor can get at some of the reasons underlying this. Most likely, Jimmy wants his cabinmates to be his friends, but he isn’t ready to share that at the moment, since he is upset. The above conversation lays the groundwork for the conversation later on, which can then hit on things like what Jimmy’s relationships with his cabinmates would look like in an ideal world, or what he wants from his cabinmates and what it means for him to be a good cabinmate in return.

How does this entail virtue ethics? As mentioned in the abstract, it is a bit like MacIntyre’s chess and candy example. Initially, it’s important for the counselor to meet Jimmy where he’s at, to figure out what he wants (to be alone and read), and to help him understand what he needs to do right then (to help clean the cabin). Later, through a more

\textsuperscript{199} In real life, it is likely that this conversation would have taken a lot longer and involved more twists and turns, but I think the above conversation gives a good sense of how one of these conversations generally go.
emotional and intellectual conversation, the counselor can help Jimmy understand the deeper reasons for keeping a clean cabin, as well as the values of the cabin. So, the first conversation, which is focused more on external goods, lays the groundwork for a shift to the internal goods at play, like friendship, satisfaction at a well-made bed, and maybe even the fun that Jimmy and his cabinmates could have while cleaning up, by making it into a game, or a singing event, or otherwise. The first conversation opens Jimmy up to other possibilities, while the second helps him to “change his picture” of how Inspection time could look if he puts in some work.\textsuperscript{200}

After Inspection, Pride Jobs\textsuperscript{201} offer a similar opportunity, perhaps augmented a bit. Since the jobs are explicitly for the betterment of the unit, as opposed to Inspection, which is more easily linked to one’s personal well-being, they are particularly fruitful for conversations about citizenship in the unit. However, those conversations generally follow the same framework as the above situation. Both are helped by expectation-setting conversations had on the first night of the summer, both as a unit and as a tent/cabin, which help every camper visualized what it means to be a good unit- and cabin/tentmate, as well as a good friend. They outline how we take care of each other and the space around us, thus helping constitute the relevant moral tradition.

At Lanakila, one serious opportunity for growth and character-building are Viking Honors, a system of ranks that campers can achieve by improving and testing their skills in the departments. The following excerpt from the Counseling Manual gives a good sense of why these exist:

\textsuperscript{200} “Changing one’s picture” is a common concept at Lanakila, and involves a shift in expectations, particularly when things do not go our way.

\textsuperscript{201} These have different names in the different age-group units but serve the same function.
We also believe that, with the right coaching and encouragement, as we learn these skills, we can begin to learn larger lessons about ourselves. One cannot master a tennis serve without learning—however frustratingly—that failure is a natural, healthy, and positive aspect of growth. We learn that it’s possible to face our greatest fears as we leap off the zip line platform at the Ropes Course or off the high dive and into the lake. We learn that boys can sing and draw and run and play, and that there are many ways to be a man. We learn that humor helps, hard work pays off, and that the greatest definition of success has less to do with what we can do than who we can be: people of courage, integrity, faith, and love.202

Viking Honors exists so that campers can win “victories over themselves”203 (Lanakila literally means “victory” in Hawaiian). These are victories over the little voice in our head that tells us we cannot do something, over the part of ourselves that believes that voice. While Viking Honors are external awards, their purpose is more about winning the battle of self-improvement and the discovery of internal goods.

Imagine a situation in the Swim department: a last-year camper, Jorge, is going for his second rank (called Tyr204). He has been working especially hard for a few days on his Tyr breaststroke, which requires him to swim 50 yards of breaststroke at what is deemed to be Tyr quality.205 His kick has been holding him back, as he has struggled to keep his right foot from doing a little flutter, which is not allowed in breaststroke. Today, he feels like he can test it, so a counselor watches as he makes it most of the way without messing up his kick, only fluttering a bit at the end. The counselor (C1) asks Jorge (J1) how he thinks he did, and Jorge thinks for a bit, before his face sinks.

203 Ibid, 69.
204 The ranks are (in order): Loki, Tyr, Thor, and Odin. In order to get his Tyr in a department, a camper must first get his Loki, and so on up the ranks. In order to achieve a full rank (i.e. to be a full Loki, etc.), campers must achieve that rank across four required departments – Boating, Camp Craft, Exploring, and Swimming – as well as two elective departments, which he may choose from any of the other departments (except Ropes, which has a separate system).
205 Tyr quality, as with the other ranks, has certain standards, but generally is based on a camper’s relative improvement.
J1: “I fluttered again, didn’t I?”

C1: “You did, but your arms looked great, and your legs were perfect almost the entire way!”

Jorge gets out of the lake, and is visibly upset. He has worked for so long on this, and feels like he cannot figure it out. He goes and sits on the bleachers on the beach. The counselor goes and sits next to him, realizing that he is crying a bit. They have had success counseling conversations before, and the counselor knows he does not have to go through the steps the same way he would with a younger camper. Instead, he gives Jorge some time to calm down before asking a modified, higher-level set of questions:

C1: “When you started working on your Tyr, what did you want?”

J1: “I wanted to stand up next to my friends on the Tyr Council. I wanted to be a leader at camp.”

C1: “I remember wanting that same exact thing when I was a camper. What do you think it means to be a Tyr?”

J1: “Well, those are people that are really respected. Other people listen when they talk, and all the younger campers look up to them.”

C1: “I agree, I have a lot of respect for Tyrs. What do you think makes them worthy of respect?”

J1: “I guess they probably had to work really hard to become Tyrs.”

C1: “Do you think that meant they failed along the way?”

J1: “Probably.”

Jorge, being the smart last-year camper that he is, and having been through these sorts of conversations since he was eight years old, realizes where this is going. He looks at the counselor, then makes up his mind. He says, “I need a bit longer to settle my mind,
but then I want to work on my kick, so that I can get it right and maybe test again tomorrow or the next day.”

Jorge, like Jimmy, realizes a need to change his picture (with the help of a counselor). Since Jorge is more mature and has more experience with success counseling, the counselor is able to jump right in with the philosophical conversation that only came in the second conversation with Jimmy. Because the victory to win is over himself and centers around how he wants to see the situation (he can either dwell in his disappointment or realize that he has it within himself to succeed, if he continues to work hard), the counselor is able to invoke a history of the practice (by referring to the process of previous Tyrs) in question to help Jorge identify the requisite virtues that it will take to push forward.

So, success counseling at camp is very much like the habituation that Aristotle and MacIntyre embrace as crucial to their theories, and echoes the lessons that come from Annas’ skill-building analogy. The underlying theory is that, through challenges that require the virtues, campers come to learn, understand, and apply those virtues, and realize the internal goods available from doing so, such as a closer relationship with a counselor, increased skill, and an appreciation of and belonging to the history and traditions of that activity. Because these challenges, activities, and practices occur over and over, in different contexts, campers have ample time to learn and test their acquired virtuous abilities, and expand those abilities outward from specific practices to their character more generally.

One thing that is absolutely critical to the theory of success counseling is excellent teaching, à la Annas. Because all of the counselors are trained extensively in the practice,  

206 Again, this conversation would probably be considerably more streamlined in real life, but has been shortened to communicate the essential points.
and there is a culture of constant improvement at success counseling, the campers get a consistent approach no matter the activity or situation. Whether a camper is learning to swim for the first time, challenging their fear of heights on the ropes course, or trying tennis for the first time, the counselor working with them will use success counseling, helping the camper identify what they want to achieve, the person they want to be, and take pride in the courage, determination, and other virtues they demonstrated in experimenting with something outside of their comfort zone. Integral to the practice of success counseling (and teaching the virtues) is the relationship between camper and counselor. In the next section, I explore the way virtuous love is demonstrated and taught at Lanakila.

IV. A Culture of Virtuous Love

If success counseling is the foundation of Lanakila’s philosophy, then virtuous love is its cornerstone. Relationships drive Lanakila forward, and make success counseling possible; because of those relationships, learning becomes enjoyable, a way of building closeness, trust, and respect between a boy and his counselor. The ethos of love that Lanakila builds is paramount to campers’ learning and growth. This sentiment is easy to identify in the 2013 vision piece:

We create a culture that not only recognizes transformation but expects it. We never give up believing in the goodness, courage, and dignity that we see in every child—even, and especially, when they fail to see those qualities in themselves. We provide a community that not only allows its members to reinvent themselves but that helps and cheers their efforts. Our camp culture is well attuned to the process of personal reinvention, so

207 It is a practice of their own!
campers know that they can take their first shaky steps amid the love, support, and faith of counselors and friends.\textsuperscript{208}

The process of transforming (building and improving one’s virtues) is a scary one, as there is no set endpoint or outcome that campers can identify as an end-all, be-all goal. Through the close relationships that campers develop with counselors and with each other, transformation and improvement are not only possible, but imminently desirable.

Those relationships make virtuous growth possible in large part because they, themselves, are characterized by virtuous love. This, too, is easy to find in the intentional philosophy of the vision pieces (this one from 2012):

Too often we think of relationships as formed by accident or a stroke of luck. At Lanakila we celebrate those friendships forged by honesty, trust, and love. We hope to help campers discover and enjoy those close, vulnerable relationships that know no bounds of age or interest and that help to shape both who we are and who we want to be.\textsuperscript{209}

From the day a camper arrives, his counselor take special interest in them, in “his school, friends, hobbies, favorite books, activities and any other interests or distinguishing characteristics that are uniquely his own.”\textsuperscript{210} Thus, the love directed at each camper is personal to him, yet characterized by the virtues of honesty, trust, and respect; it is a virtuous love, an emotional connection fortified and structured by the virtues, exactly as laid out in the discussion of Wolf in Chapter 3. When a camper arrives at camp, he is confronted with the loving outlooks of more than 100 counselors; these outlooks lay the groundwork and serve as a model for him to build his own. So, the culture is designed for

\textsuperscript{208} "2013 Vision Piece," Lanakila Staff 2013 to Parents of Lanakila Campers, June 2013, Camp Lanakila, Fairlee, VT.
\textsuperscript{209} "2012 Vision Piece," Lanakila Staff 2012 to Parents of Lanakila Campers, June 2012, Camp Lanakila, Fairlee, VT.
learning and growing in virtuous love, and reflects the framework of the previous chapter nearly perfectly.

Lanakila offers many different opportunities for boys to discover activities and relationships that bring them joy, that excite their passion. With counselors who are excited to share their knowledge and help make camp fun, each boy can experiment with different departments to discover one (or many) about which he is most passionate. So, a boy can find and develop his passion quite naturally at Lanakila. This is the first half of my framework for virtuous love built on Wolf. Lanakila also provides the conditions for virtuous growth. Counselors help campers discover the internal goods of the practices about which they are passionate. This leads campers to want to develop in those practices, not only for the sake of external goods, such as Viking Honors, but for the internal goods as well. Viking Honors build in the identification and pursuit of internal goods over and above external ones. Aside from the departments, which focus on specific practices of skills (and virtues, of course), Lanakila is all about relationships, between tentmates, camper and counselor, as well as between counselors. The pedagogy stresses that we learn to be our best, most virtuous selves in concert with those around us. The counseling staff of 2010 corroborates this:

Parents can trust us to … foster relationships grounded in authenticity, compassion, understanding, and fun. We know that developing the skills to build and maintain close, vulnerable relationships requires an attentive network of support; parents can trust us to help their sons communicate effectively, resolve conflict, and nurture friendships in ways that strengthen their values and celebrate their wit and whimsy.211

211 “2010 Vision Piece.”
This emphasis helps further support the development of virtuous, loving outlooks for campers and counselors alike. So, Lanakila supports virtuous love in that it provides access to opportunities to develop love for practices, as well as for other people, while stressing that those practices and relationships must be supported by the virtues in order to flourish.

Success counseling for relationships is effectively the loving principle of charity in practice. Whether we are confronting a friend or cabinmate when they’ve done something we do not like, having a difficult conversation, or resolving an argument, success counseling asks us to take a step back from our initial emotional reaction, whether we are eight, 25, or 74 years old. It asks us to take a second to think about the possibilities. Maybe our friend lashed out at us because they had a tough morning. Or maybe they just failed a test for their Loki (the first Viking Honor rank) or found out some bad news from their lives outside camp. The point is, reacting viciously will not help the situation. By encouraging a longer, more comprehensive, and more reflective view, success counseling implores us to give ourselves the space to understand ourselves and others, and to respond in a way that is reflective of love and virtues like patience, humility, and vulnerability.

Because camp is so focused on relationships, opportunities for flourishing are everywhere. That means that everywhere, the love that campers and counselors must be structured by the virtues in order for those relationships to flourish. The virtues of camp give loving relationships their strength, and when we embrace that, we can flourish and help those around us to do the same. This is pertinent whether a relationship is between a younger camper and an older one, between two of the same age, between a camper and a counselor, or between two counselors. Every relationship at camp is special and
characterized by love. By committing to the virtues and to the act of striving, campers and counselors help those relationships thrive and last.

Camp Lanakila is a remarkable place. In all likelihood, I have idealized it to some degree in this chapter; it is, after all, one of the places that has been most influential in my own life, and one that I will always hold dear. Regardless of whether I have idealized it, Lanakila serves at the very least as an example of a place where virtue and virtuous love are aspirationally part of the culture, where striving is built into every activity, every relationship, and the institution as a whole. It is not perfectly virtuous, but it has identified virtue as important to its flourishing as an institution, and thereby the flourishing of everyone who is a part of its community. Lanakila has identified an active philosophy – success counseling – that integrates skill-building practices with the discovery of internal goods and the development of the virtues, and embraced a culture of virtuous love that brings everyone in and further encourages virtuous development and flourishing, together. In the conclusion to this thesis, I ask a simple question: how can we apply the lessons of Lanakila in the outside world? What relevance does it have to our everyday lives, most of which occur outside of summer camp?
Conclusion: Taking Camp into the World

I. A Call to Action

At the end of every summer, there is an event called Final Council Fire. Because it is one of the most special events at Lanakila, I will not describe it further than to say that it is a time for reflection on the lessons, challenges, and triumphs of the summer, and for looking forward to returning to the outside world. In the spirit of the conclusion of the summer and the beginning of the rest of the year, the director gives a sort-of call to action, in which he asks all of the campers and counselors to take those lessons into the outside world. He asks everyone to remember that people are deserving of love and virtuous treatment not only in the camp environment, but everywhere else, too. In a way, it is the ultimate invocation of the narrative unity of a human life. The virtues learned at Lanakila do not stop having worth once the summer ends, but rather, are all the more important in outside-world situations that do not expect them or make them easy to exercise. The internal goods that come from engaging in practices and relationships do not go away in the outside world; every lesson from Lanakila can be applied in one’s life outside of camp. The director is really asking everyone to work to bring the selves they embody at camp into the world, and to spread the lessons of Lanakila to the places that need them. The
purpose of this conclusion will be similar to the director’s call to action. In it, I attempt to answer the question, “How can we take the lessons of Lanakila into real life?”

II. What Makes Camp Effective?

Lanakila is a place designed such that a young boy may come to a place where he will experience love and virtuous development around the clock, no matter the situation. This is one of the characteristics that makes camp unique: it is one of the few places that exists where, at least for three-and-a-half or seven weeks, a philosophy may pervade every part of a person’s life. Most of our lives are not like this: we wake up at home, go to school or work, and go home, creating at least two distinct environments in most people’s lives; moreover, on weekends, many of us participate in other, distinct communities: religious groups and sports teams are a couple of examples. Life at camp provides consistency of approach, whereas life outside of camp, most of the time, consists of very different situations and parts of our lives. It is easier to apply virtue when that is the continuous ethos that pervades one’s interactions, and when virtuous love abounds; this serves to the point of the second chapter that situations do matter. So, one thing that makes camp effective at teaching the virtues and practicing virtuous love is that it provides a consistent environment.

But, as I have argued, what gives virtues their worth and strength is that they are applied readily no matter the environment; they are not limited to one part of our lives or another. Does camp ensure this? The simple answer is: it cannot ensure virtuous action outside of camp, since we do not have counselors in our everyday lives, nor are we surrounded by people who practice the same philosophy we do. However, camp is
importantly about building the tools for success: it strives to be, as the 2017 vision piece says, a “launchpad” experience instead of a “pinnacle” one. If it were only the latter, it would be failing at its mission of “helping create fine people,” because those people would be unable to apply what they had learned about themselves and about the virtues in their lives outside the camp. This is where the intentionality of teaching the philosophy comes in. There are a few manifestations that reaffirm this philosophy, some of which I have already mentioned and others not.

The first is the work put in by counselors and leadership alike to set and emphasize values from the first day. The vision piece is an affirmation of this, and since it is sent out to parents, they form an expectation that those values ring true in their campers, as well as coming to appreciate those values themselves, if they do not already. This sets the philosophical course for the summer and holds counselors accountable to that course.

Second is the system of feedback at Lanakila. Because the camp places an emphasis on striving toward its best self and likewise on each person striving towards their best self, there is a culture of giving and receiving feedback from each other and ourselves about how we are doing our jobs. This is codified formally in that each department and unit has set feedback sessions at the beginning and end of the summer, as well as other times scattered throughout. There is a counselor meeting once a week that serves as a reaffirmation of the themes of the summer, as well as a time to check in with each other and oneself about how things are going. This ethos is also informally pervasive in that one norm is constant check-ins with one’s unit or department head, as well as with oneself.

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Thus the culture and structure of camp is such that people are constantly reinforced both internally and externally in their commitment to virtuous action and love.

Every Sunday, there is a nonreligious gathering in the woods during which all of Lanakila – campers and counselors – get together to share in one of the camp’s quieter traditions. At Sunday Gathering, there is singing, which often focuses on the more meaningful pieces in the Song Book, as well as a talk given by one of the counselors. These talks focus on a theme of camp that has been influential for that counselor – mindfulness on the Appalachian Trail and coming to appreciate the application of Lanakila’s values in inner city Atlanta are a couple of examples – and work to make that talk salient for the campers. They often involve a skit, which serves as a parable that supplements the talk itself, and helps make the talk relatable for the campers (these frequently involve a mix of humor and moral development). Sunday Gatherings help the entire camp to come together and reaffirm its shared virtues; each camper and counselor walks away with the possibility of applying what they have learned in their camp lives that week. Furthermore, it is a direct manifestation of the virtuous love that the camp community embraces and embodies. It involves open signs of affection – smiles, laughter, hugging, singing together, and sometimes dancing – and a sense of deep, meaningful joy.

Success counseling is one of the most important manifestations of this; since it is used every day, in almost every teaching interaction, it pervades campers’ and counselors’ consciousness. Success counseling teaches everyone who participates in it to ask themselves questions like: “If I were being patient (or courageous, or loving, or conscientious) right now, how would I handle this situation?” Success counseling gives everyone the tools to think about what is really important in a situation (its internal goods),
and how to get that, while being virtuous in the way one goes about pursuing those goods, especially in one’s relationships with others and oneself. Success counseling is the most important everyday tool that campers and counselors learn that helps them become the best versions of themselves throughout their lives, throughout the year, throughout very different situations. It is the backbone of Lanakilans that guides them as they make their way through their lives, at camp and in the outside world.

These are some of the many events and tools that Lanakila emphasizes over the course of the summer. Some are simple and everyday; others are high-level and more spread out. The two different levels work together to help Lanakilans’ commitment to the virtues and virtuous love become part of their lives outside of camp; the director’s call to action is a synthesis of this. It emphasizes the greater philosophical message – camp’s telos (to use Aristotle’s term): that we all have a responsibility to be virtuous and loving as much as we can in our lives both at and outside of Lanakila; Lanakila is a gift that each of us receive and it is on us to bring that gift with us into the world. The call to action also grounds that philosophical message in the work that it takes – which is a lot – to be virtuous and loving in our everyday goings-on. This is the application of the lessons we have learned in moments of triumph and challenge; the director calls on us to remember the way we handled those situations, and to work to do the same when we go home, wherever home is. This is what makes Lanakila effective at the teaching of the virtues and of virtuous love: it, and everyone in it, commit to a culture built on the shared telos of the camp, while also putting that telos into action in every interaction, small or large, external or internal. It successfully matches the philosophical with the practical, and embraces a commitment to improvement. So, if other organizations are to successfully teach the virtues, they must do
the same: they must identify the virtues they hold dear formally, through the structure of
the organization as well as its guiding documents, as well as informally, through culture;
they must commit to those virtues and strive to put them into practice every day. This is no
small task, and calls for a radical restructuring – the transformation – of many of the
institutions that are important to our lives, as well as of our own mindsets.

III. Challenging Convenience: A Second Call to Action

Lanakila is a definitively anti-convenience place, where campers and counselors
are actively encouraged to shift their focus away from outcomes and onto the processes by
which we achieve those outcomes, or fail to do so. Lanakila embraces the struggles of being
human, of working to transform oneself and one’s relationships so that they become more
virtuous and more loving. Lanakila emphasizes practices, internal goods, and the virtues
necessary for them, however imperfectly packaged those things come. Lanakila
intentionally opts for things that seem outmoded, like the shooting, developing, and
printing of film photography, creation of physical art and woodwork, and stories told from
memory, precisely because they require patience, courage, and thought, and often result in
imperfect outcomes. These things are difficult, and involve practices that, by their
definition, can always be improved upon.

They are also things that can be and are made easier: photography on a digital
camera often results in dazzling photos, chosen from among thousands of takes, touched
up to perfection on a computer; art and woodwork can be digitized, so that a line is
automatically straight, or a curve perfectly mimics reality; stories are told on the screen
that induce jaws to drop, make us cry, and invite us into breathtakingly beautiful landscapes
we may never know. Let me emphasize that these are good things. They bring joy and beauty and awe to more people than ever before, and this is an emphatically good thing. What I have tried to emphasize in this thesis, however, is that the practices that challenge us, that put us to work and induce reflection, that cause us to question outcomes and endure discomfort, in the name of growth and virtuous development, are often the ones that allow us to flourish. By engaging with these struggles, not only will we learn how to better handle other situations that challenge us or go in a way we would never have planned, but we also learn how to find meaning in a world of increasing convenience.

It is unlikely that the trend toward convenience will slow anytime soon (and in many ways that is a good thing!), so it is imperative upon each of us and the institutions in which we take part to understand that flourishing still relies on processes, not outcomes. In a way, convenience offers us a new lens through which we may reframe the questions central to virtue ethics. Virtue ethics implores us to ask questions like, “What is the good for me? For this relationship? For this institution (work, school, play, etc.)?” Convenience has the potential to hijack these questions, by emphasizing what is easy and fast, but we need not let it. When we focus on the virtues, these questions become: “How can I grow, so that I become more patient, more thoughtful, and more self- and others-aware? How can I help this relationship grow, so that it becomes closer, more loving, and more resilient when things go awry? How can I help this institution grow, so that it becomes more inclusive and welcoming, more fun, and more conducive to the growth of all of its members?”

This sort of approach already exists to varying degrees in many places. We can see it in schools that adopt growth-mindset curricula, where teachers help students question the
}\footnote{214 "B Corporation," The B Corp Declaration, accessed April 21, 2018, https://www.bcorporation.net/what-are-b-corps/the-b-corp-declaration.} It exists to some degree in B Corporations, which focus on “[creating] benefit for all stakeholders, not just shareholders,” thus pushing themselves past the pursuit of profit to the protection of our planet and our communities.\footnote{214 "B Corporation," The B Corp Declaration, accessed April 21, 2018, https://www.bcorporation.net/what-are-b-corps/the-b-corp-declaration.} It exists when religious leaders, politicians, entertainers, intellectuals, and other influential public figures call on us to be more loving toward each other. Critically, though, as I have emphasized over and over again in this thesis, such an approach must include a basic commitment to the virtues. It must emphasize patience, humility, courage, thoughtfulness, and justice, among the many others, if it is to truly help us flourish. It cannot be focused on outcomes, as utilitarianism is, nor on strict imperatives, as Kantian ethics is. If it is, it will fail to connect with us as humans, and fail to emphasis the process by which we grow, with which virtue ethics is so closely concerned.

Virtue ethics in practice is not constrained to Camp Lanakila, nor should it be. This thesis has emphasized the way that virtue ethics can be learned: through a focus on the discovery of goods internal to practices and on the virtues that make those internal goods accessible; in virtuous, loving relationship with ourselves, with our practices, and with those around us. In it, I have endeavored to show that learning and applying the virtues is possible no matter what one’s life situation, that being born wealthy or poor or somewhere in between has no bearing on whether or not someone can strive toward virtue and thereby flourish. Moral traditions define what we are brought up thinking is right, and virtue ethics
embraces that; while it does not condone moral relativism, it postulates that there is always improvement to be had. We can always become more virtuous (patient, humble, etc.), no matter our social positionality, identity, education level, or income.

What virtue ethics requires, more than anything else, is that we try. It helps to have good teachers, but virtue ethics does not necessarily define who those teachers are. In reality, we are all teachers and students simultaneously. Because each of us is different, some of us tend to be more patient, others more determined, and still others more courageous. We can all learn from each other and become more virtuous all the time. The math teacher may learn from their pupil a different way for looking at a problem, the running coach from the high school runner a new motivational strategy, the partner at an investment firm a more sustainable, equitable approach to investments from the associate.

That being said, there are tangible things to be done to make the virtues more accessible, specifically to children. While it is not the task of this thesis to detail them all, I will outline a related pair of ideas. First, we should work to increase communication and involvement between schools and families, as well as engaging in collective vision-setting; this will allow parents to gain a greater understanding of and say in their children’s education, as well as helping teachers to better understand the parents’ needs and interests; this is the shared work of setting a high-level philosophical course that Lanakila does so well. Second, we should work to develop more experiential, practice-based learning, wherein teachers help students to focus on the goods internal to that practice; this is the everyday groundwork that underlies the learning of the virtues that Lanakila is able to do in its departments. These are not easy fixes, and will require a concerted, coordinated effort, but educators, parents, and children would do well to push for them.
We live in a world of ever-increasing convenience, what virtue ethics requires is not that we reject that convenience wholesale, but rather be aware of its impact on our lives, and dedicate ourselves to the sometimes-inconvenient practices that help us grow and flourish as people. When we focus on the virtues and the internal goods they beget, no matter who or where we are, we unlock a world of potential within ourselves to become better, more flourishing, more loving people. When we do this, we embrace the power of our relationships to become better, more flourishing, and more loving. When this is the basis of our relationships with each other, those relationships pervade the structure of our institutions and push them forward to create a better, more flourishing, more loving society.

This is the promise of virtue ethics: a society more committed to universality than the Kantian categorical imperative could realistically achieve, with greater, more equitable overall happiness than a utilitarian utopia. When a society flourishes, it can embody these characteristics without any of the alienation; a flourishing, virtuous society is full of the love we hold so dear, that binds us together, and helps make our lives meaningful. Each of us can take Lanakila with us into our lives, whether or not we have been, or even heard of the camp before reading this. So, at the next opportunity, try something inconvenient: learn a song on a musical instrument; build something out of wood or Legos or even sand on the beach; go take a hike in a place you’ve never been before; or have a conversation with someone you know about something you’ve never talked with them about before. Try to approach it with enough patience and courage to see it all the way through, without rushing, and pay attention to the internal goods that come of the process. You never know: you just might fall in love with that little bit of inconvenience; if you do, remember the virtues that made that love possible.
Appendix

1. A counselor congratulates a camper learning to swim.

Photo courtesy of Jenn Grossman, Jenn Grossman Photography ©

2. A counselor helps a camper with measurements in the woodshop.

Photo courtesy of Jenn Grossman, Jenn Grossman Photography ©
3. Campers sing in the Barn during Assembly

Photo courtesy of Jenn Grossman, Jenn Grossman Photography ©


Photo courtesy of Jenn Grossman, Jenn Grossman Photography ©
5. Arch every camper walks underneath onto the swimming dock, proclaiming one of Lanakila’s mottos: “There are many ways to be a man.”

Photo courtesy of Jenn Grossman, Jenn Grossman Photography ©

Bibliography


Sources on Patagonia’s ethos of doing the right thing:


Sources on sexual assault and harassment in the workplace:


Sources on Social Psychology Challenges to Character:

See Harman, Gilbert.
