

Hurka's Theory of Virtue

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Abstract Thomas Hurka has put forth a powerful account of virtue. The account rests on a specification of intrinsically good mental states and then explains what unifies them. On his account, virtue and desert also share the same structure. His theory of virtue has some difficulties that threaten the structure that unifies it. First, Hurka's account cannot provide a principled account of virtue and vice when they are constituted by attitudes toward things are not intrinsically good (e.g., nonexistent state of affairs). Second, Hurka's account does not have room for an important factor in determining the degree to which an attitude is virtuous or vicious: agent-relative goods. Hurka is thus faced with abandoning the basic structure that makes his theory attractive or adopting counterintuitive positions.

Keywords Virtue · Intrinsic goodness · Vice · Organic unities

Introduction

Thomas Hurka has put forth a powerful account of virtue. The account rests on a specification of intrinsically good mental states and then explains what unifies them. On his account, virtue and desert also share the same structure. His theory of virtue has some difficulties that threaten this structure. First, when the basic goods are properly specified, virtue has a reflexive structure rather than the bottom-up structure that Hurka posits. Second, Hurka's account cannot provide a principled account of virtue and vice when they are constituted by attitudes toward things are not intrinsically good (e.g., nonexistent state of affairs). Third, Hurka's account does not have room for an important factor in determining the degree to which an attitude is virtuous or vicious: agent-relative goods. Hurka is thus faced with abandoning the basic structure that makes his theory attractive or adopting counterintuitive positions. The second two problems result from the externalism that lies at the heart of his theory.

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Hurka's Theory

The Recursive Theory of Virtue

A recursion theory of virtue and vice focuses on a repeatable structure that characterizes the different levels and types of virtues and vices. Thomas Hurka has set out a particularly powerful version of this theory.¹ On his account, there are three types of clauses that together set out the nature of virtue and vice. The first clause type is the base clause. These specify first-order intrinsic goods and evils. 'BG' stands for 'base good' and 'BE' for 'base evil.'

(BG) Pleasure and knowledge are intrinsically good.

(BE) Pain and false belief are intrinsically bad.

There might be other objective-list elements in (BG) besides pleasure and knowledge and contraries of them in (BE) and I will return to this in the context of the structure of virtue and vice.

The second clause type is the recursion clause. These are clauses that relate the value of having the correct attitudes toward objects. The proposition names stand for 'loving good,' 'loving evil,' 'hating good,' and 'hating evil' respectively. Note I shall use 'bad' and 'evil' interchangeably throughout this essay.

(LG) If x is intrinsically good, loving (desiring, pursuing, or taking pleasure in) x for itself is intrinsically good.

(LE) If x is intrinsically evil, loving x for itself is intrinsically evil.

(HE) If x is intrinsically evil, hating (desiring or pursuing the non-existence of or being pained by the existence of) x for itself is intrinsically good.

(HG) If x is intrinsically good, hating x for itself is intrinsically evil.

Note that the object of the recursion clauses can be directed toward first-order or higher-order goods and evils. It is because these clauses operate in the same way at different levels that makes the theory recursive.²

On Hurka's account, the attitude of loving consists of three more specific attitudes. To love something is to desire that something obtain, actively pursue it, or take pleasure in it when it obtains. Also, on his account, there are two modes to love something: it can be loved for itself or because it is good. This second mode of love depends on a prior judgment that it is intrinsically good. This recursive account might need to be extended to cover instrumental goods (things that bring about intrinsic goods) or inherent good (things the contemplation of which is intrinsically valuable, e.g., sunsets) since it intuitively seems intrinsically valuable for someone to love these as well. Parallel principles apply to hating various goods and evils.

¹ See Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Value, and Vice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) and Thomas Hurka, "The Common Structure of Virtue and Desert," *Ethics* 112 (2001): 6–31.

² There might be some additional conditions. One condition might be that an attitude not only is directed at an appropriate object but also that its intensity level is appropriate. For example, it is not clear that an overpowering love of a minor good is itself very good. A second condition might be that the appropriateness of an object not merely be a function of an object's intrinsic goodness but other factors as well. For example, it seems intrinsically better for a father to love *his son's love for him* rather than merely some *son's love for his father*. This allows an agent-relative condition to enter into the value of an attitude.

The third clause types are the virtue and vice clauses. These are clauses that focus on the intrinsic goods and evils identified by the recursion clauses. These identify properties that supervene on a person's attitudes.

(VR) The virtues are those attitudes to goods and evils that are intrinsically good.

(VI) The vices are those attitudes to goods and evils that are intrinsically evil.

On this account, then, virtue and vice are functions of person's attitudes. While Hurka does not specify the determinant of a person's overall character, it seems likely that a person as a whole is virtuous or vicious based on the number, ratio, and intensity of his virtuous and vicious attitudes.

Hurka's Theory of Desert

Hurka's theory of desert involves combination of base goods and evils and virtues and vices. Here are his principles.

- (1) The combination of virtue and pleasure in the same person's life is intrinsically good.
- (2) The combination of vice and pleasure in the same person's life is intrinsically bad.
- (3) The combination of virtue and pain in the same person's life is intrinsically bad.
- (4) The combination of vice and pain in the same person's life is intrinsically good.
- (5) Desert-goods and desert-goods are those identified by clauses (1)–(4).

Like the principles of virtue and vice, positive-positive and negative-negative combinations are intrinsically good and positive-negative and negative-positive combinations are intrinsically bad. Also, the role of virtue and vice in the principles of desert import the recursive structure into this account of desert. Hurka argues that the similar structure suggests that both values are parallel instantiations of a more abstract good of appropriate responsiveness to values.

The Advantages of Hurka's Theory

The account has several advantages that make it such an attractive feature of virtue. First, it allows virtue to have the same structure as desert and both to have a similar relationship to the basic good. This unified structure is appealing because it suggests that there are basic metaphysical relations that account for the structure of higher-order intrinsic goodness. Second, it links virtue to mental states. This allows us to view virtue as a function of what goes on in someone's head. This has the advantage of explaining why virtue produces a disposition to behave in certain ways, without making the disposition constitute virtue; a similar thing is true of vice. On a purely dispositional theory, moral character in general and moral character traits in particular are nothing more than dispositions to behave in certain ways under normal conditions. Third, it helps to clarify the relationship between virtue and responsibility by focusing the responsibility that a person has for his attitudes. That is, persons are responsible for virtue (or vice) to the extent to which they are responsible for their attitudes. Fourth, the account provides an appealing account of a series of particular virtues and vices. For example, it explains vices that occur because a person's attitudes do not fit their objects (e.g., callousness as not caring about another's pain and shamelessness as not caring about one's higher-level evil) or fit their objects but are disproportionate (e.g., selfishness as caring more about one's own lesser good than others' greater good). Fifth, it categorizes virtue as a type of intrinsic good, thereby allowing it to be commensurate with

other intrinsic goods. This explains our intuition that virtue is valuable in itself but capable of being weighed against other goods.

Problems with Hurka's Theory

Problem #1: Virtue Has a Reflexive Structure

The first problem for Hurka's account is that his bottom-up structure does not hold up. On Hurka's account, the value of virtue rests on the notion of the fittingness of love being directed at intrinsically good things and hate directed at intrinsically bad things. In addition, he considers, but does not clearly endorse, the notion that the degree of goodness rests on the relation between the degree, intensity, or ratio of the attitude and the degree of the object's goodness. The notion here is that the higher-order goods (e.g., virtue) be directed at lower-order goods (e.g., basic goods or virtues are lower order than the relevant higher-order virtue). The problem comes in when we consider the base goods.

The base goods are properly understood as those conditions that make someone's life go well. This explains what pleasure and knowledge have in common. The conditions that make a person's life goes well includes not only pleasure but also objective-list elements.³ These elements include things that make someone's life go better independent of their bringing about pleasure and desire fulfillment. The notion behind this theory of well-being is that a person's life goes better to the extent that both hedonistic and objective-list elements are present. However, the connection is not necessarily an additive one. That is, how well someone life goes is not merely the sum of how well it would go with each element present in isolation. A life with both elements to a certain degree might be better (or worse) than two lives each that has some of one element but none of the other.

The problem arises in that objective-list elements include not only knowledge but also virtue. This can be seen in the isolation thought experiments designed to identify the objective-list elements. These other elements intuitively seem to include such things as knowledge, meaningful relationships, and virtue. That is, the same intuitive thought experiments suggest that knowledge is an objective-list element also suggests that virtue is an objective-list good. But since virtue simply is the love of the components of well-being (or the love of the love of them, etc.) and since virtue is itself a component of well-being, virtue must involve love for itself. This is problematic in so far as it breaks apart Hurka's notion that higher-order goods are directed at lower-order goods but not vice versa.

Hurka might claim that virtue is the object-list element that consists of appropriate attitudes toward other elements on the objective list. That is, he might assert that not everything on the objective list is at the base, but only some of it. At the very least, Hurka's theory will have to be modified to allow for reflexive attitudes. For example, Ellen's love of her own virtue has a reflexive structure. Unlike the next two problems, Hurka's theory can be modified to allow for reflexive attitudes since the bottom-up feature is not essential to the recursive structure.

The above argument claims that if base goods include objective-list elements, then virtue is likely reflexive, contrary to Hurka's account. An objector might argue that the antecedent is unsupported. Instead, he might continue, the above argument provides Hurka a good reason to (continue to) deny that objective-list elements belong among intrinsic goods.

³ The notion of objective-list elements comes from Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 493–502.

However, Hurka includes knowledge among the base goods and this is a paradigm objective-list element.⁴ Hurka is thus faced with a choice: he must either reject knowledge as a base good or explain why other objective-list elements are not base goods. The former is problematic since love of knowledge intuitively seems intrinsically good. The latter is also problematic since it is not clear why some but not other objective-list elements (e.g., meaningful relationships) are base goods.

Another objector might argue that it is true that when we do thought experiments to identify objective-list goods, virtue shows up on the list. On behalf of Hurka, he might respond that thought experiments are not always reliable – Hurka’s account is revisionist, and so it is a mistake after all to think that virtue is a base good. However, this response would not work for Hurka given that he does not argue for the identity of the base goods and evils. His argument for them is probably that they are best explanation of our intuitions. Given this use of intuitions, he cannot then claim to be disregard intuitions unless doing so is necessary to provide for a better explanation of intuitions or some other data. At the very least, Hurka has not provided such an argument and, as far as I can tell, there is no plausible one available to him.

A critic might assert that the above criticism of Hurka succeeds, but since his theory can simply drop the bottom-up structure, it’s not clear why we should bother with it. It is important for two reasons. First, since it is a powerful theory, there is value in understanding it in its best light. Second, if virtue has a coherentist structure, this might or might not conflict with foundationalism elsewhere (e.g., knowledge or autonomy), and hence this is the first step toward this investigation.⁵

Problem #2: Virtue Need Not Be Directed at Intrinsic Goods

Virtuous attitudes need not be directed at intrinsically good things. This is a problem for Hurka since the shared structure of higher-order intrinsic goods (virtue and desert) is unified by their intrinsic goodness being a function of the degree to which they are directed at other intrinsically good things. A similar thing is true for higher-order intrinsic evils. There are two areas in which virtuous attitudes can be directed at things that are not intrinsically good: attitudes directed at nonexistent things and ones directed at instrumental goods. Hurka admits this in the context of instrumental goods, but does not address how this fits with his overall theory.

Problem #2a: Non-Existent Objects

Pleasures might vary according to whether their object refers to an actual event or state and whether an agent believes that it so refers. The issue then arises whether the object’s actual existence, the belief about whether it exists, or some other factor determines whether an attitude is virtuous or vicious. For example, consider the following case entitled.

Rape Porn. Four persons receive great sexual pleasure while watching rape depictions on film. The first two (A and B) both believe that the event is real; the second two

⁴ Knowledge is a correspondence good in that it involves a relation between the person and the external world. This is characteristic of another objective-list element, meaningful relationships, and at odds with purely internalist accounts such as hedonic monism (pleasure alone is intrinsically good).

⁵ Arguments for a coherentist account of autonomy can be seen in Laura Waddell Ekstrom, “A Coherence Theory of Autonomy,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53 (1993): 599–616 and Marilyn Friedman, “Autonomy and the Split-Level Self,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 24 (1986): 19–35.

(C and D) believe it is merely acted. In fact, two persons (A and C) are watching a depiction of an actual rape; the other two are not. Hence, we end up with the following matrix.

Belief status	Event status	
	Actual	Not actual
Believed actual	A	B
Believed not to be actual	C	D

The issue arises which persons are vicious in so far as they have viewing pleasure. Intuitively it seems that, other things being equal, two persons who take the same degree pleasure in what they believe to be rape (A and B) are equally vicious. The idea here is that virtue is in the head. This intuition strengthens if we imagine that both persons have the same degree of evidence in support of their belief that the event occurred.

The degree of virtue or vice might be a function of a third factor (e.g., a pro or con attitude toward the event's occurring) rather than the mere taking of pleasure (or pain) in an intrinsically good (or intrinsically bad) object, but this is unaffected by whether the perceived event actually occurs.⁶ A pro attitude toward a state of affairs is an attitude that contains or expresses the notion that it would be good that the event occur. It is possible for a person to gain pleasure from considering a scenario that she does not entertain a pro attitude toward. For example, a woman might fantasize about rape scenarios, while at the same time believing that such scenarios are bad and being glad that they do not obtain.

A concern arises regarding whether the content of an attitude (e.g., love or pleasure) is solely in the head. If the content of an attitude involves external referents, then this threatens to make relevant the issue of whether the event in question is actual. This is because if virtue is a function of the nature of a person's attitude and part of the content of an attitude is the content of an embedded belief, then virtue will depend in part on the content of the embedded belief. If the content of belief depends on things outside the head, then so will virtue. However, the concern about external content can be sidestepped here. We need merely assume that persons with attitudes toward similar actual and counterfactual objects (e.g., A and B) are equally virtuous or virtuous. This may be because they have the same attitudes (in which case attitudes are solely in the head) or because they have different attitudes but the differences are not relevant to virtue. It intuitively seems that if the former is not correct, the latter is.

The problem with this theory is that if love of nonexistent objects (e.g., merely depicted rapes) is intrinsically evil, then the value of higher-order intrinsic goods (i.e., second-order attitudes) need not refer to first-order intrinsic goods. This breaks apart the recursive structure in so far as this structure assumes that all higher-order intrinsic goods (and evils) refer to a lower-order intrinsic good (or evil). Instead, virtuous and vicious attitudes can be aimed at objects that are not intrinsically good (or evil). This breaks apart the common structure of virtue and desert since the latter cannot involve an object that is not intrinsically valuable.

On behalf of Hurka's theory, an objector might claim here that it is intrinsically better for a person's beliefs to be true than not. Since the correspondence that constitutes truth is not in the head, intrinsic goods can depend on relations to the outside world. The objector might then argue that if one intrinsic good depends on an external relation, then the same

⁶ The role of pro and con attitudes is discussed in Stephen Kershner, "Is Violation Pornography Bad for Your Soul?" *Journal of Social Philosophy* 35 (2004): 349–366.

can be true of virtue. The problem with this objection has to do with the nature of the two intrinsic goods. The purpose of knowledge is to connect a person to the outside world. Regardless of whether he knows his beliefs correspond to the outside world, this is what he aims at and what constitutes success. In contrast, virtue is not a function of whether a person is aimed at things that are in fact good.⁷ Rather, it is a function of whether what a person aims at (with the correct attitude) would be good were it as he believed it to be. Errors about referents in this context are cognitive rather than valuational and do not affect a person's character. The objector might respond that persons might have a range of hateful attitudes (e.g., misogynistic or genocidal beliefs) that are believed to be true and that make him vicious. Consider the heartfelt beliefs of Adolf Hitler or a religious leader who believes that God endorses husbands' use of disciplinary beatings to correct wives. However, such persons' errors are valuational rather than cognitive, since they involve more than a failure to properly refer.

A second objector might claim that nonexistent states of affairs are intrinsically good or evil. The objector might claim that this should be understood either in the sense of the value that state of affairs would have were they to obtain. This claim is consistent with an account of value whereby only states of affairs that obtain have a level of intrinsic value. If this interpretation is given to the object, then it might be claimed that loves and pleasures directed at merely imagined states of affairs can be virtuous or vicious. The problem with this objection is that despite the counterfactual interpretation, in the actual world the attitudinal object is not intrinsically good. Hence, despite the attractiveness of this approach, it still breaks apart the recursive structure since it makes a positive-neutral combination as good as a positive-positive one.

A third objector might argue that vicious attitudes might be directed at a fictional depiction of rape; but Hurka might point out that the depiction is real, even if its content is not. That is, the depiction might be bad in virtue of its content and the content bad because of its counterfactual badness. The objector might analogize this to the following counterfactual: if I were rich then I would buy a Porsche. This counterfactual might be true even if in the actual world I do not buy a Porsche. The problem with this objection is that it confuses the truth of the counterfactual about nonexistent events with whether described events actually occur. Both actualism (individuals exist only if they are actual) and actualism about value (something has intrinsic value only if it is actual) are plausible. The former can be seen in that it is implausible to think that there are actual persons, rocks, trees, etc. in merely possible states of affairs.⁸ The latter can be seen in that the bearers of value intuitively seem to be states of affairs that obtain, events, or persons and these exist only in the actual world.⁹ If this is correct, attitudes toward mere fictional rapes focus on something that does not exist and hence has no value. This is a problem for Hurka's theory.

⁷ Hurka would likely reject this as it would conflict with the structure of the recursive theory.

⁸ I am assuming here the modal realism of persons such as David Lewis is mistaken. See David Lewis, *Counterfactuals* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1973), 84–91 and David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

⁹ The notion that states of affairs that obtain are the bearer of intrinsic value can be seen in Ramon Lemos, *The Nature of Value* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), ch. 2 and Noah Lemos, *Intrinsic Value* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), ch. 2. Events might, on some accounts, be bearers of value. Since the best view of them is that they are concrete particulars, see, e.g., Lawrence Lombard, *Events: A Metaphysical Study* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), they exist only if they are exemplified. The idea that persons are the bearer of intrinsic value can, arguably, be found in the work of Kant.

Problem #2b: Instrumental Goods

Another apparent problem for Hurka's theory is that the love of instrumental goods (and evils) appears to be intrinsically good (or evil) and yet Hurka's structure does not allow for it. Hurka himself does allow for it, but it is not clear that anything in his theory permits this allowance. One example of this is the hatred of a malevolent act (e.g., a callous rape). A second example might be the love of a kind act (e.g., a mother's sacrifice for her daughter). These attitudes might be seen as directed at a complex state of affairs that includes not only an act, but also its effect and the motive that brought the act about. It is in fact quite hard to find a clear example of a purely instrumental good (or evil) that is the object of an intrinsic attitude and hence virtuous or vicious. For example, it is not clear if persons can love money or a car for its own sake. Hence, it is not clear that instrumental goods pose the same problem to Hurka's overall structure as do nonexistent objects. Nevertheless, if persons can have intrinsic attitudes toward them, this threatens Hurka's overall structure.¹⁰ Nor does the structure of his theory allow it to be modified so as to include instrumental goods as base goods. The same is true for instrumental evils.

An objector might assert that it is impossible for there to be a clear example of a purely instrumental good (or evil) that is an object of an intrinsic attitude. She might assert that were the good the object of such an attitude, it would cease to be a merely instrumental good. However, the objector confuses the value of the attitude toward the object (intrinsic, perhaps) with the value of the object (instrumental, by hypothesis).

My discussion here is brief. I merely raise the issue since Hurka asserts that there can attitudes toward instrumental goods that are intrinsically good or bad. However, as noted above, it is hard to find a satisfying example of this and in any case it does not fit with his theory.

Problem #3: Virtue Need Not Be Proportional to Intrinsically Valuable Objects

The structure of the recursive theory, according to Husak, results in virtue and vice being functions of three factors: fit (i.e., type of attitude such as love or hate), attitude magnitude (i.e., intensity, perhaps multiplied by duration), and object magnitude (i.e., value, again perhaps multiplied by duration). A similar thing is true with regard to three factors of desert: fit, magnitude of pleasure, and magnitude of desert. A problem arises in that there appears to be a fourth factor that characterizes virtue and vice but not desert, thereby breaking apart the proposed common structure. The virtuousness of an attitude intuitively seems to be a function of the agent's relation to the good. For example, it seems to be more virtuous for a woman to care more about her child's pleasure than some distant child's pleasure. Similarly, it does not seem to diminish a person's virtue to care more deeply about his own pleasure over that of a stranger rather than caring equally for both. This suggests that there is an agent-relativity factor that determines the amount of virtue and vice in an attitude. This breaks apart Hurka's simple tripartite structure that supposedly characterizes virtue. Also, desert does not have an agent-relative factor except as it comes in through

¹⁰ A similar problem arises with regard to positive attitudes to symbols. For example, one might think that it is good that a person have a negative reaction to a Swastika or, depending on religious views, a positive reaction to the cross. However, if symbols represent or express the good (or bad), then the attitude aimed at a symbol might have the good (or bad) as its object. The notion that it is rational to give weight to symbolic meanings and utilities is discussed in Robert Nozick, *The Nature of Rationality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 26–35.

virtue. However, it is not clear if this threatens their common structure since via virtue, desert can import the agent-relative features.

Hurka might posit that base goods are agent relative. For example, Hurka might include among the base goods for a person, e.g., Margot, general goods such as a mother's-love-for-her-own-child's-well-being or specific goods such as Margot's-love-of-her-own-child's-well-being. The first account does not explain why it is not vicious for a woman to care more about her ability to provide for her child than for another mother's ability to care for her own child. The second account presupposes agent relativity and does so at the base level rather than a higher level. This is the wrong level since the relativity intuitively seems to occur at the level of attitudes rather than the base goods. The second account also denies a shared set of objective-list elements and it is unclear whether it is even coherent to have things (e.g., events) whose intrinsic goodness or badness differs from one person to another. The problem arises if one assumes that the intrinsic value of a thing depends on its intrinsic properties and that a thing's intrinsic properties do not vary between persons.

Hurka might have a few responses here. First, he might not want to accommodate agent-relative value – his theory must be revisionist of common sense to some extent. Second, it is not clear why he cannot accommodate the value at the level of base goods. Neither response is convincing. The revisionist claim will again work only if there is a strong reason to reject widespread and strongly held intuitions. It is not clear that this is the case and in any case Hurka does not argue for it. This is particularly true when it seems more plausible that there is relativizing factor with regard to the value of the attitudes. The second response commits his theory of full-blown moral relativism. Here the concern over the truth of relativism arises.¹¹ In particular, this response allows that the same good both has and does not have a specific intrinsic value (for example, +5) and this is impossible.

Externalism in Part Explains the Two Latter Problems for Hurka's Theory

Hurka's theory is an externalist account of virtue and this causes him trouble. According to an externalist account of virtue, a person's degree of virtue is in part a function of the relation between his attitudes and their external referents (i.e., things external to his mind). This is in contrast to an internalist account of virtue, whereby a person's degree of virtue is solely a function of the relation between his attitudes and other attitudes and mental states (i.e., things internal to his mind). Here I duck the issue of whether mental states such as beliefs and intentions are attitudes. The externalist account has the advantage of directly linking the value of an attitude to the value of objects in the world, thereby allowing for a straightforward account of what the direction (love or hate) and intensity it would be good for attitudes to have. However, it is precisely the external features that generate problems for Hurka in the context of attitudes toward nonexistent objects and goods to which the agent has a special relation. Because nonexistent objects are neither intrinsically good or bad, nor parts of intrinsically good or bad things, the externalist account cannot explain why these attitudes have value. Also, because the agent's special relation to certain goods (e.g., his son's happiness) does not affect the intrinsic value of that good, the externalist account cannot explain why virtue might allow greater intensity or attach greater weight for attitudes toward such goods. Yet both factors intuitively seem relevant to virtue and vice.

¹¹ The idea for this point comes from David Lyons, "Ethical Relativism and the Problem of Incoherence," *Ethics* 76 (1986): 107–121. Note that the move made by agent-relativism (e.g., an act is morally right if and only if the agent's beliefs permit it) isn't available since the focus is not on actions.

Furthermore, the externalist account cannot explain why certain attitudes are judged less bad when they reflect cognitive errors for which a person is not responsible. For example, someone who had believed in strict roles for peasants and lords during the low Middle Ages and had attitudes tracking these beliefs would not seem as vicious as someone today who had such attitudes. This is true even if both persons similarly loved equally evil referents. A similar thing is true of slave owners during the Roman Empire compared to those in the Nineteenth Century United States or mothers who gave their daughters in their early ages for marriage to other families in ancient China compared to those who do so today. This is because such attitudes reflect a belief system that is so embedded in ways of life that it would require a Herculean intellectual breakthrough for a person to recognize its falsity. Such earlier persons' degree of virtue might be discounted because of their lesser autonomy or integration compared to persons today, but this is a further internal factor and not an external one. They might have less autonomy because they have less intellectual tools, ideas, and opportunities by which to assess their belief system. They might have less integration because less autonomy leads to their holding more beliefs or attitudes that fail to cohere.

Hurka's theory cannot be converted into an internalist theory. The role of external base goods and evils in grounding all higher-level goods denies room for virtuous or vicious attitudes toward nonexistent objects. The role of base goods also prevents Hurka from having a coherent account of virtuous attitudes aimed at instrumental goods. Hurka's account also does not have room for an agent's relation to the good since this factor cannot be incorporated into the straightforward recursive function that lies at the heart of Hurka's theory. If he were to modify this function, then virtue and desert would no longer have the common structure that Hurka posits.

Conclusion

Thomas Hurka's theory of virtue has a recursive feature in which each higher level of intrinsic value depends on an attitude appropriately directed at a lower-level object of intrinsic value. There seem to be intrinsic goods that are not directed at lower-level goods and ones that are directed at objects that are not intrinsically valuable. The simple structure of Hurka's theory also does not seem to provide room for virtues and vices to be in part a function of the agent's relation to the good. In responding to these cases, Hurka must either reject the simple recursive structure that makes his account attractive or deny a number of plausible intuitions.¹² The two more significant problems for this theory are in part the result of its externalism.

¹² I am grateful to Neil Feit and Thad Metz for their extremely helpful comments and criticisms.