



Why Virtuous Activity Doesn't Constitute Flourishing

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Many contemporary philosophers identify ethical eudaimonism as a species of virtue ethics, one that relates the virtues in some important way to the concept of eudaimonia, or human flourishing. Richard Parry, for example, defines eudaimonism as “a position that links happiness and virtue” and therefore concludes of the ancient Skeptics that “since they say so little about virtue, they could not be called eudaimonists.”¹ I argue against such a view on two grounds: first, because there are forms of ethical eudaimonism which are not virtue-ethical and, second, because virtue-ethical versions are actually comparatively bad versions of ethical eudaimonism. The primary concern of this paper is to establish this second point by objecting to virtue-ethical eudaimonism.

In its most paradigmatic form, virtue eudaimonism (for short) is an ethical theory which tells us to cultivate and exercise certain virtues in order to flourish, because this virtuous activity just constitutes human flourishing and flourishing is the ultimate goal of worthwhile action. Ancient and modern advocates typically agree that the relevant particular virtues include some canonical character (i.e., ethical) virtues like justice, courage, generosity, and moderation (temperance), though they may disagree about others. As I will explain below, the main problem for the view that flourishing consists in the exercise of such character virtues is that the moral and prudential activities which paradigmatically exhibit these virtues are not ends in themselves but serve further ends, which runs counter to the eudaimonist view of flourishing as the ultimate end of action.

Most modern virtue eudaimonists run afoul of this problem, but it is noteworthy that Aristotle does not. Though little remarked upon by modern virtue ethicists, who often place themselves in his shadow, Aristotle considered flourishing most of all to consist in the exercise of intellectual virtue in philosophical contemplation. The objection, in brief, to this intellectualist view is that, while intellectual activity is a better candidate than character-virtuous activity to be the ultimate end of action, the ethical theory which results will necessarily be either repugnantly elitist and hierarchical, treating most people as the rightful servants of the intellectual few, or woefully incomplete, failing to give prescriptions or advice to most people.

To make these objections stick, it will first be necessary to explain what ethical eudaimonism is in abstraction from its common virtue-ethical gloss. This will include explaining the functional role of flourishing in a eudaimonist ethical theory as the ultimate end of action. This is the subject of Section I. To further motivate divorcing eudaimonism from virtue ethics in our minds, in Section II, I briefly describe (without fully defending) my preferred version of eudaimonism,

¹ Richard Parry, “Ancient Ethical Theory,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/ethics-ancient/>. His full definition: “By eudaimonism, we will mean one of several theses: (a) virtue, together with its active exercise, is identical with happiness; (b) virtue, together with its activities, is the most important and dominant constituent of happiness; (c) virtue is the only means to happiness.”

which I'll call "values eudaimonism." The objections to virtue eudaimonism which follow will have more force when we have in mind a more viable eudaimonist alternative with which to compare. It will also help to avoid the suggestion that the problems lie with eudaimonism tout court and not just virtue eudaimonism.

In Section III, I describe the most paradigmatic version of virtue eudaimonism, which identifies flourishing with the exercise of character virtue, and develop the objection to character virtue eudaimonism just mentioned. I also consider responses on behalf of character virtue eudaimonism and reply to these in turn. In Section IV, I describe the underrepresented but thoroughly Aristotelian version of virtue eudaimonism which identifies flourishing primarily with the exercise of intellectual virtue, noting just how far we might plausibly extend our idea of what counts as intellectual activity. I develop the aforementioned objection to intellectual virtue eudaimonism, and I raise and reply to possible responses. Section V concludes by considering whether and how virtue eudaimonism, including the full Aristotelian picture, can be saved. I argue that it can only be made plausible by expanding the relevant categories of virtue to include, for example, social, creative, and athletic virtues. In that case, however, the view quickly approaches values eudaimonism, which might be just as attractive without appealing to virtue at all.

I. Ethical Eudaimonism

I said the first reason to distinguish ethical eudaimonism from virtue ethics is that there are forms of eudaimonism which are not virtue-ethical. We can substantiate this claim before carefully defining eudaimonism, and this will help to motivate the definition to follow. At first glance, the feature of an ethical theory that most marks it as eudaimonist appears to be its organization around the concept of eudaimonia. But the virtue conception of eudaimonia, which identifies flourishing with having or exercising virtue, has never been the only available substantive conception of the concept of eudaimonia.² If it were, ancient authors from Plato and Aristotle to the Stoics would not have felt so compelled to argue for its correctness. These authors considered lives of pleasure, honor, power, or wealth to be serious enough contenders for the title of the best human life to warrant philosophical refutation. Some philosophers today might still hold that flourishing consists in experiencing pleasure or in satisfying some relevant class of one's (possible) desires, or that the best life one can lead is the one which maximally realizes such a good.³ And nothing prevents an ethical theory from being organized around any such virtue-less

² The general distinction between concepts and conceptions is hopefully familiar from other philosophical applications of it, e.g., in John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1971), 9. A concept (e.g., JUSTICE, FLOURISHING) picks out or occupies a certain functional role in our thought or in a philosophical theory, while a conception is an interpretation or a specification of what plays that role (e.g. justice as fairness, flourishing as virtuous activity). Those in disagreement about a concept are taken to share the same concept but have different conceptions of it. For the use of the distinction in the context of virtue and eudaimonism, see Anne Baril, "Eudaimonia in contemporary virtue ethics," in Stan van Hooft (ed.), *The Handbook of Virtue Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2014), 17-27.

³ Hedonism and desire-satisfactionism are, at any rate, defended as theories of welfare or well-being: see, e.g., Alex Gregory, "Hedonism," and Chris Heathwood, "Desire-Fulfillment Theory," in Guy Fletcher (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Well-Being* (London: Routledge, 2016). And "well-being" and "flourishing" are sometimes taken to be synonymous, e.g., in Daniel Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness: The Elusive Psychology of Well-Being* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), 29. The relationship between *eudaimonia*/flourishing and welfare/well-being, and their respective literatures, is complicated, to say the least. For some discussion and further citations, see Baril, "Eudaimonia in contemporary virtue ethics," 2014.

conception of eudaimonia. Nor need such an ethical theory invoke virtues in the deontic, action-guiding part of the theory; it could focus instead on rules conducive to flourishing or on the consequences, in terms of flourishing, of individual actions.

Nevertheless, it is easy to see how the strong association between eudaimonism and virtue ethics has arisen. Though he was not the first to investigate either eudaimonia or virtue, Aristotle's admirably systematic treatment of each in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE) has made this the canonical founding text for both ethical eudaimonism and virtue ethics in the Western tradition. When G. E. M. Anscombe sparked the modern revival of virtue ethics, she called to abandon the modern ethics of obligation in favor of an ancient-inspired investigation into both virtue and human flourishing.⁴ Since then, much of contemporary virtue ethics (though not all) has been explicitly formulated in terms of human flourishing.⁵ The result, in the words of Anne Baril, is that "[e]udaimonia and virtue ethics are interwoven, many extant virtue-ethical theories being eudaimonist, and many (perhaps most) extant eudaimonist theories being virtue-ethical."⁶ Baril herself is careful to distinguish the two, but it is easy to see why someone might consider them equivalent, given the present state of the field.

But if eudaimonism and virtue ethics are not equivalent, what is ethical eudaimonism?⁷ To answer this question, we may look to Aristotle's model in NE Book I. Here Aristotle sets down eudaimonia as the highest human good and the ultimate end or aim of human action.⁸ The version of this claim that matters for the purposes of ethical theory is not the psychological claim that everyone in fact always, implicitly or explicitly, aims at flourishing no matter what they're doing (though Aristotle might have accepted this). It is instead a normative claim about the ethical justification of action. What it means for flourishing to be the ultimate end of action is that it is the final reason or purpose for which actions are ethically recommended, required, or justified, if they are.⁹

An ultimate end, in the normative sense, is the last good answer to a sequence of justificatory "why?" questions. Why should someone work a job, even if they don't like it? Perhaps, to earn money. Why should they earn money? Among other things, to purchase necessities. Why should they want necessities? To stay alive and fit. Fit to do what? We think such justifications must stop somewhere, and that the justificatory force of any one answer in the sequence depends upon the justificatory force of the answer(s) which follow it, if any. That is, if earning money justifies

⁴ G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," reprinted in Roger Crisp & Michael Slote (eds.), *Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 26-44.

⁵ E.g., Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: OUP, 1993); Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: OUP, 1999); Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: OUP, 2001).

⁶ Baril, "Eudaimonia in contemporary virtue ethics," 17.

⁷ There is, of course, also debate over what virtue ethics is. (For some discussion, see Roger Crisp, "Modern Moral Philosophy and the Virtues," in *How Should One Live? Essays on the Virtues* (Oxford: OUP, 1996), 5-8.) For present purposes it will suffice to say that an ethical theory is virtue-ethical only if it centrally invokes or recommends virtue or virtuous activity (whatever else might be necessary). My contention is that there are forms of eudaimonism which do not (centrally) invoke virtue.

⁸ NE I.7-8 1097b20-21; I.13 1102a14-16. All citations of Greek texts are to the Oxford Classical Texts editions and all paraphrases and translations are my own.

⁹ Under the heading of "ethically recommended," I mean to include, at least, the recommendations of prudence, morality, and political theory—a stipulated use of the term "ethical," but one in keeping with Aristotle's own. I qualify the recommendation as specifically ethical because I wish to leave open that there are other normative domains (e.g. aesthetic) which make different recommendations on different grounds, and I do not wish to commit to the view that ethical recommendations trump all other normative recommendations in the determination of an "all-things-considered" normative recommendation (if there is such a thing).

working a job one hates, it is either because earning money is justified in turn by some other end or because earning money is an ultimate end (i.e., an end in itself).

A eudaimonist ethical theory places human flourishing in the theoretical role of the sole, ultimate end of human action in this ethically justificatory or commendatory sense. All actions that are ethically recommended are so ultimately because of their contribution to realizing human flourishing, whether by constituting it, causing it, or making it possible or probable.¹⁰ That is, an action's contributing to human flourishing in some way is always the last good answer to justificatory "why?" questions for the purposes of ethical recommendation. Equivalently, we could say that an ethical theory is eudaimonist if and only if, and because, it fundamentally recommends actions which contribute to realizing flourishing. This recommendation is meant to be fundamental in the sense that all other, more particular or more concrete recommendations are derivable from, or conditional on, this one.¹¹ The virtue-ethical eudaimonist recommends virtuous actions because these supposedly constitute flourishing; another kind of eudaimonist, considering flourishing realized in some other way, might make different lower-level recommendations altogether but offers the same kind of justification for them.

This definition of eudaimonism provides at least one way of evaluating eudaimonist ethical theories: whatever is taken to constitute flourishing must plausibly be an ultimate end, not requiring further justification. This is not to say that the constituents of flourishing cannot also be instrumental to other things: almost anything can be instrumental to something. But constituents of flourishing should not rely on their further effects for their justification. What, then, makes something plausible as an ultimate justificatory end of action? As a heuristic, at least, an ultimate end should be something it makes sense to pursue or aim at for its own sake. Pain would be a funny thing to seek out for its own sake, and money is famously only worth pursuing for what you can do with it, so neither is a good candidate to be an ultimate end.

Furthermore, for an ultimate end plausibly to constitute flourishing, it should make sense not just to realize that end when given an easy opportunity, but also to seek and create opportunities to realize it. That is, it should make sense to organize one's life, including its more laborious activities like earning money and keeping healthy, around and towards that ultimate end. After all, an ethical theory is supposed to give us broad practical guidance about how to live and act, how to acquire and dispose of free time and resources, and all such commendatory guidance, by hypothesis, must bottom out in ultimate justificatory ends. To apply this heuristic, while it may be worthwhile, in some sense, to watch reality TV even when it serves no further end, I take it that this is not a plausible candidate to constitute flourishing, since (without saying more about the context or way in which a particular individual pursued this activity) it does not make sense to organize one's whole life around watching reality TV.

I'll offer one more example of how to apply the criterion of plausibility as an ultimate end, since it will be relevant to what follows. What's a more plausible ultimate end, simply having virtue or

¹⁰ It needn't be that all actions which are not ethically justified or recommended are thereby bad or impermissible. I might let out a shout of joy because the feeling overtakes me. This action might serve no further purpose, least of all the purpose of realizing human flourishing. This does not mean that the shout would be ethically bad, wrong, or impermissible; it just isn't ethically recommended. Many actions might be ethically neutral in just the same way. I take it that ethical proscription can be defined as the dual of ethical recommendation: an action is ethically bad or wrong when refraining from the action is ethically justified or recommended (and doing the action is not).

¹¹ Compare Baril: "Recommendations to ϕ are made *on the condition* that ϕ -ing is (alternatively) conducive to, or at least compatible with, the realization of eudaimonia" ("Eudaimonia in contemporary virtue ethics," 25, original emphasis). Another (perhaps) equivalent formulation of the same point: all the normative reasons relevant to specifically ethical deliberation are eudaimonistic reasons, i.e. reasons having to do with flourishing.

exercising it, i.e. acting virtuously? Aristotle argues in favor of the latter. Someone could have virtue while asleep or otherwise incapacitated, in which case they seem not to benefit from it.¹² The benefit of a dispositional state like virtue seems to come from its exercise.¹³ Aristotle's answer here strikes me as quite right. What's the point of developing a certain kind of character trait if one never has a chance to act on it? Why should I develop courage if I will never face risk or danger? If we should develop virtues for the sake of exercising them, then virtuous activity is more plausibly an ultimate end than simply having virtue, and therefore virtuous activity is a better candidate constituent of flourishing. I will assume this in what follows. Thus, I will only object explicitly to the proposal that flourishing consists in virtuous activity and not simply having virtue. I do not think a retreat from activity to a state of virtue will help the virtue eudaimonist overcome my objections.

II. Values Eudaimonism

Before arguing against virtue-ethical forms of eudaimonism, however, it will be useful to explain my proposed alternative as a foil. If my values conception of flourishing avoids the difficulties encountered by virtue conceptions, then that will be evidence that virtue eudaimonism, but not eudaimonism itself, is flawed. That may also count as some evidence in favor of the values conception of flourishing, though I will not offer a full defense of that here. For now, I merely explain the values conception with an eye to showing the virtue conception implausible by comparison.

On the values conception, a human being flourishes by successfully engaging in activities which are objectively valuable and which that person subjectively values.¹⁴ That flourishing consists in activity, not passive states, is a point of agreement between myself and what I've (following Aristotle) just argued is the superior interpretation of the virtue conception. This is to deny that we flourish by being in states like experiencing pleasure, having knowledge, or having our goals accomplished—states which could, in theory, be realized for us by others. Rather, we flourish by doing things ourselves: perhaps, pursuing pleasure by making and eating good food, acquiring knowledge by studying or researching, or accomplishing our own goals. The activities which contribute to flourishing, however, must be objectively valuable activities. By “objectively valuable,” I mean only that these activities should be appropriate objects of subjective valuing. The question of what makes an activity appropriate to value or worth valuing—e.g., whether it must bear agent-neutral value,¹⁵ or whether it need only be suitable to the agent in question in light of their capacities and other subjective values¹⁶—is too big an issue to take up here, and so I'll remain neutral. I'll also remain agnostic about general patterns of shared features which might explain why valuable activities are valuable, such as that they are all

¹² *NE* I.8 1098b30-1099a7.

¹³ This is suggested by a more general Aristotelian principle “that actuality [activity] is both better and more valuable than the good potentiality [capacity]” (*Metaphysics* Θ(IX).9 1051a4-5).

¹⁴ Cp. Susan Wolf on meaning in life: “meaning arises from loving objects worthy of love and engaging with them in a positive way” (*Meaning in Life and Why It Matters* (Princeton: Princeton, 2010), 8). Wolf does not intend to use the concept of meaningfulness in the same way that the eudaimonist intends to use flourishing—that is, as the sole ultimate justificatory end of action. She thinks moral considerations and recommendations, for example, come quite apart from those bearing on meaningfulness. But our conceptions of the two concepts overlap significantly.

¹⁵ Cp. Stephen Darwall, *Welfare and Rational Care* (Princeton: Princeton, 2002).

¹⁶ Cp. Valerie Tiberius, *Well-Being as Value Fulfillment: How We Can Help Each Other to Live Well* (Oxford: OUP, 2018).

perfections or exercises of distinctly human capacities.¹⁷ Here I'll only rely on plausible, paradigmatic examples of objectively valuable activities, such as engaging in loving relationships, raising children, participating in cultural practices, pursuing stimulating or socially useful careers, engaging in academic research, creating or enjoying arts or crafts, and athletic or otherwise skill-based training and competition, to name a few. Plausible examples of activities which are not valuable include watching paint dry and selling drugs to schoolchildren. It is still not enough for us to flourish that we simply engage in valuable activities. If doing philosophy left me cold, if I had no stake or interest in the activity or its products, though it still might be worth doing in some sense, it wouldn't contribute to my flourishing. The same could be said for a mother who, but for pervasive social pressures, would never have chosen to have children and who takes no satisfaction in it. If parenting were never more than a burden imposed on her, it wouldn't be part of her flourishing. It is crucial to flourishing that we also subjectively value the valuable activities we engage in, that we love them or care about them deeply. Here, again, I wish to remain officially agnostic about the best precise account of subjective valuing. But Jason Raibley offers one representative account of what I mean. He writes that valuing is constituted by a "stable and noninstrumental pro-attitude, such as desiring, enjoying, liking, loving, caring, or esteeming" with which the agent stably identifies. "To stably identify with the pro-attitude, the agent must be disposed to take it to be representative of who they are and who they want to be. In addition, the pro-attitude must inform or structure their emotional responses and practical deliberations."¹⁸

One necessary condition yet remains. One's valued, valuable activities would not contribute to one's flourishing if they met only with failure: e.g., if a parent's children did not thrive, if a businessperson's ventures all went bankrupt, if an academic failed to discover anything interesting and failed to educate their students. To flourish, we must find some manner of success in our valued, valuable activities.¹⁹ But note that the standards for success may be quite variable, depending on the activity in question and a person's particular interest in it. Success need not be competitive or positional. One way to succeed in sports or music is to win high-profile competitions, but another way is simply to compete or play for one's own entertainment or for the honing of one's own skills, if that is what one cares for.²⁰

The values conception of flourishing I endorse holds that we live well when we meet these four necessary conditions: (1) we engage in activities which (2) we subjectively value and which (3) are objectively valuable, and (4) our engagement is, in some relevant respect, successful. Note that there is no essential reference here to virtue, even though certain valuable activities (e.g., working for a disaster relief organization) might also be exercises of virtues (e.g., charity or beneficence). We will return below, in Section V, to whether all valuable activities can be seen as the expression of some kind of virtue. Even if certain valuable activities are also virtuous activities, however, what matters to flourishing, according to the values conception, is that you

¹⁷ Cp. Tom Hurka, *Perfectionism* (Oxford: OUP, 1993).

¹⁸ Jason Raibley, "Values, Agency, and Welfare," *Philosophical Topics* 41, no. 1 (2013): 187-214 (quoted text from p. 191).

¹⁹ This is in line with Aristotle's insistence that *eudaimonia* is not entirely up to us, but requires external goods that depend on fortune, such as wealth, health, and the prosperity of one's friends and descendants (*NE* I.8-11 1099a31-1101b9).

²⁰ This is not to say it is totally up to an individual to determine what counts as success in their activities; there may be limits of plausibility imposed by the nature of the activity or by social expectations. I can't decide that I succeed in playing football simply by watching my favorite team every Sunday. For discussion of standards of success in a similar context, see Tiberius, *Well-Being as Value Fulfillment*.

succeed in doing things you correctly value. This is a very plausible ultimate end worth organizing one's life around, thus satisfying the above criterion for a conception of human flourishing. Let us now compare virtue conceptions of flourishing in this respect.

III. Character Virtue Eudaimonism

The most prevalent form of virtue eudaimonism today is character virtue eudaimonism, which takes flourishing to consist in the exercise of character (ethical) virtues. The standard list of paradigmatic character virtues shared by Aristotle and most contemporary virtue ethicists includes justice, courage, moderation, honesty, and generosity.²¹ Aristotle also recognizes many character virtues which contemporary virtue ethicists do not much discuss, and which they may or may not accept as virtues, e.g., greatness of soul (magnanimity), proper anger, proper shame, wittiness, and friendliness (pleasantness).²² And contemporary virtue ethicists often recognize virtues which Aristotle did not, such as hope, beneficence or charity, compassion or empathy, patience, humility, and industriousness.²³ On the Aristotelian model, character virtues are intermediate states between vicious extremes of excess and deficiency (e.g., rashness and cowardice), and the correct application of character virtues is governed by the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom.²⁴

Activities which exercise character virtues fall on a spectrum between those benefitting oneself (prudential) and those benefitting others (moral). Paradigmatically prudential activities, which exercise virtues like moderation, include dieting, getting physical exercise, saving money, and going to therapy. Paradigmatically moral activities, which exercise virtues like justice and generosity, include feeding the stranger, keeping one's promises, donating to charity, and generally refraining from harming others for personal benefit. The exercises of other virtues like courage can fall somewhere between being fully self- and other-regarding. Exhibiting courage during a counter-protest, for example, might lead you to avoid excessive risk to yourself but also to intervene when appropriate to help others avoid harm.

The Non-Ultimacy Objection to Character Virtue Eudaimonism

The main problem for the view that flourishing consists in the exercise of character virtues is that the prudential and moral activities which paradigmatically exercise these virtues are not plausible as ultimate justificatory ends of action. On the contrary, character-virtuous activities are characteristically justified by the further ends they serve, the benefits they produce.

First, none of the paradigms of prudential, self-benefit activities is worth doing solely for its own sake. We do not save money because doing so is intrinsically worthwhile. We save money so that we have money. And simply having money, too, is pointless; it is only as good as what it is spent on. Similarly, we exercise and consume moderately for the purpose of maintaining bodily health, and we go to therapy for the purpose of building or maintaining mental health. No one should organize their life around simply eating,

²¹ Hursthouse, for example, names some of these as part of the "standard list" (*On Virtue Ethics*, 28).

²² Aristotle describes his particular virtues, and corresponding vices, in *NE* II.7 (cf. a somewhat different list in *Eudemian Ethics* II.3 1220b38-1221b3).

²³ E.g., Philippa Foot, "Virtues and Vices," in *Virtues and Vices* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), 1-18; Robert Merrihew Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (Oxford: OUP, 2006).

²⁴ *NE* II.6 1106b36-1107a6; VI.13 1144b1-1145a6.

drinking, exercising, or going to therapy.²⁵ And while a state of health might in some sense be good for its own sake, it is also importantly good for the valuable things it allows one to do. We wouldn't envy the life of someone who acted only as necessary to maintain health and did no more with it than simply sit idle.

Paradigmatic moral, other-benefitting activities are also not intrinsically worthwhile. First consider negative moral actions (i.e. omissions) like refraining from theft or coercion. These omissions are worthwhile in the sense that not refraining from harming would be positively bad. But they are not activities worth aiming at, which could justify other actions—they are not really activities at all! Even the idler morally refrains from harming others, but this doesn't turn their inactive life into a flourishing one. Positive moral actions are also not intrinsically worthwhile. If they were, then it would make sense to create or at least hope for opportunities to engage in them, for example to make promises simply in order to keep them, to hope people will become sick or endangered in order to assist them, or to create injustice for the purpose of justly rectifying it. But we don't and shouldn't look for such opportunities; we perform such moral actions for their further effects. Making a promise is only as worthwhile as the promised act is and keeping a promise only as worthwhile as the promised act plus the additional benefit of building or maintaining mutual trust. The value in assisting someone comes from the benefit received by the assisted party. And distributing justly or generously derives its value from the value of the relevant kind of distribution. Moreover, the goods distributed in just or generous transactions—money, dry goods, health, power, and so on—are themselves instrumentally valuable for what they allow people to do (as noted already in the discussion of prudential activities).

The main point in all this is that both prudential and moral actions are characteristically justified by the further activities which they help people to do, whether the agent herself or other people. And these further activities, which the beneficiaries of prudential or moral actions are enabled to do, had better eventually include some intrinsically valuable activities and not just more prudential or moral action, or the value of these prudential and moral actions would never get off the ground. There would be a valueless regress of agents being prudent for the sake of being prudent or moral, and of agents being moral for the sake of others' being prudent or moral. We need a more ultimate, non-character-virtuous end to stop this justificatory regress.

Now so far, we have only considered paradigmatic prudential and moral activities expressing the canonical character virtues like justice, moderation, and generosity. But the same point about instrumental justifiability seems to apply to exercises of most kinds of other candidate character virtues. Exercising courage at a counter-protest or in a literal battle helps to advance one's other ends: engaging in only necessary risk helps to win the battle or to display solidarity and commitment to the cause. Courageous activity is justified by such ends and not worth doing solely for its own sake. That is, we shouldn't hope for battles, heated protests, or other risky situations for the sake of exhibiting courage. Other Aristotelian virtues are similar. Exercises of proper anger like speaking out against a colleague's offensive remarks are useful for changing people's behavior for the better or for defending the rights of injured parties (sometimes including oneself). But better for everyone that the colleague, for example, had never engaged in the problematic behavior in the first place.

²⁵ Here I'm setting aside how these activities can serve as constitutive parts of intrinsically worthwhile activities, e.g., exercise as part of pursuing athletic achievement, eating for aesthetic appreciation, or drinking together as a way of engaging in loving relationships. Even in these cases it is not eating, exercising, etc. *simpliciter* which are intrinsically worthwhile; they derive their value from the broader projects of which they are parts.

A few Aristotelian character virtues may not characteristically be justified by the further ends they help to realize. These are character virtues which concern conversation and emotion, rather than action. For example, while being witty or friendly may help advance one's ends in certain situations, it seems like it's also worthwhile to be witty or friendly even when nothing is to be gained by it. Similarly, it seems worthwhile to feel proper shame, not too much or too little, about the right sorts of things, even when nothing results from the feeling. However, while these exercises of character virtues are not obviously instrumentally justified, they still fail the heuristic test for being plausible ultimate ends. It would not make much sense to organize our lives around feeling shame to appropriate degrees in appropriate contexts. Neither would it make sense for most of us to organize our lives around being friendly or witty.²⁶ We certainly don't think the point of prudent and moral actions is enabling ourselves and others to be funny or properly ashamed. Even if these are ends in themselves, in a sense, they hardly seem like instances of the ultimate end constituting flourishing and justifying all other actions.

Again, the same points obtain for modern candidate character virtues which Aristotle did not recognize. Exercises of beneficence, kindness, or charity are characteristically other-benefitting, and therefore instrumentally justified, in just the same way as exercises of justice and generosity. Industriousness is only as good as the kinds of pursuits industriously engaged in, and most forms of "industry" are only instrumentally justified, if justified at all. And, again, character virtues which concern emotion rather than action may not be characteristically instrumentally justified, but also seem not to justify most of the actions which make up a life. I mean, for example, virtues like hope, compassion or empathy, patience, and humility. Even if such emotions are worth feeling (in the right sorts of situations) independently of their effects, it does not make sense to organize one's life around feeling hopeful, compassionate, patient, or humble. It would be strange, for example, to seek achievements for the sake of being properly humble about them. Nor should we hope for people to experience pain or misfortune for the sake of feeling appropriately compassionate towards them.

If this is all correct and exercises of character virtues are characteristically justified by their effects—or if they are, at any rate, implausible candidates to be the ultimate end which serves to justify all other actions—then the exercise of character virtue is a poor candidate to be the sole or primary constituent of human flourishing, at least for the purposes of ethical eudaimonism. One could insist, despite all the foregoing, that flourishing consisted of character-virtuous activity, but this would divorce flourishing from its role in a eudaimonist ethical theory as the ultimate justificatory end of action. The present objection is a serious problem for character virtue eudaimonism, if not for the character virtue conception of flourishing when removed from its natural home in eudaimonist ethical theory.

Responses Considered

What might be said in response on behalf of character virtue eudaimonism, which is by far the most well-represented form of eudaimonism in contemporary ethics? One possible response is that we have not considered all of the relevant character virtues or all of the possible activities which exercise them. Perhaps the best list of character virtues will avoid these objections. It is true enough that we have not been exhaustive: there are many candidate lists of virtues and

²⁶ This is not to say that it makes no sense for anyone to organize their lives around exercising wit. Comedians can flourish by doing comedy, an observation easily accounted for by the values conception of flourishing. But clearly not everyone can or should be a comedian—a point analogous to the objection to intellectual virtue eudaimonism below.

virtuous activities. However, I think the examples discussed so far are quite telling. We examined the most paradigmatic character virtues, by both ancient and modern lights, and some of their most paradigmatic activities. And we examined some of the less paradigmatic ones, too. In all the cases discussed, we found that character-virtuous activities were not very good candidates to be the sole ultimate end of action. In light of this inductive evidence, there is little reason to think some few special character virtues and their exercises will escape the general problem. This is not to conclusively rule out the possibility, but it does at least shift the burden to the character virtue eudaimonist.

Another possible response draws attention to the fact that, while no single character-virtuous activity is by itself a good candidate to be the ultimate end of action, the class of character-virtuous activities is quite broad and diverse, and engaging in those kinds of activities as a class might yet be a sufficiently worthwhile ultimate end. Certainly, it makes better sense to organize one's life around keeping one's promises and feeding the stranger and fighting injustice, etc. than to organize one's life around, e.g., just keeping one's promises. The diverse range of all character-virtuous activities, taken together, is more likely to justify the diverse kinds of actions involved in ordinary practical life than is any one character-virtuous activity alone. Nevertheless, the problem remains that all these prudential and moral activities are not worth doing just for their own sakes but, importantly, for their further effects. The instrumental value of each individual activity does not seem to add up to intrinsic value when you take the activities collectively.

To put the point another way, all these character-virtuous activities taken together are still remedial or corrective. They address problems, lacks, or deficiencies in people's lives: poverty, hunger, danger, injustice, and so on. If the exercise of character virtue were the ultimate end of action and constituted our flourishing, then we should be grateful for these problems and deficiencies to arise, for they give us opportunities to flourish. But this would be perverse. It would surely be better if there were no danger and injustice to virtuously rectify in the first place. We want flourishing to be a goal around which to organize our lives, but if flourishing consists in character-virtuous activity, then the very act of flourishing undermines our opportunities to flourish (and it would be perverse to create problems so as to create opportunities for virtuous action).

To this it might be replied that "the poor you will always have with you." It is no problem for character virtue eudaimonism that it makes our ability to flourish depend on undesirable circumstances in the world because these undesirable circumstances will always obtain. People will always become hungry, there will always be danger and injustice, and so on. Such is the human condition. And this means that there will always be opportunities to flourish by exercising character virtue. This response strikes me as unnecessarily defeatist. Of course humans will always have bodily and mental needs which must be addressed, and these needs should be addressed virtuously (e.g., justly, moderately). But I daresay we, as a global community, could be doing much better at alleviating these undesirable circumstances than we are. Humanity has the resources, ingenuity, and ability to significantly reduce injustice, poverty, war, disease, and danger in the world, if we would only try. (We have made progress already, albeit with much backsliding.) And one of the important things an ethical theory should do is explain why we should try, why we should intervene to alleviate these undesirable circumstances.

If character virtue eudaimonism pressures us to accept the tragic status quo, it would surely be better to pursue another conception of flourishing which did not rely on that status quo. A better

ultimate end would be one that we could still pursue even under ideal circumstances; even better if morally ideal circumstances are conducive to the pursuit of that ultimate end. Such an end could then serve to justify the drastic moral action necessary to bring us closer to those ideal circumstances. The values conception of human flourishing is better than the character virtue conception in this respect. Valuable activities like loving relationships, cultural practices, and creative or athletic achievements are equally worth aiming at in ideal circumstances and in less-than-ideal ones. Indeed, more ideal circumstances (peace, food security, justice, etc.) are more conducive to these activities than non-ideal ones (war, famine, etc.). The full explanation of how values eudaimonism justifies drastic moral intervention must be left for other work, but we can already begin to see how the values conception of flourishing will make for a better ultimate end and ethical ideal than will the necessarily corrective exercise of character virtue.

A final response might go like this: surely moral activities can constitute flourishing. Some people dedicate their whole lives to helping others—working for charities, combating disease or starvation, resisting injustice, and so on—and these seem like perfectly worthwhile, indeed very admirable, lives. How, then, can we deny that people can flourish by exercising character virtues? In fact, we need not deny this. But there is, I submit, a better, more direct explanation available for why these moral activities can constitute flourishing. On the values conception, flourishing consists in successfully engaging in valuable activities you value. It is easy to believe that moral activities like those just described are valuable activities, in which case they can constitute flourishing. And they would plausibly still be valuable activities, even if the people engaging in them were not particularly virtuous. It seems worthwhile, for example, for the irritable, immoderate Dr. House to dedicate his life to solving medical puzzles and curing patients, though he exercises little to no character virtue in doing so.

Moreover, it's important that these moral activities, and character-virtuous activities more generally, are not the only kinds of valuable activities, that people can also flourish in other ways. If flourishing consisted solely in moral activity, then moral activity could only be justified by yet more moral activity, and we have seen that this is implausible. But if flourishing also consists in activities beyond moral activities, then moral activity can be instrumentally justified by its contribution to people's flourishing. The instrumental value of moral activity must ultimately bottom out in the intrinsic value of non-moral ways of flourishing. But given that there are non-moral ways of flourishing, then moral activity is valuable and therefore nothing prevents it from constituting the flourishing of those who value and engage in it. Meanwhile, that there are many non-moral ways of flourishing entails that flourishing does not require undesirable circumstances in the way that specifically moral activities do. There is only a problem if we think flourishing is exhausted by moral activity, as many contemporary virtue ethicists do suggest.

IV. Intellectual Virtue Eudaimonism

Aristotle himself would likely agree with everything just said about the deficiency of character virtue. On his view, even the best exercises of character virtue (in war and statecraft) are “unleisurely and aim at some end and are not choiceworthy for their own sakes.”²⁷ This is one of the main reasons why he considers the exercise of character virtue to be eudaimonia only secondarily and the character-virtuous life to be the second-happiest.²⁸ Moral and prudential activity is productive, it serves other ends, and so it isn't fit to be the ultimate justificatory end.

²⁷ *NE* X.7 1177b6-18.

²⁸ *NE* X.8 1178a9.

Eudaimonia, and the activity that primarily constitutes it, is supposed to be choiceworthy for its own sake and never for the sake of anything else.²⁹ For that, Aristotle looks to an entirely unproductive activity, namely the exercise of intellectual virtue in philosophical contemplation of necessary truths.³⁰ All practical action is ultimately supposed to aim at creating opportunities for people to contemplate. Character-virtuous activity is worthwhile as the best kind of practical action, but its value still derives in no small part from this ultimate aim.

Aristotle's view, that the only intellectually virtuous activity constituting flourishing is philosophical, is needlessly restrictive for our purposes. We may expand our notion of intellectually virtuous activity to include other paradigms such as study, research, and teaching in any of a wide variety of fields, humanistic or scientific. It will turn out that intellectual virtue eudaimonism encounters difficulty no matter how restrictive or capacious our notion of intellectually virtuous activity (unless we severely strain the meaning of "intellectual").

The Elitism Objection to Intellectual Virtue Eudaimonism

The fundamental problem for intellectual virtue eudaimonism is that intellectual activity couldn't reasonably serve as the sole ultimate end for most people. A eudaimonist ethical theory built upon intellectual activity as the sole justificatory end consequently could not recommend actions for most people. But an ethical theory should be comprehensive: it should give most people recommendations about how to live. This is not to assume that an ethical theory must be universal in the sense of giving the same recommendations to all. But we don't want an ethical system which only applies to some select few. At best, such an ethical system would be woefully incomplete, merely a part in a broader system that remains to be worked out; at worst, it would simply be the wrong ethical system to adopt.

Why can't intellectually virtuous activity reasonably be most people's ultimate aim or end? One reason is that, if intellectual virtue is as difficult to achieve as Aristotle suggests, most people could never hope to have it.³¹ Intellectual virtues like wisdom, understanding, or a strong intuition for abstract principles do seem difficult to acquire. It would plausibly require access to education, as well as time and resources to dedicate to intellectual development, which many people in fact lack (often as a result of unjust social conditions). And if someone lacks the ability to acquire intellectual virtues, it would make little sense for them to aim at the exercise of intellectual virtue.

It is also clear that many people have little interest in engaging in paradigmatically intellectual activities like studying, researching, or teaching for their own sakes. These people might prefer instead to focus on family life, on producing tangible goods and services, on athletic achievement, and so on. And it would seem to contribute not at all to such people's flourishing to engage in intellectual activities in spite of their own desires. Must we think that such people are making some grave mistake? That they would be better off if they had the ability and desire to pursue intellectual activities? Clearly not. It would be arrogant and self-aggrandizing for those of

²⁹ *NE* I.7 1097a28-1097b7.

³⁰ *NE* X.7 1177a12-22. There are scholarly debates concerning what precisely Aristotle means by the term for contemplation, "*theoria*." It includes, at the very least, knowing and thinking about the metaphysical first principles of the universe. It may also include reflection on other necessary truths, such as the first principles and theorems of other sciences. For present purposes we need not settle these issues.

³¹ Aristotle seems to follow Plato in thinking that complete intellectual virtue, especially wisdom, can only be achieved by the best and brightest and requires a lifetime of cultivation and academic study—that is, if it is even an achievable ideal at all. It is clearly not thought possible for most people. Indeed, Aristotle rules out a great number of people along gender and ethnic lines (*Politics* I.12-13; VII.7).

us in the ivory tower to insist that everyone would be better off if they engaged in intellectual activities, instead of pursuing their own actual interests.

So then, many people in fact lack interest in, or the resources and ability for, exercising intellectual virtues,³² and it would be absurd to expect these people to aim to engage in that intellectual activity. Moreover, it would be practically impossible for everyone to engage in intellectual activities for much of their lives. In Aristotle's time, the reason that a few elite Greek men had the leisure necessary to engage in philosophical contemplation was that women, slaves, and poorer men did almost all of the productive labor. Aristotle was aware that not everyone could spend their lives in contemplation. Since it is necessarily unproductive (that's what makes it a prime candidate to be human flourishing), if everyone were to do it, nothing would get done. And our society in the present day is much the same in this respect: those who engage in intellectual activities for much of their lives (e.g., in academic careers) are supported by a now global labor economy producing practical goods and services. Those of us who do seriously pursue intellectual activities need many other people not to. Without drastic changes to our social structures, it would be impossible for most people to give up their current labor and instead engage in intellectual activities. If flourishing consisted solely or primarily in intellectual activity, then it would be practically impossible for most people to flourish—and, in that case, ludicrous for the vast majority of people to aim at it.³³

There is one way everyone could aim at intellectual activity: namely, those who do not desire or are unable to engage in intellectual activities themselves could aim at the intellectual activity of those who are willing and able to engage in it. The many can work to make possible the intellectual activity of the few. Aristotle views this as the right and natural order of things. His *Ethics* is addressed to an elite audience, but his complete ethical theory is not silent on how the rest should live. He thinks that women and natural slaves should obey and serve those men who partake of complete human reason³⁴ and that the rest of civil society (including the labor of free, working-class men) should be structured so that the elites have leisure to rule and do philosophy.³⁵

Now, it would be possible to dispense with Aristotle's sexist, racist, and classist essentializing while retaining the suggestion that an ethical theory ultimately aimed at intellectual activity could be comprehensive—that is, could give recommendations for most people—by recommending that people either (a) engage in intellectual activity, if they can, or (b) contribute to making possible others' intellectual activity, if they cannot engage in it themselves. But I don't think any of us today could stomach such an ethical theory. Even without its most essentializing parts, the proposal still seems unfair and exploitative. It would reduce most people, as a matter of ethical right, to useful tools for the realization of the intellectual activity, the

³² To emphasize a point suggested above, a lack of either ability or interest may often be the result of unjust social structures limiting certain people's access to education and intellectual activities. As a matter of justice, everyone should perhaps have access to intellectual activity, but, even in a just world, it is likely that many people would still lack interest, if not ability also.

³³ The problem is not that flourishing is difficult, i.e. that most people will not in fact flourish. Such difficulty is meant to be a datum which Aristotle's theory is supposed to predict, and we need not reject this datum. The problem is that flourishing as intellectual activity is not something most people can reasonably aspire to. It cannot even rightly serve as an ideal for most people to aim at.

³⁴ *Politics* I.5, 12-13.

³⁵ *Politics* I.7 1255b35-37; III.4-5; VII.9. Note that, according to Aristotle, women, slaves, and free laborers are not only barred from intellectual virtue but also from full character virtue. They cannot even pursue their own flourishing in its secondary sense of character-virtuous activity.

flourishing, of the intellectual elites. The proposal is to enshrine slavery in ethics. I trust that the reader joins me in having no interest in such an ethical theory. We prefer an ethical theory which does not subordinate the interests of one class of people to the interests of another. Our ethical theory should (ex ante) permit or encourage everyone to advance their own interests equally, and where it recommends advancing the interests of other people (namely, in moral theory), it should make the same kinds of other-concerning recommendations to all people, on the basis of mutuality and reciprocity.

Responses Considered

One response on behalf of intellectual virtue eudaimonism is to broaden our understanding of what counts as intellectual virtue and its exercise. For Aristotle, the other distinct intellectual virtues, scientific understanding and intuition, are but parts of wisdom, with their combined activity being philosophical contemplation.³⁶ But we might instead think there is a diverse range of intellectual virtues. Contemporary virtue epistemology provides possible candidates, such as intellectual honesty, intellectual courage, intellectual humility, intellectual generosity, and epistemic justice.³⁷ Such intellectual virtues are obviously modeled on familiar character virtues, and just as the different character virtues are exercised in different kinds of activities, so each of these intellectual virtues could have its own activity besides simply contemplation.

Unfortunately, these intellectual virtues are likely to encounter the same deficiency plaguing the character virtues upon which they are based. That is, activities exercising these intellectual virtues are not plausible ultimate ends of action. This is clear if the value of these virtues consists in their being conducive to forming true beliefs, justified beliefs, knowledge, or any other kind of valuable epistemic state. For then the exercises of these virtues would be characteristically justified by the value of the relevant epistemic states, whatever the source of their value in turn. On the other hand, even if epistemic value is to be located fundamentally in the having or exercise of intellectual virtues themselves rather than in the epistemic states they conduce to forming, it would still be bizarre to organize most of one's actions around the exercise of these character-like intellectual virtues—around, for example, accepting one's own epistemic limitations, giving people the benefit of the doubt, believing things no matter how unpopular, and apportioning everyone their fair share of testimonial weight. These might be great ways to form beliefs, but they hardly seem to justify going to work every morning and all the other things we do. In this respect, these intellectual virtues are akin to the emotion-governing character virtues like hope, patience, and humility.

In addition to expanding our list of particular intellectual virtues, we might also respond on behalf of intellectual virtue eudaimonism by expanding our list of intellectual activities. We have so far considered only intellectual paradigms like philosophical contemplation and academic study, research, and teaching. But many activities engage the intellect and so, whatever the relevant virtues are, couldn't there be many activities, available to many different kinds of people, which exercise the intellectual virtues? We should not construe intellectual activity overly narrowly. One may also exercise intellectual virtues, for example, while forming political views, navigating social relationships, problem-solving in non-academic careers, strategizing in games or sports, or while creating or enjoying art. In that case, couldn't most people aim at

³⁶ *NE* VI.7 1141a18-20, 1141b2-3. Since intuition and understanding are included in wisdom, exercises of intuition or understanding on their own would naturally be justified by serving the more ultimate end of exercising wisdom.

³⁷ See, e.g., Robert C. Roberts & W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: OUP, 2007); Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: OUP, 2007).

exercising intellectual virtues in these ways regardless of ability or interest in academic subjects and without the need for a non-intellectual underclass? Intellectual virtue eudaimonism could then avoid the charges of elitism and hierarchy.

I agree that this is a step in the right direction for ethical theory, but it will not save the spirit of intellectual virtue eudaimonism. In the first place, while most people are capable of engaging in activities in which intellectual virtues can be exercised, this does not entail that most people can succeed in acquiring intellectual virtues and exercising them in these activities. It has already been suggested that many people lack the access, interest, resources, or time to acquire intellectual virtue. While these people can sensibly aim at the activities on our more inclusive list, they cannot sensibly aim at their own exercise of intellectual virtue. This problem can be avoided, however, if intellectual virtue is more readily attainable by most people, a possibility which I wish to allow.

The bigger difficulty for this inclusive version of intellectual virtue eudaimonism is that, in expanding our notion of the kinds of activities which can constitute flourishing, intellectual virtue begins to seem quite unnecessary to flourishing. It does make sense for people to aim to engage in social, productive, creative, skillful, or athletic activities, all of which can create opportunities to exercise the intellect. But the value of these activities, what makes them plausible ultimate ends, is clearly not exhausted by their intellectual aspects. Art, for instance, can be intellectual, but it needn't be; some works of art are intended to be non-rational and to engage other important parts of the human psyche. It is similarly worth developing, displaying, and competing in the use of physical skills involved in running, playing tennis, or playing the fiddle even when these are performed at a sub-rational, intuitive level. And loving relationships need not be intellectually deep or challenging to be valuable. These are all clearly activities worth doing even for someone who lacks intellectual virtue. So, when we become inclusive about the kinds of activities that can realize intellectual virtue, we realize that it is not the exercise of intellectual virtue alone which makes these activities good candidates to be ultimate ends of action. I submit that the values conception better explains why these activities can constitute flourishing: it is not that such activities are intellectual, but that they are valuable and that we do value them for their own sakes. The intellectual aspects of these activities might explain part, but not all, of their value.

V. Conclusion: The Prospects for Virtue Eudaimonism

Character virtue eudaimonism takes flourishing, the ultimate end of action, to consist in the exercise of character virtue. I have objected to this view on the grounds that character-virtuous activities are not plausible ultimate ends, since they are characteristically justified by further ends themselves. This is the version of virtue eudaimonism which is most well-represented in contemporary virtue ethics. I have also argued against intellectual virtue eudaimonism, which takes flourishing to consist in the exercise of intellectual virtue, on the grounds that the resulting ethical theory will be incomplete, elitist, or hierarchical. But it is right to point out that, at least according to Aristotle's version of virtue eudaimonism, flourishing consists in the exercises of both character and intellectual virtues, not solely one or the other. So, it is worth considering whether combined, character-and-intellectual virtue eudaimonism can overcome the above objections.

It seems the combined version at least begins to solve the elitism objection to the intellectual virtue version. If it's true that most people can't sensibly aim at exercising intellectual virtue themselves, combined virtue eudaimonism would have them aim instead at

exercising character virtues which, while not necessarily easy to acquire, do seem more universally accessible (here rejecting Aristotle's exclusion of women, slaves, and laborers from full character virtue). Even if intellectual activity is the primary form of flourishing, the exercise of character virtues is still pretty good and counts as flourishing in its own right. So everyone can aim at their own flourishing after all and no one is treated as a slave to others.

This attempted solution is not wholly satisfying. It remains true that character-virtuous activity is characteristically justified by further ends. Combined eudaimonism says that people should be prudent and moral for the sake of people's being prudent or moral or intellectual. This is some improvement over character virtue eudaimonism, but only a small one. The value of character-virtuous activity can now bottom out in an intrinsically valuable activity, which avoids the problem of a justificatory regress. But that intrinsically valuable intellectual activity will still only be available to a small portion of the population. This still seems to subordinate most people to the intellectual few. Granted we can now say that most people are able to flourish in their own right, but most people's character-virtuous flourishing will depend on a few people's intellectual flourishing. As a result, most people will have strong reason to prioritize others' intellectual flourishing in order to make their own character-virtuous activities worthwhile.

In comparison, values eudaimonism also says that moral activities like resisting injustice are valuable and so can constitute flourishing. And it also locates the justification for such moral activities in intrinsically valuable activities, but in many more kinds of valuable activities than simply intellectual ones: social, creative, skillful, and athletic ones, at least. And these other intrinsically valuable activities, especially taken together, are much more plausibly available to everyone. So values eudaimonism allows that people can flourish by engaging in moral activities, but it avoids ultimately subordinating those who flourish in this way to those few who are good at one particular kind of intrinsically valuable activity. Instead the value of moral activities bottoms out in the value of activities which, taken altogether, anyone can do. Combined, character-and-intellectual virtue eudaimonism does not wholly overcome the objections raised for each of its component parts, especially when compared to values eudaimonism. Is there any way, then, to save virtue eudaimonism? At least one possibility remains: to greatly expand our notion of virtue beyond these two categories. If values eudaimonism avoids problems by including a wide variety of social, creative, and athletic activities in its conception of flourishing, then virtue eudaimonism, too, can include these activities by recognizing social virtues, creative virtues, athletic virtues, and any others which might be needed. Nothing says virtue eudaimonism must stop at character and intellectual virtues, after all. This is right, and by my lights would represent an improvement for virtue eudaimonism. But it improves virtue eudaimonism by bringing it awfully close to my own values eudaimonism. The question, then, is whether virtues or values are better at explaining why certain activities constitute flourishing.

We cannot conclusively settle this question here, though the reader may anticipate the kind of answer I am inclined to give. The values conception strikes me as the more fundamental description of flourishing. What matters most to flourishing, by my lights, is subjective valuing and objective valuableness. A particular theory of objective value (e.g., perfectionism) might reveal significant overlap between objectively valuable activities and virtuous activities, in which case values and virtue eudaimonism, too, would significantly overlap. But I am not convinced that the only objectively valuable activities are those which exercise virtues of any sort. Engaging in loving relationships and playing the banjo, for example, may well be worth doing

even for those who are quite bad at them. On the other hand, if it is possible for one to have and exercise a virtue without valuing the relevant activity, it seems to me that activity will not contribute to one's flourishing. Wherever virtue and values eudaimonism diverge, I prefer values eudaimonism. And if they do not diverge—and I would like to see the proof of this—then I will rest content to be a virtues-and-values eudaimonist.