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Disciplinary Responses to Theology Brief Preview

THE VIRTUES

Ian Harper

- Dean and Director of the Melbourne Business School, AUSTRALIA

- Co-Dean of the Faculty of Business and Economics at the University of Melbourne

- Member of the Board of the Reserve Bank of Australia

I very much enjoyed reading Jennifer's Preview of *The Virtues*.

I related most directly to her discussion in the context of my work as a public policy economist. Here I regularly bump up against the limits of purely technical analysis and reach for (primarily) the cardinal virtues in making a decision, for example, about the setting of interest rates or minimum wages. It's one thing to interpret the predictions/forecasts of formal models but quite another to discern what is just or prudent, let alone courageous! And, of course, the Christian virtues overarch my thinking as I pray about how best to love my neighbour in applying the technical discipline of economics to reaching *virtuous*, i.e., loving, hopeful and charitable, public policy decisions.

John R. Peteet

- Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School, USA

As an academic psychiatrist, I am interested in exploring the relevance of the virtues to both the character of the good psychiatrist and to the cultivation of needed virtues in our patients. To this end, I recently edited The Virtues in Psychiatric Practice (Oxford University Press, 2022), which considers the implications of virtues of self-control (accountability, humility, equanimity), benevolence (forgiveness, compassion, love), intelligence (defiance, phronesis), and positivity (gratitude, self-transcendence, hope) for clinical work. Specific psychiatric conditions show a need for particular virtues, the goals of treatment are informed by virtues characteristic of human flourishing, and therapists' preferred virtues reflect their spiritual commitments.

Christopher Hays

- President, Scholar Leaders, USA

- Formerly, Professor of New Testament at the Fundación Universitaria Seminario Bíblico de Colombia in Medellín, Colombia

As a New Testament scholar who works in the area of Christian wealth ethics, I agree heartily with Prof. Herdt's construal of Christian virtues as both *infused* and *cultivated*. The component of *infusion* does, to my mind, reflect Pauline theology as well as, e.g., Jeremiah 31. So also, the emphasis on the *development* of virtues coheres with the exhortations of Jesus, James, and the Torah.

It is as a participant in interreligious dialogue (specifically, with Muslim theologians) that the Christian and biblical account of virtues aptly summarized by Prof. Herdt leaves me with questions. If divine infusion of virtue depends on the work of the Holy Spirit poured into believers as part of the soteriological process that begins with reconciliation to God through Christ (as Romans 5:1-5 does indeed indicate), then what do I do about the fact that I perceive in many of my Muslim friends the same patterns of acting well that, in a Christian, I would call virtue? It strikes me as special pleading to say, on the one hand, that they are acting well, but not consistently so, by dint of their lack of infusion by the Holy Spirit; and by contrast to say that my Christian friends act well under the salvific influence of the Spirit, and that their inconsistencies are merely the persistent influences of their sin nature. It also seems to me that the pillars of Islam—profession of faith, prayer, alms, fasting, and pilgrimage—look very much like components in the process of developing virtues, especially when coupled with the admiration and imitations of virtuous exemplars from within the Islamic tradition. (I could further elaborate the same argument in connection to Judaism, but the issue feels more poignant in relation to Islam than in relation to the Jewish religion, of which Christianity sees itself as an heir.)

In brief, I would be grateful for Prof. Herdt's insights on how to connect this account of Christian virtue with the settled dispositions of laudable behavior on display in many faithful practitioners of the other Abrahamic religions.

Javier Sánchez-Cañizares

- Associate Professor, Institute for Culture and Society (ICS), "Mind-Brain" Group, University of Navarra, Pamplona, Navarra, SPAIN

Prof. Herdt's reflections on virtue make us think about two features of human beings.

First, human beings are capable of ethical habits, i.e., stable dispositions allowing for excellent actions. In that regard, human beings share with other natural systems an autonomy through which they act over their environment but do this in a human-specific way, namely, developing human habits by freely choosing their goals in life. Virtues and free will thus go hand in hand.

Second, all scientific progress ultimately depends on scientists sharing virtues like truthfulness, industriousness, and humbleness. Science is built by virtuous people.

Tim Maughan

- Professor of Clinical Oncology, University of Oxford, UK

I agree virtues are very important for a flourishing research culture in which both science and people flourish. I would welcome greater emphasis on the role of the Spirit transforming us and our own inability to live the virtuous life in our own strength.

Michael Spence

- President & Provost of University College London, UK

The whole issue of the role and maintenance of virtue in the collective life of universities, both amongst staff and students, is currently a very live topic of conversation amongst institutional leaders. But the virtues that perhaps require most attention are those forming part of practical wisdom and focussing on the conduct of effective discourse, that is, the so-called epistemic virtues. I wonder whether a particular focus on those might be helpful?

Joerg Friedrichs

- Associate Professor of Politics, Department of International Development, University of Oxford, UK

- Official Fellow of St Cross College, Oxford

The humanist in me cannot but welcome a focus on virtue, although the word "virtue" occurs only four times in the New Testament (Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, London 1929). The most likely reason is that the NT de-emphasizes human merit and emphasizes divine grace, with Christian qualities the fruit of the Spirit rather than innate. Professor Herdt already shows that she is fully conscious of this; most notably, "infused and cultivated" is a good formula. While there may be good reason to re-emphasize virtue ethics, it requires a fine balance; otherwise, un-deconstructed notions of virtue as merit may easily creep back in. Could the author, therefore, be even more direct and transparent about both sides of this balance, as underpinning her reasoning about the virtues? As mentioned, she already expresses this inside the brief; but maybe the text could state it right from the beginning, as a point of departure?

Karen Man Yee Lee

- Senior Lecturer, La Trobe Law School, LaTrobe University, AUSTRALIA

Courage and justice, two of the cardinal virtues that Prof Herdt identified, can be used to describe those ordinary citizens and community leaders who risked their individual liberty in defending political liberalism in many authoritarian or transitional societies. These two virtues are perhaps mutually reinforcing: a sense of justice gives one courage to persist amid a climate of fear, while courage can be born of one's strong sense of justice. From the opposition leaders in Russia, to women rights activists in Afghanistan, and political activists in Hong Kong, for example, courage and justice symbolize the universal demands of human dignity and fundamental freedoms, though they are not devoid of enormous human

suffering.

Rafael Vicuña

- (Formerly) Full Professor, Department of Molecular Genetics and Microbiology, Faculty of Biological Sciences, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, CHILE

Excessive concern of professors for promptly moving forward in their academic careers and for obtaining funds for research are currently damaging the very essence of the university. Indeed, nowadays professors have less time to interact in fruitful discussions, show little willingness to collaborate in tasks for the common good and, what is more worrying, dedicate less time to the personalized attention to students, especially those at the undergraduate level. Consequently, institutions that are highly prestigious may not necessarily be delivering formative education according to the standards they exhibit. The latter represents a problem of profound ethical connotations, which calls for the cultivation of virtues and a culture of virtues such as generosity (i.e., to devote more time to personal conversations with students or to show disposition to undertake academic management responsibilities), justice (i.e., to give faculty members and students the dedication they require for their own flourishing) and courage (i.e., to consciously give up personal rewards for the benefit of others).

Chris Marshall

- Emeritus Professor, Te Ngāpara Centre for Restorative Practice, School of Government, Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington, NEW ZEALAND

- Diana Unwin Chair in Restorative Justice in the School of Government, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

Professor Herdt provides a wonderfully lucid overview of the virtues and virtue ethics and I look forward to the fuller account in due course. The topic seems more relevant than ever in our so-called "post-truth age".

In reading the Brief, two questions came to mind that the fuller treatment will no doubt clarify. The first relates to the meaning and content of the category of "*Christian* virtues". By this phrase, are we talking about a discrete assortment of virtues (including the "theological virtues" of faith, hope and love) that are "formed within the context of the life of the Church and support a life of faithful discipleship"? Or are we talking about a Christian perspective on all the virtues or, perhaps, a distinctive way of extending or deepening virtuous conduct, such as in love of enemy? And if it is true that "the virtues are a gift of divine grace" and require some "infusion" of moral power through the sacraments, what bearing does this have on the cultivation of moral virtues in a secular or pluralist arena?

The second question relates to whether and how we can speak of virtuous *institutions* as well as virtuous individuals. Dr Herdt proposes that virtue ethics can help us think about how groups and institutions, such as the university, can help form the character of the people who constitute them and who, in turn, help form the institution. This suggests a kind of virtuous feedback loop: virtuous agents help shape virtuous institutions which in turn help shape virtuous character.

Experience suggests this sometimes *can* be the case (such as in healthy families), but the shameful record of the institutional church with respect to sexual abuse, for example, gives serious pause for thought about how straightforward or common this phenomenon is.

And when it comes to, say, the institutions of the criminal justice system, the issue becomes even more challenging. Institutional forces are at work there that seem to defeat the best intentions of those virtuous actors working within the system and, at worst, to stir up the basest instincts of wider society. We may speak euphemistically of "correcting" offenders and "rehabilitating" their moral character, but evidence shows the opposite often takes place. Certainly, a virtue-framework can help us identify the moral problems of institutional performance; I am keen to know more about how it can offer a practical way of helping transform institutional character.

Oliver O'Donovan

- Professor Emeritus, Christian Ethics and Practical Theology, University of Edinburgh, UK

- Honorary Professor, School of Divinity, University of St. Andrews

Jennifer Herdt's statement is an excellently focused statement of the traditional presentation of the virtues in theological discussion. In putting one or two questions to her, one is putting them to the tradition she has carefully sustained and developed.

The impossibility of an exhaustive list of the virtues appears to be stated as a principle. The reason appears to be, though not quite stated in these terms, that *new* virtues may arise as new instances of dispositions perfectly responsive to challenges appear in history. I would personally support both that principle and that reason for it. But if it is so, how do we defend the status of the classical lists of cardinal and theological virtues as *canonical* and *definitive*? If "Jesus Christ fully exemplifies the virtues", such a canonical set of virtues seems to be implied. It would seem too little to claim that he exemplified "some possible virtues", and too much to claim that he exemplified "all possible virtues". And is this statement about Christ adequate from a *Christological* point of view? Or is it liable to the reductive interpretation that Kant produced in his famous statement about "the Holy One of the Gospels" who is admired because he corresponds to our idea of moral perfection? Might Jennifer Herdt copy Balthasar's response that Christ was the *concrete* categorical imperative, with some such claim as that he was the *concrete* form of the virtues?

With the idea of a canonical list there seems to be implied a permanent "form of the virtues" or "unity of the virtues" – i.e. some description of the shape of virtue which is expressed in *this* list and would not be expressed in other possible lists of dispositions required to meet new challenges – *e.g.* "smartness, savviness and an eye to the long game". That would be necessary if virtue-language was to be a *critical* language, not just a *formal* language of morals. Can Jennifer Herdt say more in support of this idea than she has? It bears on whether virtues transcend concrete cultural evaluations or are ultimately culturally relative phenomena – in which case they are to be numbered among the culture's "values".

In turn this affects the claim made for the saints that they inspire the faithful to virtue. Do they represent the *form* of virtue as a whole, so that each is held to be, as it were, a perfectly rounded character, or merely that each inspires the faithful to *one* virtue among the range – St. Francis to tenderness for nature, St. Joan of Arc to military courage, etc.? If the former,

might some of the statements about the virtues of the saints need to be more nuanced by a critical distance on their vices? And that prompts a further question about about the status of vices as such? Are they co-original with virtues – as it were, "stable dispositions that enable an agent to act badly" (!)? Or are they *defective* virtues, so that every vice could be analysed as a virtue-not-quite-realised?

The presentation of virtues in the first paragraph makes it clear that they can be attributed to corporate agents as well as individual agents. But the language of "infused virtues" and "the heart" , introduced to specify Christian virtues, leans strongly towards individual virtues. Does the Holy Spirit infuse virtues into a business organisation? Does a university have a "heart"? Or are virtues primarily produced in individuals by the Spirit and then *communicated to the corporate* bodies by those who participate in them?

Donald Hay

- Emeritus Fellow, Jesus College, University of Oxford

This is a very informative and stimulating outline of the argument, and I look forward to the full version to follow, which may address some of the following comments and queries.

Professor Herdt writes: 'Virtue ethics helps us to think holistically about how groups, institutions such as universities, and practices form character and in turn are formed by the character of the people who constitute them.' For a social scientist, this is a key proposition, but the preview does not yet extend to how this works in practice. Much of the discussion focuses attention on the formation of virtuous character of persons, and on how persons can develop the virtues. Can a virtuous person be 'corrupted' and become less virtuous? Can there be a 'virtuous institution' or is such an institution just a community of virtuous people?

Why does this matter? There is now an extensive literature which explores the moral framework that is needed for the functioning of the market economy. The standard ethical framework of economics is utilitarian, which has loosely been interpreted as related to the virtue of prudence. It is widely accepted by thoughtful economists that this is not enough to sustain well-functioning markets. Without temperance and justice, and possibly hope and love, the trust that is needed for market economies to flourish is likely to be absent. There is for example a large literature on the 2008 financial crisis that identifies the crisis as attributable to a collapse of virtuous behaviour in financial markets as much as any technical failures in the structure and functioning of the markets. At the very least, the virtue of temperance was notably absent from those operating in the markets!

There is a parallel literature which explores whether markets are conducive to the formation of virtuous agents, or whether markets as currently constituted in the advanced capitalist economies are actually corrosive of virtue. Returning to the example of the financial crisis, the suggestion is that it was the introduction of incentive schemes linking remuneration to profit that undermined the moral code that had previously underpinned the functioning of financial markets in the City of London. There is even a suggestion that the emphasis on incentives in the standard presentations of economic behaviour in economics departments and business schools has eroded the virtuous character of a new generation of economic actors involved in running corporations.

Anna High

- Senior Lecturer in Law at the University of Otago, NEW ZEALAND

The framing of virtue ethics as a holistic view of persons flourishing in community resonated with me. I have recently established a mindfulness society, aimed at supporting lawyers, including legal academics, in cultivating mindfulness – clear and present awareness of current experience. Mindfulness can be associated with cultivating equanimity, focus, empathy, a sense of justice, and wisdom; it is a contemplative technique that for Christians might be framed as a means of developing certain virtues, while also acknowledging virtues as a gift of divine grace.

In terms of my research, I am interested in how law shapes the character of citizens, which is an aspect of promoting human flourishing. More specifically, in the context of researching models of consent in sexual violence law, what are the "vices" that classically are entrenched in our rape laws, and what are the virtues that can be promoted through law reform and law's educative function?

Terence C. Halliday

- Research Professor, American Bar Foundation

- Honorary Professor, School of Regulation and Global Governance, Australian National University

- Adjunct Professor, Sociology, Northwestern University, USA

I am very grateful for Jennifer Herdt's Preview on the virtues. It brings theological insights to my work in ways I hadn't previously considered. I have two questions that reach to my research.

First, several responses to the Preview note the salience of virtues to particular settings, e.g., psychiatric care, epistemic communities, science. In like manner, Prof. Herdt's Preview raises questions for me about lawmaking and policymaking in international organizations, such as the UN Commission on International Trade Law, the International Monetary Fund or UN Security Council. I am pressed to consider whether there are distinctive virtues particularly salient to lawmakers and policymakers in these settings, whether state or non-state delegates or international civil servants within IOs, virtues that are conducive to flourishing and constructive legal order within and beyond states? Can these virtues be derived, or their understanding enriched, from biblical and theological ethics?

Second, social scientists not infrequently attribute characteristics of individuals to collective actors. A just person may be echoed or mirrored or transfigured into a just organization or a just political order. While Prof Herdt observes that virtue ethics help us think about how character is shaped by institutions and institutions may be shaped "by the character of the people within them," can we go a step further and say that an organization or institution or state or supra-state organization itself has an emergent virtue? Can virtues conventionally attributed to individuals also be descriptive or normative for organizations or collective actors, such as a corporation or non-profit organization or a political party? Can I properly speak of the UN Commission on International Trade Law as more or less just, more or less temperate? Can the International Monetary Fund be properly held accountable to the virtue ethic of humility in its institutional solutions for

financial crises? Is the Financial Action Task Force modest in its formulae for suppressing money-laundering in vastly diverse countries? Can the UN Security Council be characterized as courageous if it acts against the vices of sexual violence by UN peace-keepers or the use of torture by the U.S., one of its permanent five members?

In short, do the infused and cultivated virtues, do virtue ethics, offer a repertoire for theological appraisal of international organizations or, indeed, entire transnational legal orders?

Brendan Case

- Associate Director for Research, The Human Flourishing Program, Harvard University

I enjoyed reading Prof. Herdt's preview of her forthcoming Theological Brief on the Virtues, and particularly appreciated the way she connects the virtues to human flourishing. In the full Brief, I would be interested in seeing some engagement by Prof. Herdt with the empirical evidence for the relationship between moral character and flourishing; one recent paper by our team at the Human Flourishing Program found that even the self-assessed "commitment to promoting the good in all circumstances" is highly predictive of future flourishing in many domains, including social relationships, life satisfaction, and even physical health (https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0890117120964083).

I'll also mention two broad questions which I would be glad to see discussed in the full brief. First, Prof. Herdt notes that, "Things do not always go well for virtuous people"; I hope she'll defend this position against (or perhaps rather, clarify its relation to) the classic Stoic insistence that virtue is sufficient for happiness, a position more often pilloried than refuted. In *The Morality of Happiness*, for instance, Julia Annas helpfully shows how the Aristotelian alternative to Stoic self-sufficiency also yields apparent paradoxes, such as that the virtuous person can be made continuously happier by the addition of external goods.

And second, I hope that Prof. Herdt will offer some discussion of how common the virtues are. This is a question which has generated a great deal of debate among contemporary psychologists and philosophers (under the heading of "situationism"), but much less so (so far as I can tell) among theological ethicists. This is unfortunate, because if the virtues are rare, that would have significant implications for their potential role in shaping the character of society as a whole.

Strikingly, there seems to have been a virtual consensus among classical and medieval theorists that the virtues (and indeed the vices) are quite rare: Aristotle, for instance, insisted that "the many…do not abstain from bad acts because of their baseness but through fear of punishment" (*NE* 1179b7–13). (In *Aristotle and the Virtues*, Howard Curzer comments that, for Aristotle, "the category of 'the many' includes not only children, but also the majority of adults, for [in Aristotle's view] these adults are morally childish" (333). And, as Thomas Osborne notes, "Following Aristotle, Thomas [Aquinas] thinks although some agents are virtuous and others are vicious, there are many agents who are neither. Continent agents act well, but they think about what they should not do because their desires are disordered. Incontinent agents act poorly, but they are generally aware of what they should do" (*Human Action in Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham*, 77, cf. *De malo* q. 3, art. 9, ad 7).

John D. Inazu

- Sally D. Danforth Distinguished Professor of Law and Religion, Washington University in St. Louis, USA

- Professor of Political Science (by courtesy)

Virtues as I understand them must be cultivated and practiced through particularized communities and institutions. Professor Herdt rightly claims that "virtues reach to ways the academy itself is structured." But what are those virtues, and how do we know? The intellectual virtues are indeed relevant to scholarship and the scholarly life, but their cultivation in an embodied community requires a host of other virtues too often neglected or even suppressed by the modern research university. The resulting deficit allows for words like "equality" and "justice" whose precise meaning is subject to capture by the loudest voices and the deepest pockets. Scholars (Christian and otherwise) will need to identify and cultivate virtues—and practices—that imagine a different possibility.

Karen Kong (　　　　)

- Principal Lecturer in Law, University of Hong Kong, HONG KONG

Legal issues often involve resolving moral dilemmas. Law has its limitations, discretionary or grey areas. The extent to which just and fair decisions can be made depends not only on how good and comprehensive the law is, but also on how the legal personnel interpret and practice the law and how they exercise discretions within the legal system.

Judges and legal practitioners need to have the courage and prudence to uphold the rule of law, advocate and develop the law, make good judgments, and choose what is fair and just when exercising discretionary powers. Courage enables lawyers and advocates to voice and challenge established norms that are unfairly favoring the privileged or prejudicial against the minorities.

In scholarly life, intellectual virtues enable a legal academic to choose to research in areas that deepen understanding of issues that contribute to human flourishing but may not easily lend itself to publication in prestigious journals or greatly enhance the research profile of the academic. Wisdom enables an academic to allocate his time and resources well for the service of the institution, the students, and the community for human flourishing.

However, the extent to which such virtuous decisions can be consistently made depends on the virtue ethics of the legal practitioners or academic. As Professor Herdt highlighted, Christian virtues are infused and cultivated. At the same time, political, legal and institutional pressure can force a person to choose to pursue self-preservation driven by fear rather than human flourishing out of love. The political, legal and institutional will can often be motivated by self-preservation or human pride of those people behind the institutions.

At some critical moments, Christians may face the choice of whether to continue to stay on to practise virtues against institutional or political pressure at a high cost and a risk of their own fallenness and stifling, or to sever from those institutions and authorities and find a more nurturing place that enable them to better promote human flourishing. Perhaps more can be discussed on how to support Christians in public and scholarly life in this decision-making process.

Nicholas Wolterstorff

- Noah Porter Professor Emeritus of Philosophical Theology at Yale University, USA

- Senior Research Fellow in the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, University of Virginia

- Honorary Professor of Australian Catholic University

What a fine brief statement on virtues Jennifer Herdt has given us!

From some of the responses to my own Theology Brief on justice, it became clear to me that a significant gap in what I have written about justice is that I have paid no attention to the virtue of *being just*; I have focused all my attention on acting justly. But in the absence of the virtue of *being just,* acting justly will be, at best, episodic. If one has the virtue of being just, then one will act justly (most of the time). But it is possible to act justly now and then without having the virtue of being just. One might, for example, act justly when the law requires it, and because the law requires it, not because one has the virtue of being a just person.

In what I have written about the religious voice in democratic politics, I have discussed the virtues required in the citizenry for the sustenance of democratic politics.

Those who write about what it is to be a Christian scholar have tended to focus on the content of such scholarship. The content is, of course, important. In what I myself have written on the matter, I have also paid attention to the virtues that should characterize the Christian scholar and teacher. Treating one's students and discussion partners with dignity is prime among those. In my teaching and writing, I have done my best to exhibit that virtue - treating both my students and my fellow scholars with dignity. I remember vividly a seminar in which we were discussing something in Augustine, and one of the students in the class was being brusquely dismissive of him. Finally I said to her, "Would you say what you just said if Augustine were sitting across the table from you?" "Of course not, she replied." Enough said!

Connie Svob

- Assistant Professor of Clinical Psychology (in Psychiatry), Columbia University, USA

- Research Scientist, Research Foundation for Mental Hygiene, Columbia University Irving Medical Center

Dr. Herdt has provided an excellent rudimentary overview of the virtues. In my particular field of memory and cognitive psychology, the intellectual virtues indeed deserve greater attention. I would like to suggest that the cultivation of some virtues (e.g., *prudence*) may operate through the intellect. Thomas Aquinas suggests the two cognitive faculties upon which *prudence* relies are (1) remembrance of the past and (2) understanding of the present.[1] That is, basic human cognitive processes, such as memory and decision-making, may eventually culminate in intellect (i.e., an integrated form of knowledge). The intellect may then be further refined by being put into practice through the addition of a moral component, resulting in *prudence* – which, in its highest form, is wisdom directed through right action. The cultivation and practice of *prudence* may then help direct individuals to their ultimate end in God. By better understanding basic human

cognitive processes, we may discover more about virtue formation and its ultimate effects.

[1] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.22.1.

David Mahan

- Lecturer in Religion and Literature, Yale Divinity School, USA

- Co-Director, Rivendell Center for Theology and the Arts at Yale University

In his essay "Religion and Literature" (1935), T.S. Eliot famously (some would say *infamously*) asserts, "Though we may read literature for pleasure, … this reading never affects a sort of special sense; it affects us as entire human beings; it affects our moral and religious existence." He later adds, "It is our business, as readers of literature, to know what we like. It is our business as Christians, *as well as* readers of literature, to know what we *ought* to like" It was for this reason that in this same essay Eliot contends that "Literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint." But the problem, he continues, is that there is no longer such a shared standpoint, and as a result, the formation of moral judgments whether in literary works or from the reading of literature has disintegrated. For him, that "common code" was championed, was made coherent by religious beliefs, which secularization had undermined, substituting not necessarily immorality or amorality, but the suspension of resolute moral judgment itself.

Set Eliot's perspective alongside a claim like that of Georg Lukács who famously described the novel as inhabiting "a world that has been abandoned by God" (*The Theory of the Novel*, 1916), or the more recent views of Salman Rushdie and others that fiction is inherently secular, and we get a sense of how contested the space is when we talk about literature and morality, or in the context of this conversation, literature and virtues. Whose Virtue? Whose Morality?

Despite competing views about what literature is and what it does (or *should* do), and the sources that inform literary creation and criticism, all of these writers and thinkers would agree that literature creates a *moral space*, which is decidedly not the same thing as *teaching* particular moral values or explicitly commending certain perennial human virtues. Even Eliot distanced his views from Christian literature that was too pedantic, too unlike the literature he esteemed. What kind of moral spaces does poetry, fiction, drama, create? I would argue that what some may find to be its deficiency is in fact one of its greatest advantages in this regard: literature creates and generates *moral complexity*. Yes, the embodiment of virtuous lives (or lives in need of virtue) has affective pull that other kinds of texts do not, and for this reason we may commend literature as a distinctive vehicle for inculcating moral vision and virtuous aspirations through its characters or personae. We want to be like them (or not)! (One thinks of the heroes of great drama or of epic fantasies such as *The Lord of the Rings* here.)

But as with biblical narrative, protagonists are also fraught with their own weaknesses and moral deficiencies. Literature embodies such ambiguities and multi-valences in ways that connect with our own, usually equally fraught, moral lives. This is not to say that the ambition to live a virtuous life is treated best when that prospect is held in abeyance because of the failure to fulfill it. But to acknowledge, as literature often enables us to do, that we are complicated creatures who often find ourselves in morally ambiguous situations, as often as not the product of our own [un]doing. What literature

does distinctively, regardless of whether or not it is rooted in explicit religious commitments, is to *provoke moral urgency*. Some of the best literature in terms of the cultivation of a virtuous life is not the fiction or poetry or drama that resolve into a clear moral vision, but those which make us want to find such a vision, and to find it embodied in our own lives. In this respect, Jennifer Herdt's category of 'developing virtues' fits best with what literature can so powerfully influence.

Among the many writers I would commend on this score, I think of the Catholic fiction writers Graham Greene, Flannery O'Connor, and Walker Percy, or the agnostic genius Cormac McCarthy.

One other comment I would add, regarding 'virtuous reading,' what literary critic Alan Jacobs calls "the hermeneutics of love" in his book of that title. Although not limited to the reading of literature, this notion was born of his lifetime engagement with literary texts. Writing against a 'hermeneutics of suspicion,' Jacobs commends an approach to texts that reads critically but also *charitably*, granting to authors the same courtesy that we are called to grant persons. In the often toxic atmosphere of competitive academia, virtuous reading offers another aspiration that highlights the practice as well as the disposition of virtue in our scholarship.

Daniel Hastings

- Cecil and Ida Green Education Professor and Head, Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), USA

This is a thoughtful preview. In my own scholarship based on science and engineering, much seems very certain such as the fact that the earth is a prolate spheroid whose gravitational potential is measured and modeled. This allows us to very accurately calculate orbits for satellites. Here the truth is indisputable. I am struck by the contrast with much of the political debate in the country where basic facts are disputed and lies are accepted as truth never mind the evidence. I am at loss as how to reconcile these two different things. Could it be that greater attention to developing virtues by citizens and our institutions, as Prof Herdt implies, might go some distance towards reconciliation? Here, too, the Christian gift of discernment may be essential to help distinguish between truth and falsehood.

Hubertus Roebben

- Vice-Dean for Research and Professor for Religious Education, Katholisch-Theologische Fakultät, Universität Bonn, GERMANY

The virtues approach of colleague Herdt reminds us of important elements in the reflection on moral behavior and ethical decision-making. One of them is "human flourishing". This should be the ultimate horizon for every kind of social and political action, regardless of the worldview or religious background of individuals and communities involved. The development of cardinal virtues in family education, public schooling and the life of faith can deeply and decisively contribute to human flourishing, to what I would call "growing in shared humanity".

However, two remarks need to be made. First, I believe an *inclusive* reconfiguration of the idea of human flourishing and its accompanying virtues need to be made. By "inclusive" I mean ways in which the diversity of different options of

virtuous behavior can be compared and discussed in the light of human flourishing. How do we learn to live together with differently shaped contexts for our virtues? Being a European scholar these days, this issue is really at the heart of political concern for me and many others. And secondly, what is needed for virtues to come alive in *ambiguous* settings, such as pandemic, war, racial injustice, etc.? Which formal procedures of behavior and decision-making can support the virtuous live of politicians, researchers, doctors, soldiers, teachers, etc.?

At least two fields of application should be considered briefly here. My own doctoral research was on *moral education* in Christian perspective. I conducted research on a developmental model for becoming a virtuous person and found out that instilling virtues of trust and obedience in early childhood needs to be followed by more complex virtue sets, such as the ones mentioned by colleague Herdt (temperance, courage, justice and prudence) in adolescence and young adulthood. This implies two different modes of moral education – first by admiration of virtuous examples, later by critically communicating with these examples. The second phase is much more difficult and needs extra attention these days, so that young people can become real virtuous agents of their own lives and the lives of others.

The second field of application is *academia*. Yesterday evening, after a splendid presentation on "Identities, ambiguities and designs of meaning" (our common faculty research topic) by our colleague in patristics, we discussed the need for more space in universities and higher education to discuss complexity and to deliver "slow" results of research. We were not sure whether or not modern academic institutions with their focus on result-oriented research "outcomes" still can offer us such a safe and brave space. We decided to reconsider and reconsolidate our search for a common set of intellectual virtues for our faculty of theology and to start talking about this anew – bottom up and in mutual respect.

Stewart Gill

- Master, Queens College, University of Melbourne, AUSTRALIA

The short article on virtues resonates with me as I head up a Residential University College where our mission is to provide pastorally sensitive academic support for our students. Personally, the paper challenges me to think how I model Christian virtues to my staff and students and how I can call upon them we interpret the mission of the College. It is a particular challenge as we have recently established an institute (The Sugden Institute) in which it is envisioned as a forum for the scholarly yet accessible exploration of public concerns, premised on a sensitivity to the ongoing complexity of debate around such issues as reconciliation, diversity, sustainability and leadership.

Pauline Chiu

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Today's researchers in the sciences face pressures in a "publish or perish" research environment. In pursuit of rankings or other key performance indicators set out by meta-institutions, the university administration passes these pressures to professors and research supervisors to generate data and papers, exacerbating an already highly charged and competitive atmosphere. Under the pressure to deliver, the professor-research student relationship can devolve into a utilitarian one, and virtues stand in the way of efficiency and productivity.

Research leaders and professors need courage to stand against such pressures, to insist that research publications are not an end, but the means, and to consistently pursue nurturing compassionate mentorships for the flourishing of students, relationships which are often bypassed in efforts to become more efficient research teams.

Tyler VanderWeele

- John L. Loeb and Frances Lehman Loeb Professor of Epidemiology, Harvard University School of Public Health, USA

- Co-Director of the Initiative on Health, Religion and Spirituality and Director of the Human Flourishing Program, Harvard University

Professor Herdt describes some of why the virtues are so important in thinking about what constitutes a flourishing life. A challenging question concerns how to foster the virtues. Christian theologies of course offer accounts of transformation by the Spirit, by God's love, by following Christ's example, by suffering, etc.

Professor Herdt distinguishes between infused and what are sometimes called acquired virtues. With regard to the latter, there has been interesting work in psychology and the social sciences on interventions that can promote character development. Such interventions have been successfully evaluated in randomized trials with, for example, interventions to promote gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion. However, such "interventions" may be more difficult to conceive of for fostering the cardinal virtues (practical wisdom, justice, fortitude, and temperance). These may require longer term communities and commitments and formation. It would be interesting to understand what virtues and aspects of character can and cannot be fostered through simple interventions at the population level.

Empirical study of the virtues requires measurement which itself is challenging with respect to character. It would likewise be interesting to better understand what virtues are more, versus less, amenable to empirical assessment. I have discussed some of these issues and challenges in the pieces below:

VanderWeele, T.J. (2022). The importance, opportunities, and challenges of empirically assessing character for the promotion of flourishing. *Journal of Education*, 202:170–180.

VanderWeele, T.J. (2022). Character and Human Flourishing. Psychology Today, August 2021.

Allan Bell

- Emeritus Professor of Language & Communication, Auckland University of Technology, NEW ZEALAND

- Senior Research Fellow at Laidlaw College, Auckland

- Honorary Research Professor in the School of English, University of Hong Kong

This is a wonderfully compressed piece of writing, encapsulating so much about the virtues in its brief compass, and

making me eager to see the full exposition that will follow. Full thanks to the author.

As a sociolinguist, whose interest is in the workings of language and speech in society, this inspires me to wonder where speaking and listening may fit among the virtues. Undoubtedly good speaking is a virtue: Jesus emphasised the importance of speaking truly, kindly and wholesomely from the heart, and the letter of James focuses extensively on traits of good and bad speaking.

Complementarily, listening is a virtue which we are to cultivate. Consider how few people you know who are genuinely good listeners rather than using what you say as a platform for what they themselves want to say next. Jesus also stressed listenership: 'Let those who have ears, hear!' And James urged his readers to be 'quick to listen, slow to speak'. Good listenership is the often unrecognized foundation of good interpersonal and institutional relationships, including in the academy.

Both individually and institutionally, then, I believe good speaking and good listening are among the virtues, although I am unsure exactly where they would fit in the schemas Professor Herdt lays out. They certainly have to do with kindness, justice and love, and we can take it that they are both infused and developed.

Priscila Vieira Souza

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- Postdoctoral Fellow at School of Communication in the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (CAPES/PNPD), BRAZIL

I found Professor Herdt's brief very stimulating, especially as it attempts to connect the issues of virtue and institutions. I will reflect upon this relation adding some postcolonial concerns to it, and developing my comments from the interconnections between key issues such as: technique; social media; public life/politics; and postcolonial institutions.

I vividly remember attending several debates around **technique** during my undergraduate journalism studies. After all, the development of technology is a condition of possibility for social communication. Later on my academic career, as a Researcher in the field of *Media, Religion and Culture*, I have studied Evangelical media in Brazil from the 20th to the 21st century. I concluded, then, that there was an understanding among this social group that technologies were neutral, and this was based upon a clear distinction between technique and content – with the later been considered as more valuable. Virtue was in the content. But Professor Herdt's brief repositioned this relation: is technology neutral with respect to morals or virtues?

This question (partially) leads me to my second strand of considerations: **social media and public life**. I say partially, because technique and technology are an indispensable part of social media – and as consequence, for contemporary public life. But technology is not the only component of social media – which is a complex kind of media (here I will drop the use of the notion of *techne* because social media begins when there is a fusion between technique and *logos*). There are technological and human elements in this space, where there seems to be a blurring between humanity and technology. Are these technological elements neutral? Can they be said to be virtuous or evil? In media, the human is

everyday more similar to his or her own technological production. Are social exclusion, the growth of individualism, the impossibility of dialogue, the fostering of extremism to be considered technological phenomena only? Or are they human phenomena? Or do they belong to the media alone? Or is media per se also capable of generating communities and fostering affection and actions of compassion, mutual recognition, and happiness? Are they capable of cultivating virtues? Recently I have started research on the realities of dissemination of Fake News among Evangelicals in Brazil. It is surprising to see how deep this social group was connected to the dissemination of disinformation that has taken over the country since the Presidential elections of 2018. Questions related to virtues, including (or specially) theological ones, are important to reflect on these relations. Might the cultivation of virtues in individuals and institutions like the media forestall or prevent fake news or distortion of news?

The relation between virtues and **institutions** is particularly intriguing. Here, postcolonialism could – or perhaps, should – be a starting point. This might sound strange in western societies, in countries religiously Christian and historically part of empires. But for a colonized citizen of a former colony, in countries determined by huge social inequalities, to raise the question about the possibility of *virtue* in institutions (especially political or governmental institutions) is to risk complete misunderstanding or being made the object of ridicule. States and their apparatus are considered intrinsically unjust and beyond fixing. There is no doubt about it. The majority of the population does not feel represented by their institutions and does not effectively participate in these institutions. That might be the reason why anti-corruption discourses are so attractive – even when coming from the most corrupted mouths. In Brazil, the "morality of politics" is a vivid and common expression in political discourse. However, it is a morality that is never close, never effective and eventually serves purposes that are anti-political, flirting with and feeding on fascist experiences of our recent history. In Brazil, the question about the possibility of overlap between virtue and politics, virtue and social institutions, is urgent. Can calling out vices in institutions, can building virtuous institutions, be even imagined?

Finally, follows the question about virtue and **academia**. Social injustices seem to reproduce themselves in academia. There are a few possible causes for this such as lack of due care, social reproduction, absence of specific public policies, or the perpetuation of class privileges. A Brazilian intellectual used to say that the poor quality of public education (basic, fundamental, secondary and higher) was "not a problem, but a project". When the effects of the latest and most significant policies of granting access to higher education for low-income families were slowing in the country, they were interrupted by two political coups (2016 and 2018).

The questions I raise in all these cases: Is it really possible to think about institutions that contribute to the flourishing of virtues? Or, more specifically, is virtue capable of redeeming institutions that build upon colonialism, oppression and injustice?

Looking forward for the long version.

K. K. Yeo

- Harry R. Kendall Professor of New Testament at Garrett-Evangelical Seminary

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I appreciate Prof. Herdt's theoretical and practical considerations on the life of virtues. Her inspiring work regarding the pagan-Christian sources in western classical traditions on virtue ethics encourages me to explore the interplay of philosophical and religious virtue traditions in other parts of the world. Following the logic of Herdt's work on engagement of New Testament writers with Greek thinkers, I believe there is a similar logic and method confronting biblical virtue ethics in many cross-cultural contexts, not least two radically divergent traditions in ancient histories.

1) The Old Testament intertextual world reveals that the Yahwistic theological ethicists were in conversation with Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature, raising the questions: (a) why and how can a monotheistic faith anchor its ethical discourse on virtuous life in relation to writings in its surrounding Mesopotamian polytheistic traditions; and (b) why and how are polytheistic sources on virtues used by biblical ethicists as mediums of God's revelation?

2) This method and content extends to Chinese and global Christians as they undertake cross-disciplinary work that links Pauline theology to Confucian ethics on the virtues. The classical Confucian canon is extra-biblical and pre-biblical (canonically), yet in Chinese translations of the Bible both canons encounter and intertwine with each other. Confucian ethical semantics are used in Chinese Bibles to express and understand biblical thought, including ways to re-interpret Confucian virtues in light of the God/Christ/Spirit story even though the concepts of Tian or Heaven in Confucianism are largely impersonal although not anti-theist. This opens up the possibility of a systematic comparison between Christian virtues and the Confucian "four cardinal principles and eight virtues"—Li (propriety, rites), Yi (righteousness, justice), Lian (integrity), Chi (shame); Zhong (loyalty), Xiao (filial piety), Ren (humanity, benevolence), Ai (love), Xin (trustworthiness). Despite what may appear to be a mismatch between two virtue traditions, I consider there is a mutually enriching and fruitful way of bringing these into conversation, for example, between Li and Law, Ren and Spirit, Shame and the Cross.

My hope is that this may stimulate other disciplines to discern various robust methods of engagement between theology and our the diverse fields of study exemplified by the scholars within GFI.

Nicholas Aroney

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In her essay on *The Virtues*, Professor Herdt offers a warm and engaging account of the nature and importance of moral character in Christian ethics. In this short comment, I offer a brief exploration of one of the important observations with which she begins her essay.

Professor Herdt commences by pointing out that the rules or principles that define good conduct require people capable of putting them into practice. Principles, she notes, "must be interpreted in order to be applied, and this requires good judgement". "Without the virtues," she continues, "no moral code, however perfect, can ensure that we act well."

Despite the sense that rule-based systems of morality are somehow opposed to character-based systems of morality, it seems that both rules and character are essential components of ethical behaviour. Thomas Aquinas particularly suggests this in his discussion of the virtue of prudence. Following Aristotle, he affirms that "prudence is right reason applied to action", but he then points out that actions are singular or particular, and that prudence consists in the

application of "universal rules to particular cases" (*Summa Theologica* II-II, 47.2 and 47.3). Accordingly, the prudent person must "know both the universal principles of reason, and the singulars about which actions are concerned" (ST II-II, 47.3).

This could be taken to suggest that good actions are simply a matter of following rules, but Aquinas's point is more subtle than this. The particulars to which the universal rules are to be applied are "contingent", "infinite in number" and "contain many combinations of circumstances" (ST II-II, 45.5, 47.3 and 49.7). It follows that particular cases involve factual situations of great complexity and variability, which test the limits of human memory and understanding (ST II-II, 49.1 and 49.2), and which require us to be solicitous, teachable, circumspect and cautious in our practical judgments (ST II-II, 47.9, ST II-II, 49.3, 49.7 and 49.8). As human beings limited in time and place, we find it practically necessary to rely on an understanding of these matters derived from experience, focusing on what is true and right "in the majority of cases" (ST II-II, 49.1).

In many situations, we exercise judgment according to these commonplace "rules of thumb", but there are also situations in which the common rules are insufficient or inapposite, in which cases we have to judge according to higher and more universal principles (ST II-II, 51.3 and 51.4). Accordingly, while prudence consists in the application of universal rules to particular cases, it requires considerable qualities of character to discern, judge and act rightly. Without them, we are prone to allow impulses of will and passion, as well as thoughtlessness, inconstancy and negligence, to impel us into acting carelessly, rashly or precipitously, and thus imprudently (ST II-II, 53.3, 53.4, 53.5 and 54.1).

Accordingly, acting rightly is not simply a matter of applying rules to factual situations. It requires good judgment, which is a quality of character. This brings into a view another implication. Prudential judgment is needed in different spheres of life, one of which is the governance of a political community, which Aquinas calls the "regnative" species of prudence (ST II-II, 50.1), together with the corresponding virtue of being a good subject, which Aquinas calls the "political" species of prudence (ST II-II, 50.2). By maintaining that the virtue of prudence extends to both the responsibility of governing and the responsibility of obeying, Aquinas underscores that qualities of character are needed in both ruler and ruled.

It follows that prudent governance will not consist simply in the multiplication of rules in order to secure good conduct. The particular situations to which rules must be applied are too contingent and complex for a discrete set of rules, no matter how sophisticated and comprehensive, to provide sufficient specific guidance for good conduct in every situation that will arise. Moreover, the individuals to whom these rules are addressed are not irrational or inanimate beings set in motion by simple command; rather, as free and responsible agents, they are moved by the commands of others only as they move themselves through the exercise of their own responsible free will (ST II-II, 50.2).

Without some rectitude in the population, no laws will cause us to obey, or to obey well. Merely multiplying the rules, and backing them with sanctions, may impel a degree of outward obedience, but not the sort of good conduct that is the mark of a person of good character. Indeed, the mere multiplication of rules can have many unintended bad consequences, and serve to burden those of good will without effectively controlling the behaviour of those who care less.

And yet one of the characteristics of our time, as Oliver O'Donovan has pointed out, has been an "incessant stream of lawmaking". [1] The quantity and complexity of the law continues to increase without measure. In the decade of the 1990s, the Australian Parliament, for example, enacted over 54,000 pages of legislation. [2] It seems we live in an age of "unbounded confidence in the value and efficacy of law as an engine of social and moral improvement", as one

experienced jurist has put it. [3]

However, as Professor Herdt has pointed out, the codes of conduct that govern behaviour require people capable of putting them into practice. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, having largely abandoned interest or hope in virtue, our governments have turned to law as their resource of first and final resort. But if personal character is a necessary basis for the development of healthy societies, then governments need to allow more space, and to actively encourage, the development of character in the population generally.

How is this to be done? [4] Governments need to recognise and support the vital contributions made by healthy families, vibrant local communities and wider institutions of civil society to the development of good character. Education can play an important role, but only if it is conceived not only as an undertaking directed to the transference of knowledge and the acquisition skills, but also to the inculcation of wisdom and virtue. But even education is insufficient if it doesn't grapple with the deepest drivers of human motivation and behaviour.

Socrates and Plato recognised that the development of good character requires a conversion of the soul. [5] However, they also considered that the ultimate cause of human failing is ignorance because human beings by nature pursue that which they consider to be good. Evil occurs, therefore, because we are ignorant of the truly good, and so we pursue that which is evil, mistaking it for good. And thus the remedy lies in acquiring knowledge. [6]

Augustine of Hippo begged to differ. He considered that a truly good character requires a conversion of the soul that goes further than anything Socrates or Plato imagined. This is because Augustine recognised that the human soul is *not* naturally moved towards the good. [7] The fundamental problem of human nature is not a deficiency of the mind; rather, it is a defect of the will. He believed that human pride is our fundamental problem, and that humility must be the first and essential step towards our moral improvement. As Alasdair MacIntyre has explained, it is only through a 'transformation of the will from a state of pride to one of humility that the intelligence can be rightly directed'. For the will 'is more fundamental than intelligence and thinking undirected by a will informed by humility will always be apt to go astray'. [8]

Augustine offered a striking image of this problem when he wrote of 'Pleasure', sitting 'like a voluptuous queen on a royal throne', with all the virtues arrayed around her as her attendant handmaidens, ready to do whatever she might command. [9] The image suggests that a person might adopt certain virtuous practices—for example, by being wise, moderate and fair in his dealings with other people—but not out of the goodness of his heart, nor even for the good of those people, but only as means of satisfying his selfish desires. Augustine points out that human pride and the desire for glory works the same way. These motivate us not to do good for its own sake but only to do good—or more precisely, to *appear* to do good—so that others will think well of us and we will get more out of them. In this way, human pride is the deepest root of our problems, for it infects us even at our very best moments when we appear to be doing good. But because the desire for glory and honour only motivates us to appear to be good, it doesn't motivate us to do what is right when no one is looking, when no one sees, or when we can get away with it. And herein lies the root of all our problems.

This is why even education cannot provide the deepest solution to our problems. For Augustine, the solution lay in religion, properly understood. Religion in this sense goes further than education, because it forces us to ask deep questions about our motivations. It forces us to self-examination. And it challenges us to confess and to repent—not just to confess the truth about our outward actions and behaviours, but to repent of our darkest inward thoughts and desires. It sets before

us a model not of self-justification and self-rationalisation, but of candid acknowledgement of our failures. [10] And it presses us to admit that we are in need of forgiveness, and that we need to forgive one-another. [11]

Religion in this sense is more than mere education and it is much more than mere law. Education without religion can only inform the mind and train the hand; it cannot convert the soul. Law without religion can only require outward conformity and punish when there is disobedience; it cannot redirect the heart. Law and education therefore need to leave room for religion, so that religion can do what it alone is capable of: soften the heart and redirect the will.

[1] Oliver O'Donovan, "Government as Judgment", *First Things*, April 1999.

[2] Michael McHugh, "The Growth of Legislation and Litigation" (1995) 69(1) *Australian Law Journal* 37.

[3] Jonathan Sumption, "The Limits of Law," in Barber, Ekins and Yowell (eds), *Lord Sumption and the Limits of the Law*, Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2016.

[4] This section draws on Nicholas Aroney, 'Law, Education and Religion – Pathways to the Good Society?' (2020) 252 *St Marks Review* 19.

[5] Plato, *Republic*, Bk VII, 518b-d.

[6] Plato, *Protagoras*, 352c, 358b-d.

[7] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (London: Duckworth, 1990) 84.

[8] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry*, 91.

[9] Augustine, *City of God*, Bk V, ch 20.

[10] *Luke* 18:9-14.

[11] *Matthew* 18:21-35.

Judy Dean

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I have two responses to Jennifer Herdt's stimulating Preview on the virtues. One speaks to the academic life, the other to my discipline of economics.

In discussing "intellectual virtues," Herdt encourages us to be attentive to how our scholarship can contribute to human flourishing. Economic research has often done this in surprising ways. For example, economists have shown that actions done out of self-interest can promote widespread access to material goods through mutual exchange. They've also shown that competition can promote better use of scarce resources, so that goods are better quality and more affordable for the broad population. Interestingly, even in its terminology, economics recognizes the importance of pursuing "goods," mitigating "bads" (e.g. pollution), and having practical wisdom in stewarding our world's scarce resources. As Adam Smith so poignantly stated it long ago, "no society can surely be flourishing and happy of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable."

With respect to academic life, virtues do indeed enable flourishing! Perhaps it is not unique to my field of economics, but

early on I noticed two virtues conspicuous by their absence in many academic and professional contexts—humility and selflessness. Self-promotion was applauded and seemed to advance people in their careers. Young scholars were pressured to view their academic work as the sole purpose of their lives. The results were often derision of colleagues, loss of self-worth, illness, and no time for the needs of others. How can we help cultivate the virtues and replace toxicity with flourishing?

Manuel David Morales

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- Data Scientist, State Council of Public Safety, Jalisco State Government, Mexico.

I highly appreciate Jennifer Herdt's Preview of The Virtues.

The understanding of virtue ethics in terms of agents acting according to their moral character, reminded me a lot what was proposed by theologian Stanley Hauerwas as an important component of his confessional postmodernism. Moreover, as a Christian scientist, constantly seeking to give meaning to my beliefs according to our scientific age, I appreciate this emphasis on agency and character because it creates a healthy distance from substantialist views of the self.

Like many open and relational Christian thinkers, I am inclined to understand reality, including ourselves, as an interconnected wholeness. In communities such as the Church, a country, or even academia, there is a co-dependency among individuals. This is coherent with what we know from current natural/social sciences, and even, with what Jesus teaches us regarding the two most important commandments (Matthew 22:36-40). Our world is social, we live in relation to God and to our neighbors, and these relationships happen in a temporal unfolding.

A question I raise for Professor Herdt: How can the idea of virtues development include a relational dimension beyond the process of admiration for virtuous exemplars? I suspect that a mere process of admiration would not ensure that behind that process there is a true relational understanding of virtues. In other words: Are we talking about a true altruistic/empathetic process and not an imitation motivated, for instance, by narcissistic purposes without a self-reflection about the relational nature of virtues? If so, it would be very important to explain why it is the case.

An answer to the above question would be highly relevant if we think in current trends in science and technology, such as the open science movement, in which open and relational Christian views could play a significant role, as I recently outlined in a collaborative work edited by Tim Reddish, Bonnie Rambob, Fran Stedman, and Thomas Jay Oord (Partnering with God: Exploring Collaboration in Open and Relational Theology, SacraSage Press, 2021). I argue that open and relational Christians can provide a deeper meaning to limited forms of communities involved in the open science movement, and so the movement genuinely reaches ethical virtues as cooperation, inclusion, and openness.

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