



CANDIDATE

1054612

TEST

**MOCK EXAM TT23 (AM) -
A12694W1 Ethics**

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Question	Question type
i	Information or resources
1	Essay
2	Essay
3	Essay

This paper contains twenty-three questions. Answer **THREE** questions.

The paper is split into two sections, Section A and Section B.

Candidates taking Philosophy paper 128 Practical Ethics (A15878W1), **must not** answer any question from Section B.

Candidates **not** taking 128 Practical Ethics may answer freely from both sections.

SECTION A

1. 'Hume's genealogy of morality is plausible, but it does not show that morality is binding.' Discuss.

2. **EITHER**

- (a) Can objections to Kant's account of moral worth be addressed adequately by distinguishing between ways in which a person might be motivated by duty?

OR

(b) 'How could exercising the freedom to choose...represent the *renunciation* of freedom? It could if this were analogous to the free choice of slavery. But how similar would [a] villain's choice be to the choice of slavery?' (DAVID WIGGINS)
Do Kantians have a good response to these questions?

3. 'Moral properties are just a highly unusual kind of natural property.' Do you agree?
4. 'Arguments for non-cognitivism rely on a distinction between beliefs and noncognitive attitudes, which any satisfactory solution to the Frege-Geach problem will undermine.' Is this a decisive objection to non-cognitivism?
5. 'There are no objective moral values, but we should nevertheless pretend that they exist.' Do you agree?
6. Is moral relativism a good explanation of the existence of widespread moral disagreement?
7. Can internalism about practical reasons makes sense of the critical dimension of claims about what reasons an agent has?
8. 'Far from being able to assess the relative value of options for an agent by their possible contribution to his well-being, we cannot judge their contribution to his

wellbeing except by reference to their value.' (JOSEPH RAZ) Is this the basis of a successful response to the amoralist?

9. Can rule-consequentialists specify a compliance level at which candidate rules are to be assessed without falling prey to decisive objections to their view?
10. 'When I reflect on the reason that the wrongness of an action seems to supply not to do it, the best description of this reason I can come up with has to do with the relation to others that such acts would put me in: the sense that others could reasonably object to what I do.' (T. M. SCANLON) How powerful an argument for contractualism is this?
11. Must virtue ethics be objectionably self-effacing?
12. 'For purposes of analysis moral philosophy should remain at the level of differences, taking the moral forms of life as given, and not try to get behind them to a single form.' (IRIS MURDOCH) Discuss.
13. 'Hedonism is merely an arbitrarily short version of the objective list theory of wellbeing, and moreover one that can't avail itself of a perfectionist rationale.' Is this a compelling reason to favour the objective list theory over hedonism?
14. Do egalitarians have any compelling answer to the Levelling Down Objection?
15. Is it possible to wrong someone without violating any of their moral rights?
16. 'Incompatibilists are fundamentally concerned about the fairness of holding people responsible, but the fairness of holding someone responsible has nothing to do with whether they were free in any strong sense.' Is this a good argument for compatibilism?
17. What, if anything, is wrong with being shameless?
18. What is blame? Would we be better off without it?
19. Can love be rational?

SECTION B

*Candidates taking paper 128 Practical Ethics **must not** answer any question from this section.*

20. Do animal rights stand in the way of our re-introducing predator species to ecosystems from which they have vanished in recent centuries?

21. 'If the Doctrine of Double Effect were true, I could make a terror bombing permissible just by finding someone nice to do it for me.' How compelling an objection to the Doctrine of Double Effect is this?

22. 'I would be terribly sorry to learn that a friend's foetus was very likely to be born with [chronic fatigue syndrome], but I would not urge her to abort it ... Many people with disabilities, while we understand quite well the personal burdens of disability, are not willing to make the judgment that lives like ours are not worth living.' (SUSAN WENDELL) Discuss.

23. Suppose that the parents in a very unhappy family have another child in the hope – unsupported by the evidence available to them – that this will motivate them to stay together. Is what they do wrong? Does it wrong the child?

[End of Questions]

1 Please type your first answer below. Please indicate which question you are answering.

'Hedonism is merely an arbitrarily short version of the objective list theory of wellbeing, and moreover one that can't avail itself of a perfectionist rationale.' Is this a compelling reason to favour the objective list theory over hedonism?

Hedonism appears to be no more than an arbitrarily short version of the objective list theory. Hedonism appears to be a version of the objective list theory which has only one item on the list, namely pleasure (and the absence of pain). So it seems that hedonism is vulnerable to any objection that can be brought against list theory more generally, and has no advantage here. But list theory can appeal to a perfectionist explanation of what makes the items on the list good, and hedonism it seems, cannot. I begin by presenting these arguments. The former argument seems plausible. The latter argument is not straightforwardly successful. I argue that the simple perfectionist response is unsatisfactory. I consider and reject the possibility that no satisfactory explanation is possible. I then consider and reject Brink's normative perfectionism as an explanation for the prudential goodness of perfectionist goods. I conclude that neither perfectionism nor hedonism can meet this demand, so perfectionist list theories have no advantage over hedonism in this regard.

According to hedonism, only pleasure (and the absence of pain) non-instrumentally makes a life go better for the person whose life it is. According to objective list theory, all and only the items on some objective list non-instrumentally make a life go better for the person whose life it is. Objective list theory as such is not committed to any particular list, and different versions of list theory in fact offer different lists. Then, because hedonism is simply one version of list theory, it is vulnerable to any objections against list theory in general and, additionally, is vulnerable to any specifically anti-hedonist objections (and there are many).

So, for example, the objection that list theory is objectionably paternalistic is also an objection against hedonism as an arbitrarily short version of list theory. According to list theory in general, a person can be mistaken about the things that are good for him. According to the hedonist version of list theory, this mistake consists in thinking that things that are not pleasant are (prudentially) good or that things that are pleasant are not so. So for example, according to list theory in general, the Grass Counter fails to see the prudential worthlessness of grass counting, and list theory invites if not licenses objectionable paternalistic intervention, i.e. compelling the Grass Counter to do something more (supposedly) worthwhile. Similarly, according to hedonism, an ascetic could go wrong in thinking that worldly pleasures of food and drink do not make his life go any better, and that his life goes best if he lives a life of religious devotion, empty of pleasure. Hedonism, it seems, would then license if not invite objectionable paternalistic intervention in the life of the ascetic, i.e. compelling the ascetic person to have some fun, or hooking the ascetic up to a pleasure machine. Admittedly, this objection is not particularly compelling, general list theoretic responses appear successful for both the "normal" list theorist and for the hedonist. The point here is that any objection that can be made against list theory in general can also be made against hedonism in particular, so hedonism seems (at least weakly) less defensible than list theory in general.

Perfectionism appears to offer some ground for the prudential goodness of plausible objective lists, but not the objective list consisting entirely in the single prudential good of pleasure. According to perfectionism, all and only those things that perfect human nature contribute non-instrumentally to a person's well-being, i.e. belong on the objective list. Traditionally, it is thought that such things as knowledge, achievement, and friendship perfect human nature. For example, part of human nature is rationality, which involves (to borrow from Aristotle) both theoretical and

practical rationality, and the capacity of theoretical reason is made more perfect by having knowledge (of important things), so knowledge will be a perfectionist good. Then, hedonism cannot appeal to a perfectionist rationale, because a perfectionist rationale would almost certainly bring along with it such non-hedonist goods. That perfectionist list theories can appeal to a perfectionist rationale is a virtue of such theories because we think that a plausible theory of well-being should not only have an account of which things are good (the extension of the prudential goods), but also an account of what makes such things good (an explanation of prudential goodness). Any account that failed or refused to explain this would be no more than an arbitrary or ad hoc assertion that certain things are good. Then, that perfectionist list theories can appeal to a perfectionist rationale seems to constitute an advantage for such theories over hedonism.

The perfectionist explanation of prudential goodness is unsatisfactory because when we demand an explanation of some thing's prudential goodness, we are not simply demanding some statement of necessary and sufficient conditions for goodness and an explanation of why such a thing is prudentially good. So, for example, we would not be satisfied by the hedonist response (if a similar demand were made against the hedonist) that pleasure is the only prudential good because all and only those things that have pleasantness are good. This invites the worry that no adequate explanation is possible. Suppose that the perfectionist, upon answering that such things as knowledge, achievement, and friendship are prudential goods because they perfect human nature is again asked "why are the things that perfect human nature prudentially good?" If the perfectionist responded "because the things that perfect human nature have property P and the things that have property P are prudentially good", it seems the perfectionist has failed to answer the question, because it would make sense to ask again "why are the things that have P good?". But then no such explanation would be adequate, so it seems that no adequate explanation is possible. After all, "ultimate ends do not admit of proof" and "all explanation ends somewhere", so the perfectionist (and the hedonist) could reject the demand for a further explanation. Then, that a perfectionist explanation of some goods' being so is available for perfectionist list theories is not a virtue for such theories over hedonism. The perfectionist explanation is inadequate and no adequate explanation is possible.

This fails to defuse the objection. When we ask for an explanation of the perfectionist goods being prudentially good, what we are looking for is some reason to think that the perfectionist goods are prudential goods, and such a demand can be met without offering an explanation with the above problematic structure. Brink's normative perfectionism, for example, appears to offer such an explanation. According to Brink's normative perfectionism, we humans are essentially rational agents, and it is as rational agents that we act in the world. So, our rational agency would not determine us to undermine itself and would determine us to cultivate itself. (Brink does not say this latter part, but I include it here for ease of exposition, it will not be particularly important because I conclude that Brink's normative perfectionism is not in the end successful, but it does show that the demand for an explanation is not unreasonable.) So our rational agency would determine us to, for example, seek out knowledge, because rationality involves theoretical reason, which is cultivated by pursuing knowledge. Similarly, our rational agency would determine us to seek our achievement, because rational agency is cultivated by its exercise and the exercise of practical reason involves pursuing practical ends that are worthwhile (striving to achieve). So we have authoritative reason to pursue such goods as knowledge and achievement. We cannot help but act as rational agents, and so acting means we have such reason. And we think that we have authoritative reason to pursue the prudential goods, i.e. that reasons for pursuing the prudential goods are inescapable, we always have them (even if they are sometimes silenced or outweighed). So (Brink's normative) perfectionist goods are in some sense fit for purpose. They share the characteristic that our reasons to pursue them are authoritative with prudential goods. This is some reason to think that the perfectionist goods are prudential goods. So an explanation of why the perfectionist criterion is the right criterion for prudential goodness is

not simply impossible, and more generally, the explanatory demand is not unreasonable. Neither the perfectionist nor the hedonist can reject the demand for an explanation, and it seems the perfectionist can offer an explanation while the hedonist cannot.

But Brink's normative perfectionism does not appear to justify the prudential goodness of all the items on a plausible objective list, so it is not helpful here. For example, it is not clear what reason there is to think that rational agency requires the pursuit of friendship. We necessarily act as rational agents (if we do act, including if we act by doing nothing), but it seems we do not necessarily act as social creatures, or as members of a community, or as members of the human race, because psychopaths exist. There seems to be nothing irrational with acting without regard for the value of friendship as such, even if so acting is incompatible with being social creatures. More generally, it is not clear that every prudential good is some requirement of rational agency. The concepts of prudential goodness and rationality seem too "far apart" for this. Prima facie, there is no reason to think it so, so even if the normative perfectionist can offer some plausible derivation of each intuitively plausible prudential good from rational agency, this would still be suspicious and ad hoc, an explanation of a general connection would be necessary. So the normative perfectionist strategy is not particularly compelling.

We should conclude that the possibility of appeal to a perfectionist rationale is no advantage for perfectionist list theories over hedonism. The simple perfectionist explanation is inadequate (as is the simple hedonist explanation) because this fails to explain the conceptual connection between perfecting human nature (pleasure) and prudential goodness. The more ambitious strategy of normative perfectionism makes an attempt to establish such a connection but is unsuccessful (or at least incomplete as it is, without significant shoring-up to establish that the argument generalises to all intuitively plausible prudential goods). That the perfectionist has gotten a little farther along than the hedonist is not particularly important here, the perfectionist has had a significant headstart, and there is no reason to think that a similar hedonist argument is not possible.

Words: 1763

Attaching sketches to this question?
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'When I reflect on the reason that the wrongness of an action seems to supply not to do it, the best description of this reason I can come up with has to do with the relation to others that such acts would put me in: the sense that others could reasonably object to what I do.' (T. M. SCANLON) How powerful an argument for contractualism is this?

Scanlon's argument is that contractualism's account of our motivation to avoid wrongdoing is uniquely accurate to the phenomenology of our being so motivated. I begin by presenting the contractualist account of right action and moral motivation, and the argument for its phenomenological accuracy. One immediate worry about this argument is that Scanlonian contractualism is accurate to the phenomenology of moral motivation in the borderline or problematic cases where "something goes wrong" and justification is called for. Morality more generally certainly does not seem like it involves going around thinking "I could not justify x, I could not justify y, so I must z". I consider and reject Scanlon's response to this difficulty. Wallace's response is more successful (and necessary for the contractualist) but can be co-opted by alternative theories. I conclude that Scanlonian contractualism is no more phenomenologically accurate than its rivals (Kantian deontology in particular).

Scanlon argues that contractualism offers an account of our motivation to avoid wrongdoing that is uniquely accurate to the phenomenology of being so motivated. According to Scanlonian contractualism, an act is wrong iff its performance under the circumstances would not be permitted by any set of principles for the general regulation of behaviour that could not reasonably be rejected as the basis for informed, unforced consent. In other words, an act is wrong if so acting under the given circumstances could not be justified to some person on the basis of some principles because that person could reasonably reject those principles for the general regulation of behaviour (which is what we think moral principles do). So, by contractualist lights, to act wrongly is to act unjustifiably (in a way that would not be permitted by principles that could not be reasonably rejected), and whatever reason we have for not acting wrongly is reason for not acting so unjustifiably. According to Scanlon, to act justifiably is to stand in relationships of mutual recognition to others, i.e. to recognise that other persons are persons to whom justification of our action is owed, and these are the appropriate sorts of relationships between persons. Then, because we have reason to stand in such relationships, we have reason to act justifiably, hence we have reason to avoid wrongdoing. This seems accurate to the phenomenology of being motivated to avoid wrongdoing. When we are motivated to avoid wrongdoing, we think, for example "I would not be able to face him if I did that". Being moved to avoid wrongdoing feels like being moved to avoid acting in a way that would undermine or betray the sorts of relationships we should have to other persons. The contractualist account of our motivation to avoid wrongdoing seems uniquely phenomenologically accurate because it closely associates wrongness with justifiability and the appropriate relationships between persons. In contrast, for example, the consequentialist would say that our reasons for avoiding wrongdoing is that wrongdoing yields bad consequences, but when we are moved to avoid wrongdoing it does not feel like what we are moved by is simply a desire to avoid bad consequences. This seems to constitute an advantage of contractualism over its rivals.

One immediate worry about Scanlon's phenomenological argument is that it mistakes the phenomenology of the problematic or borderline cases of wrong action with the phenomenology of the business of morality more generally. When we are moved to act rightly, we are not moved by the thought that "if I act otherwise, I would not be able to face my friends, and I would not be able to justify myself to this person", instead we are moved by the far simpler thought that "this is what I must do" or "of course I will help him!" The business of justifiability seems to be proper to a

domain far narrower than the domain of interpersonal morality in general. It is when we are confronted with difficult cases, when our moral reasons conflict with other reasons, or more generally when we are tempted to do wrong that thoughts about justifiability occur to us. For example, when one is tempted to break a promise to a friend for some potentially large prudential gain, we think "but I would not be able to face my friend if I broke this promise". But more generally, where there is no such temptation, this thought hardly occurs to us at all, being moved to act rightly feels natural, almost thoughtless, and certainly without consideration of justifiability and betrayal of the relationships to others that we ought to stand in. So it seems Scanlon has mistaken the narrow phenomenology of motivation to avoid wrongdoing in problematic or borderline cases for the broader phenomenology of motivation to avoid wrongdoing in ordinary cases. Perhaps some sort of deontology would be more true to this phenomenology. When we are straightforwardly moved in unproblematic cases, we are so straightforwardly moved because the relevant deontic principle and its application are obvious. In more problematic cases, this is less obvious, and we have to try to understand the relevant principles by thinking about the "kingdom of ends", which in some sense also posits an ideal sort of relationship between persons. Whether or not this Kantian account is particularly plausible, the point is that Scanlonian contractualism seems no more accurate to the broader phenomenology.

Scanlon would account for our being so directly moved in unproblematic and obvious cases by saying that the contractualist ideal of justifiability supplies "higher-order" reason for us to structure our moral deliberations in certain ways, including treating some considerations as sufficient or exclusionary reasons, and treating other considerations as irrelevant or silenced. For example, suppose a person could save a child drowning in a shallow pond at the cost of damaging his new expensive shoes. We think that such a person could not justify to others his affording the consideration "I really like these shoes and they're brand new!" any weight in his deliberation, or to fail to be simply moved by the consideration "that child is drowning and I can save him!" So, by contractualist lights, the agent has moral reason to treat the former consideration as silenced or irrelevant and the latter as sufficient or exclusionary. Similarly, to be moved by thoughts about justifiability would be to have "one thought too many" in such a case, by contractualist lights. More generally, in such cases where what is right is obvious, Scanlon would say that it does not feel like we are moved by thoughts about justifiability because we in fact are not, but the reason that we are not so moved is not because contractualism offers a false or inaccurate account of moral motivation, but because we are acting as contractualism requires. So contractualists can account for our being directly moved, without referring to any thoughts about justifiability or the right sorts of relations between persons. Then, it is accurate to both to the narrow and the broad phenomenology.

The contractualist account of being directly moved by "first-order" considerations like "that child is drowning and I can save him!" is unsatisfactory because it suggests that our moral deliberation and motivation, by contractualist lights, are a sort of false consciousness. By contractualist lights, as explained above, our reason for acting rightly is that right action is justifiable, and to act justifiability is constitutive of standing in relationships of mutual recognition between persons, and such relationships are the appropriate relationships between persons. But on the account of moral motivation in "obvious" or "unproblematic" cases given above, we treat such thoughts as "that child is drowning and I can save him!" as either itself a moral reason or supplying a moral reason to save the child. So contractualism is committed to a sort of false consciousness under which our moral reason for saving the child is that this (and only this) is justifiable and constitutive of a relationship of the appropriate sort between persons, but the reason we take ourselves to be acting under is the first-order reason to do with the child's needing saving. This sort of false consciousness is at least odd, and it suggests a not obviously plausible split in a person's rational agency. One part has and responds to the true reason for acting rightly, namely that acting otherwise would not be justifiable. Another part is acted on by the former, and made to treat the

child's needing saving as a reason. This is an internal bifurcation of rational agency analogous to the aristocratic bifurcation of society into an aristocratic informed elite and an uninformed mass that the elite manipulate. It is not clear that such an internal bifurcation is metaphysically or psychologically possible.

A more attractive contractualist response accounts for moral deliberation and motivation in the "obvious" and "unproblematic" cases not as having some reasons obscured from one's consciousness, but as simply proceeding very quickly over trivial steps. So, for example, the agent in the drowning child case does not stop to think about whether not saving the child is justifiable because it obviously is not. There is nothing problematic about this sort of motivation and deliberation, it is in fact perfectly ordinary. When we exercise theoretical reason in solving a math problem, for example, we do not stop to think about the particular steps of long division involved in solving 12 divided by 3, and simply give the answer 4. Similarly, when we exercise practical reason in a prudential context, we do not make explicit the thought "and losing my arm would be bad for me" when considering whether we "prudentially" should dip an arm into a tank of piranhas. Our thoughts here are more like "I remember that piranhas don't attack if they don't smell blood, and I have no open wounds" or "I would be able to pull my arm out quickly enough if I sense danger". So the contractualist is not committed to thinking that the business of morality more broadly has a justifiability-phenomenology.

But this contractualist strategy can be co-opted by any competing theory. In fact the sketch of the Kantian account of our reasons to act rightly given above adopts exactly this strategy. The sophisticated consequentialist in fact does say that we are moved so directly because certain things obviously have bad consequences, so we need not linger on such considerations.

So what remains? Contractualism remains accurate to the phenomenology of motivation to avoid wrongdoing, but in order to avoid phenomenological inaccuracy in its account of the business of morality more generally (when things do not go wrong, and justification is not called for), the contractualist must argue that we sometimes skip steps in our moral deliberation. But this strategy can be co-opted, in particular by the Kantian deontologist, who will say that we do in fact skip steps, and when things go wrong, what is called for is not thinking about justifiability or our relations to others, but the sorts of deontic principles necessitated by the ideal of the kingdom of ends. So any phenomenological advantage that contractualism has (at least over Kantian deontology) consists in the difference between their two organising ideals, namely relationships of mutual recognition, and the kingdom of ends. But the differences between the two are philosophically intricate, both specify a sort of ideal relationship between persons, and whatever clue we get from how the business of morality feels to us, it certainly will not be so precise as to discriminate between this. We conclude then, that contractualism is not uniquely phenomenologically accurate.

Words: 1969

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- 3 Please type your **third** answer below. Please indicate **which question** you are answering.

Must virtue ethics be objectionably self-effacing?

Virtue ethics appears committed to self-effacingness because, it seems committed to thinking that our reason for acting rightly is that so acting is constitutive of or necessary to our being virtuous, and we have reason to be virtuous, but being acting from such motivations as "I want to be a kind person" and "I want to be a just person" is hardly virtuous action, and we should act virtuously, so we should act without being moved by what, according to virtue ethics, is our true reason for acting rightly. This sort of self-effacingness is objectionable because it suggests a bifurcation of rational agency that seems metaphysically if not psychologically impossible. This is not a problem for the virtue ethicist, who will maintain that being simultaneously moved by "I want to be a kind person" and such first-order considerations as "he needs help" is not incompatible with the demands of virtue ethics. This appears to be incompatible because the objector treats the virtues as some particular "thin" way of being, and evidently a desire simply to be some particular way is not a virtuous reason for acting rightly. But the virtues are "thick" modes of moral responsiveness, and a desire to be virtuous in this sense is clearly compatible with the demands of virtue. The virtue ethical response does not reject "I want to be a kind person" as a reason for acting rightly, so it seems to leave virtue ethics open to the charge of egoism. This objection is unsuccessful because any plausible moral theory will be "egoistic" in the same sense, and this sort of egoism is unproblematic. I conclude that virtue ethics can respond to the self-effacingness objection.

Virtue ethics treats the virtues as primitive in ethics. In contrast, deontology treats deontic principles as primitive and consequentialism treats consequences and the value realised in them as primitive. Then, according to virtue ethics, we have moral reason to be kind, just, courageous, and so on, and whatever reason we have to act morally derives from our reasons to be virtuous. For example, we have reason to help a person in need because so helping is necessary for and/or constitutive of being a kind person, and we have moral reason to be kind persons. But to perform a kind act motivated by the thought "I want to be a kind person" rather than, for example, "he needs help" seems to be acting quite selfishly rather than kindly. So if virtue ethics requires that we act kindly, it will require that we are moved by the latter sort of consideration and not by the former sort. Then, virtue ethics will require that we blind ourselves to what, by virtue ethical lights, is our true reason for acting kindly.

This sort of self-effacingness is objectionable because it suggests a bifurcation of rational agency whose metaphysical and psychological possibility is at best dubious. In the virtuous agent, acting virtuously, moved only by such considerations as "he needs help" and not by such considerations as "I want to be a kind person", rational agency is bifurcated into two parts. The first part has the reason supplied by virtue ethics to help the person in need. This is the reason that one has to be kind (which different versions of virtue ethics variously fill in, for example, according to eudaimonist virtue ethics, our reason to be kind is that kindness is a virtue and to be virtuous is to flourish, and we have reason to pursue our flourishing). In the second part of this agent's rational agency, this agent treats "he needs help" as a reason, and the reason "I want to be a kind person so I should help him" is blotted out by the first part. This is a picture of an "aristocratic informed elite, and blissfully ignorant hoi polloi" within a single person. The rational agency is bifurcated into two parts, of which one has the "true" reason for acting rightly and manipulates the second into not having this reason but having another. It is not clear that this sort of split within a person is metaphysically or psychologically possible. So if this sort of split is required, by virtue ethical lights, for right action, virtue ethics requires the impossible, and is objectionably self-effacing.

The virtue ethicist will reject that virtue ethics is self-effacing in this way by maintaining that acting with such thoughts as "I want to be a kind person" alongside such thoughts as "he needs help" is compatible with acting kindly. To want to be kind is to want to be moved by and respond to the needs and well-being of others, so to be moved by a desire to be kind is not inconsistent with the demands of virtue ethics. To want to be kind is not simply to want to have a certain disposition to do kind acts. Such a disposition would be better described as a habit, an inclination, or even a behavioural tick, but not as a virtue. The virtues are rich modes of responsiveness that include sensitivity to reasons and things such as need, well-being, and desert. Then, to be moved by the thought "I want to be kind" is to be moved by a desire to be appropriately responsive to the needs and well-being of others, and there is nothing unkind about being so moved. Similarly, to be moved by the thought "I want to be just" is to be moved by the thought "I want to be appropriately responsive to what other people deserve", and there is nothing unjust about being so moved. In fact, it seems that to be kind and/or just requires that one be so moved. To be kind requires that one be moved to respond to the needs and well-being of others. More generally, being moved to be virtuous is compatible with acting virtuously. Phrased this way it is obvious that the objection from self-effacingness is mistaken, and this mistake consists in having too "thin" an understanding of virtue as just some particular odd ways for a person to be. But the virtues are "thick" moral concepts, so a desire to be virtuous is far from incompatible with morality, virtue, and acting virtuously.

One worry about the above virtue ethical response is that, on this account, virtue ethics is objectionably egoistic, because our reason for doing right is then ultimately self-regarding. The virtue ethicist has maintained that our reason for acting rightly is that so acting is necessary if not constitutive of virtue and we have reason to be virtuous, and "doubled-down" by maintaining that we should in fact be conscious of this reason for so acting. But this reason is still self-regarding, it is concerned with our being appropriately responsive in some ways. But we think that our reasons for acting rightly (in interpersonal morality at least) are reasons for other-regarding. And we think that our reasons for acting rightly are other-regarding "all the way down". For example, it is not sufficient that one is moved by the thought "he needs help" if one's reason for being so moved is that one will be punished by the law if one fails to be so moved. This reason for being moral is ultimately still self-regarding, and seems to be the wrong type of reason for acting morally, or for being moved by first-order moral considerations. The virtue ethicist correctly found it necessary to maintain that being moved by "he needs help" is necessary for right action, but could not be forced to abandon that being moved by "I want to be kind" is incompatible with right action, the objection from egoism might succeed here. If it succeeds, then virtue ethics cannot be right, because virtue ethics necessarily derives our reason for acting rightly from our reason for being virtuous, and whatever reason we have to be virtuous must be a self-regarding one.

The demand that our reasons for doing right are "ultimately" other-regarding or other-regarding "all the way down" is unreasonable and impossible to satisfy, so virtue ethics is not objectionably egoistic and need not abandon that one of our reason for acting rightly is that this is necessary for and/or constitutive of being virtuous. Suppose that some "sequence" of entirely other-regarding reasons for acting rightly were available. For example, suppose that some theorist says that we have reason to help others because we should respond to the needs of others, and we have reason to respond to the needs of others because the satisfaction of the needs of others is an important source of value in their lives, and so on. Even then, it makes sense to ask what reason we have to care about any of these things, and what reasons we have to care about other-regarding reasons in general. This demand will not be met by yet another other-regarding reason, because when we make this demand we are skeptical that other-regarding reasons apply to us or are reasons for us. So any explanation of our reasons for acting rightly must at some point be self-regarding, it must tell us why the sorts of beings that we are have reason to care about other-regarding reasons. That we have reason to be virtuous is exactly this sort of reason, it is a reason

to care about the needs, well-being, desert, etc. of others. We have reason to care about such things because we are beings that have reason to be virtuous, for whom the standards of virtue are appropriate. We find a similar vein in other ethical theories. A Kantian deontologist, for example, thinks that our reasons for acting rightly derive from our being rational agents. A Scanlonian contractualist thinks that our reasons for acting rightly derive from our being persons for whom relationships of mutual recognition to others are appropriate. So the virtue ethicist response to the self-effacingness objection does not leave virtue ethics open to the objection that it is objectionably egoistic.

Virtue ethics escapes the charge of self-effacingness because it understands the virtues as "thick" modes of moral responsiveness, not simply as some particular "thin" dispositions, or habits, or ticks. Being moved to be virtuous is to be moved to be appropriately responsive, and there is nothing about this that is incompatible with virtue, in fact, being so moved is a requirement of virtue. This appeared at first to leave virtue ethics open to the charge of egoism, but that objection fails because the demand that an ethical theory be other-regarding "all the way down" is impossible and unreasonable. Any such theory fails to explain why we have reason to act rightly because it fails to explain why we should care about other-regarding reasons. Virtue ethics is more sophisticated than its opponents give it credit for, and so escapes such superficial objections.

Words: 1804

Attaching sketches to this question?
Use the following code:

6 3 7 6 8 9 3