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Abhi Kalpeshkumar Ruparelia
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Virtue, Agency, and the Silence of Reasons

by

Abhi Kalpeshkumar Ruparelia

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Advisor: Dr. Nancy Schauber

Virtue, Agency, and the Silence of Reasons

Introduction¹

In the Aristotelian tradition, virtue ethicists often distinguish virtue from continence. Virtue is the ideal state of character, continence is the good but inferior character. While both virtuous and continent agents act in a way that is (morally) correct, the virtuous person is considered most praiseworthy because she feels the right way about acting well. She takes pleasure in performing virtuous actions and is never tempted by considerations that compete with virtue. In contrast, the continent person feels ambivalent about performing virtuous actions. He is someone who possesses base appetites and is often tempted by them (and pained by their deprivation). Therefore, even though he performs virtuous actions, he finds them difficult and has to struggle with competing inclinations.

Essentially, then, virtue is a state of internal harmony while continence is that of inner conflict. If this distinctively Aristotelian picture of virtue and continence is right, it raises an important question about the psychological differences between the two agents: How exactly do we explain the virtuous person's supposed invulnerability to temptation? Is this person so good that the thought of performing a less than noble action never enters her mind? Does this person only dream chaste dreams?

On one interpretation of Aristotle advanced by John McDowell, the difference between the virtuous and the continent person lies in their reasons for action.² The fully virtuous person is never tempted by non-virtuous considerations because she does not view them as reasons for action.

¹I owe a debt of gratitude to Nancy Schaubert, Karin Boxer, Will Reckner, Javier Hidalgo, Jessica Flanigan, Nikhil Krishnan, Kevin Scharp, and Andrew Alwood for their helpful comments, conversations, and insights on various versions of this paper.

² J. McDowell (1998); All references to McDowell, unless otherwise stated, are in his *Mind, Value, and Reality*

McDowell explains this phenomenon metaphorically. When the virtuous person deliberates about a course of action, she never sees any conflict between the requirements of virtue and other competing considerations, because for her, the requirements of virtue *silence* the competing considerations.³ I call this the “silencing thesis.”

In this essay, I argue that the silencing thesis presents us with a philosophically unattractive picture of virtuous agency. In Section 1, I discuss the philosophical problem that McDowell is trying to solve (i.e. how to understand the virtue/continence distinction) and how his view solves it. In Section 2, I raise an initial objection against the silencing thesis. I argue that the silencing thesis commits us to a psychologically implausible understanding of virtuous agency. I also provide here a diagnosis of what I take to be the main problematic features of McDowell’s view. In Section 3, I provide a novel response on McDowell’s behalf and argue against it. I maintain that while McDowell can escape my initial charge of psychological implausibility, he can only do so at the cost of undermining the praiseworthiness of the virtuous person. In Section 4, I offer concluding reflections on how to make McDowell’s view more amenable to the sorts of objections I outline in this paper.

A preliminary note before beginning: McDowell offers his view of silencing as an interpretation of Aristotle’s distinction between virtue and continence in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE). However, some features of his view appear to diverge from Aristotle (see esp. Section 2.1 for a detailed treatment of these features). This discrepancy has led several philosophers to treat McDowell’s view as an independent proposal for virtuous agency.⁴ For my purposes, I treat McDowell’s view as a standalone proposal that also has its roots in Aristotle.

1. The Problem and The Solution

³ J. McDowell (1998), pp. 77-94, 50-76 and 3-22, respectively

⁴ See, for instance, A. M. Baxley (2007) and K. Stohr (2003)

In “Virtue and Reason,” McDowell grapples with the problem of what constitutes a virtuous agent, in contrast to the merely continent agent.⁵ Following Aristotle, McDowell’s account relies on the role of perception in distinguishing virtue from continence.⁶ For McDowell, there is a fundamental difference between the perceptions of virtuous and continent agents – they simply ‘see’ situations differently. McDowell insists that instead of relying on some codifiable, universal principles of conduct, the virtuous person acts on a standard of right behavior that is dependent on the particular features of disparate circumstances. Accordingly, the virtuous person – and only that type of person – is able to ‘perceive’ the moral demands of a situation by recognizing its morally salient features. Furthermore, McDowell thinks that there is a connection between the virtuous person’s perception and motivation.⁷ The virtuous person’s perception, in combination with her beliefs, is motivationally efficacious (barring any external constraints). Therefore, her correct identification of the morally salient features in a situation reliably leads her to act virtuously. This perceptual ability, combined with McDowell’s view of motivation, is what explains the virtuous person’s disposition to act admirably.

McDowell’s picture of virtue is designed to show the appeal of the Socratic thesis that virtue is knowledge. On this picture, being virtuous is not a matter of blind habit or the correct application of ethical principles, but of being a certain sort of person, namely someone who views situations in a distinctive manner. McDowell uses the example of a kind person to explain this point. Such a person has what he calls a “reliable sensitivity” to act kindly – that is, an ability to “get things right.”⁸ The kind person *knows* when she is confronted with a situation that requires her to act kindly. When walking on the road, if this person comes across a weeping child, her

⁵ J. McDowell (1998)

⁶ NE 1126b

⁷ J. McDowell (1998), pp.80-81

⁸ Ibid, p. 54

sensitivity rightly singles out this situation as the one which requires her to help. In this sense, her reliable sensitivity is a kind of perceptual capacity. McDowell further identifies this sensitivity in terms of perceptual knowledge and takes its deliverances to be nothing but “cases” of this knowledge.⁹

Here is a puzzle: intuitively, we might think it is possible for a continent person to have the exact same perception of a situation as the virtuous person and yet see no reason to act as the virtuous person does. How do we explain this difference? McDowell’s response comes in two parts. First, he rejects the intuitive view that virtuous and continent agents share the same perceptions.¹⁰ That is, even though virtuous and continent agents perceive the same object, the continent person’s perception is “clouded” or “unfocused” by “the impact of a desire to do otherwise.”¹¹ We might understand this point using an analogy. The continent person is like someone suffering from a cataract. A cataract patient’s vision will be hazy, in the literal sense of the word, causing difficulties in viewing everyday objects that would be clearly visible to the normal eye. Analogously, we might say that the continent person suffers from a *moral* cataract, which prevents him from viewing fully the morally relevant features of a situation.

Second, given McDowell’s view of motivation, perceptual judgements need not be accompanied by a desire or a non-cognitive pro-attitude to move the agent to action. The agent’s judgements, combined with her beliefs, are sufficient for action (except when there are any external constraints).¹² The clear-sighted virtuous person, since she keeps her attention fixed only on the morally relevant features, reliably performs right actions every time. The continent person, owing to his unfocussed perception, is motivated to act in several different ways at the same time. This

⁹ Ibid, p. 51

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 80

¹¹ Ibid, p. 54

¹² Ibid, pp. 78-79

is why the virtuous person is at harmony, while the continent person is conflicted. In sum, the continent person's faulty perception, combined with McDowell's view of motivation, elicits a different response than it would from the virtuous person. This, as I understand it, is how McDowell characterizes the virtuous person's disposition to act rightly and distinguishes virtue from continence.

So far, though, I have said nothing about the virtuous person's reasons for action or the silencing thesis. I will now focus on these questions as they pertain to the virtue/continence distinction. McDowell explains the idea of silencing using an example. When the virtuous person is faced with the choice of sleeping with someone she ought not to, she will not be tempted by the thought of obtaining sexual pleasure. But this is not because her libido is undemanding or that she sees no value in the pleasure of sex. Rather, her clear perception of the requirements of virtue "insulate[s] the attractions of competing courses of action from generating actual urges to pursue them."¹³ And further, the missed opportunity of obtaining sexual pleasure will not count as an admitted loss, counterbalanced by her sense of benefit in acting temperately. Rather, when the action in question involves flouting the requirements of virtue, missing the opportunity involves "no loss at all."¹⁴ McDowell puts the point nicely:¹⁵

"What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul?" Obviously we are not meant to answer, "The profits are outweighed by counterbalancing losses." The intended answer is "nothing." At that price, whatever one might achieve simply does not count as profit. Or, in the terminology of reasons: the attractions of whatever wickedness might bring do not constitute some reason for wickedness, which is, however, overridden

¹³ J. McDowell (2009), p. 67

¹⁴ J. McDowell (1998), p. 17

¹⁵ McDowell's point about the absence of losses might seem confusing at first. When McDowell talks about the virtuous person's invulnerability to losses, he seems to suggest at some places that the virtuous person does not suffer any losses *simpliciter* (see J. McDowell (1998) p. 17). At other places, however, he talks about the virtuous person suffering no "genuine losses" (see J. McDowell (1998) p. 17). McDowell does not explain what it means to suffer a "genuine" loss (as opposed to an ordinary one), but for our purposes, we can treat a "genuine" loss as a loss which really matters to the virtuous person.

by the reasons against it; rather, given that they are achieved by wickedness, those attractive outcomes do not count as reasons at all.”¹⁶

McDowell’s point about the absence of losses is crucial and I will come back to it. But for now, we can understand the idea of silencing in two ways. These two ways correspond to what philosophers often think of as the two types of reasons for action. Following Michael Smith, we can distinguish between two types of practical reasons: normative and motivating reasons. Smith explains them in the following manner:

“To say that someone has a normative reason to Φ is to say that there is some normative requirement that she Φ ’s and is thus to say that her Φ -ing is justified from the perspective of [some] normative system.”¹⁷

In contrast, for an agent to have a motivating reason to do something is to say that she is in a mental state that is *explanatory* of her doing that thing. A normative reason, thus, is used to show that the action in question is justified (from some normative perspective), whereas a motivating reason is a psychological state that explains the action.

Coming back to silencing, McDowell argues that when the requirements of virtue are pitted against competing non-virtuous considerations, the virtuous person will not view the latter as reasons for action. McDowell says:

“To embrace a specific conception of eudaimonia is to see the relevant reasons for acting, on occasions when they co-exist with considerations that on their own would be reasons for acting otherwise, as, not overriding, but silencing those other considerations - as bringing it about that, in the circumstances, *they are not reasons at all.*”¹⁸

Understood in terms of normative reasons, when a non-virtuous consideration is silenced in this manner, it loses its normative force for the agent. As a result, the agent does not consider that non-virtuous consideration a normative reason for action.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 90

¹⁷ M Smith (1995), p. 95; see also S Stark (2001)

¹⁸ J McDowell (1998) p. 17; my italics

McDowell's point about silencing can also be construed in motivational terms. He argues that if the requirements of virtue silence a non-virtuous consideration, the virtuous agent will not be *tempted* to act on that consideration. In terms of motivating reasons, when a non-virtuous consideration is motivationally silenced, it stops holding any motivational weight in the agent's deliberation.

To be clear, for the virtuous person, both types of silencing go hand-in-hand. They are not competing explanations, but complementary ways of understanding the same phenomenon. That is, it is because the virtuous person does not perceive non-virtuous considerations as reasons for action that she will not be tempted to act on them. Less metaphorically, we might say that she recognizes only those reasons for action that are in accord with virtue and these reasons perform both normative and motivating functions for her. This is why she never experiences contrary inclinations and is not conflicted about acting virtuously. In contrast, for the continent person, the reasons competing with virtue are not silenced so he lacks this harmony between normative and motivating reasons. Therefore, he recognizes normative *and* motivating reasons that compete with virtue and only arrives at the correct judgement by weighing them against one another.

So far, I have laid out McDowell's understanding of the virtue/continence distinction and his thesis of silencing. I would now like to raise an initial problem with this thesis. This problem is that the silencing thesis results in a psychologically implausible and counter-intuitive picture of virtuous agency.

2. An Initial Objection

It seems that there are some obvious advantages to construing the virtue/continence distinction in terms of silencing. Most notably, it helps us explain those cases where the requirements of virtue should rightly block competing considerations from generating reasons for

action. When these considerations are outright immoral or vicious, under the circumstances, it would be morally inappropriate for the virtuous person to recognize them as reasons or consider missing out on them as genuine losses.¹⁹ For instance, if the virtuous person can save a drowning baby at the cost of ruining her new jacket, it would be wrong for her to count this as a reason for not jumping in the water. Of course, what makes this reason morally objectionable is not just the triviality of the cost involved, but also the nature of the circumstances. In a different situation, where less is at stake, it might count as a perfectly legitimate reason for not jumping, e.g. the virtuous person will ruin her new jacket by participating in a mud wrestling competition with her friends.

Beyond such marginal cases, however, it seems implausible to me that the virtuous person should silence non-virtuous considerations (or not count their upshots genuine losses) every time virtue is at stake. Indeed, the recent work on the silencing thesis is filled with examples where it would be excessive, inappropriate, or plainly wrong to silence any non-virtuous consideration that competes with virtue.²⁰ Let us consider some examples to understand this point.

Imagine an honest shopkeeper whose business is on the verge of bankruptcy.²¹ Since this person is honest, the thought of short-charging his customers or having his creditors killed would not even *occur* to him. However, when all the efforts to save his business fail, a less scrupulous friend suggests that he defraud his creditors. But again, this person's virtuous nature will exclude this possibility from the range of options he considers seriously. At this point, does he suppose that in ignoring the only chance to save his business, he risks no "genuine" losses (cf. 20)?

¹⁹ What makes a loss "genuine," as far as I understand it, is whether or not the loss matters to the virtuous person. I borrow this interpretation from Seidman (2005), p. 70

²⁰ K. Stohr (2003), A. M. Baxley (2007), N. Schuster (2020)

²¹ I borrow this example from J. Seidman (2005), p. 72

Our intuitions against silencing become stronger as we fill the story with richer detail: the shop is the only source of livelihood for him and his family, and without it, he cannot afford to pay for his mortgage. If we are committed to denying that losing the shop can count as a genuine loss for him, do we not render the shopkeeper's previous deliberative efforts unintelligible? Indeed, if losing his business would not matter to him, why did he struggle so much to keep it afloat in the first place? Perhaps we might say that in comparison to the loss that he would suffer by acting against his virtue, the loss he suffers by foregoing his shop pales in significance. But the lesser of two losses is still a loss.

Similarly, imagine that someone has a deep and abiding love for a woman who happens to be his best friend's partner (let us stipulate that he came to have these feelings towards her before she got involved with his best friend).²² He now has the opportunity to be with this woman but chooses not to pursue her. Should we not count this person's sacrifice of something so profound as love a genuine loss? McDowell himself offers the Aristotelian example of a courageous soldier who, even as she faces the risk of death in battle, remains serene.²³ To her, the value of her life and health "count for nothing" as she faces the enemy.²⁴ In all such cases, it seems counter-intuitive to suggest that acting virtuously does not involve a genuine loss for the virtuous person.

But, of course, just because a view leads to counter-intuitive results does not automatically mean that we should reject it. We must examine *why* McDowell's view leads to such results, and what he can do to overcome this shortcoming. To that end, let us first consider where McDowell's view goes wrong.

2.1. Why Silencing is Problematic: A Diagnosis

²² I borrow this example from A. M. Baxley (2007) p. 415

²³ J. McDowell (1998), p. 92

²⁴ Ibid

I argued in the previous section that McDowell's view of silencing is problematic because it leads to an implausible and counter-intuitive picture of virtuous agency. In this section, I investigate the particular features of this thesis that entail its seemingly problematic results.

I think the main culprit in McDowell's silencing thesis is his commitment to the view that when acting virtuously involves sacrificing something that might appear to us as extremely valuable, this does not constitute a genuine loss for the virtuous person. The only exceptions to this commitment are 'tragic predicaments,' where no acceptable course of action is available to an agent and it is impossible to act virtuously without suffering a great loss.²⁵ As McDowell argues, a virtuous life is the "most satisfying life possible" and "can contain no ground for regret, in spite of great ill-fortune."²⁶ All these claims, McDowell argues, simply follow from his interpretation of Aristotle's remarks about the self-sufficiency of virtue and the role of regret in a virtuous life. But surely, these claims seem closer to the Socratic ideal that "no evil can happen to a good man either in life or in death"²⁷ – a view that Aristotle rejects.²⁸ So, we might press further, how *exactly* does McDowell justify such a radical reading of Aristotle?

As I understand him, McDowell justifies his reading of Aristotle on two grounds. First, he appeals to Aristotle's claim that a life in accordance with the virtues is eudaimon, and that such a life is self-sufficient.²⁹ McDowell understands his view of genuine losses to simply be a "rewording" of Aristotle's claim about the self-sufficiency of a virtuous life.³⁰ A self-sufficient life, McDowell claims, is maximally desirable and "lacking in nothing."³¹ Hence, when acting

²⁵ J. McDowell (2009), p. 73

²⁶ J. McDowell (1998), p. 18; As I will argue shortly, these claims aren't exactly Aristotle's own (insofar as one could find textual evidence for them), but McDowell takes himself to be *interpreting* Aristotle in offering them.

²⁷ Plato, The Apology 41c8-d2

²⁸ NE 1153b19-21

²⁹ T. H. Irwin (2006), p. 185, in C. Macdonald and G. Macdonald (2006)

³⁰ J. McDowell (2006), p. 199, in C. Macdonald and G. Macdonald (2006)

³¹ Ibid, pp. 199-200

virtuously requires the virtuous person to give up something of value – because her life is already fully sufficient – this sacrifice would not matter to her. McDowell further explains this self-sufficiency using the silencing thesis.

“A life made up of actions in accordance with excellence would lack something, in the area of (the relevant kind of) desirability, only if the attractions of courses of action not pursued in it were reasons for pursuing them. But according to the thesis of... silencing they are not, so it does not lack anything in the relevant sense.”³²

In other words, a life in accordance with the virtues would not be sufficient if one had reasons to pursue something that is absent from such a life. But due to silencing, the virtuous person has no reasons to pursue anything other than the virtuous course of action. Hence, it follows that a virtuous life is self-sufficient. This is why the virtuous person cannot suffer genuine losses by acting in accordance with the virtues.

McDowell also offers a second justification in favor of his view of genuine losses. In his “The Role of Eudaimonia in Aristotle's Ethics” McDowell argues that when Aristotle talks about prudential concepts like ‘benefit,’ ‘advantage,’ ‘loss,’ ‘harm’ etc., in connection with the role of external goods in a virtuous life, there are “strains” and “slides” in his remarks.³³ On a first look, it might appear as though Aristotle is inconsistent about his employment of prudential concepts. However, McDowell thinks that there is another explanation.

On McDowell’s proposal, Aristotle tends to slide unwittingly between two senses of the prudential concepts.³⁴ The first sense is the ordinary employment. But the second sense is a special, “derivative” employment. McDowell claims that Aristotle does not see clearly that the two senses are needed to make his position consistent. So this is a distinction that he draws *on Aristotle’s*

³² Ibid, p. 199

³³ See J. McDowell (1998), p. 18 for more details on these strains and slides

³⁴ Ibid, p. 18

*behalf*³⁵ (this is one of those ‘divergences’ I mentioned earlier that has led philosophers to interpret McDowell’s view as a standalone proposal, rather than a strict interpretation of Aristotle). As McDowell explains it, the derivative employment of prudential concepts is something that only the virtuous person is equipped to do. As a result, one’s usage of these concepts is guided not by a point of view external to the virtuous person’s conception of loss and gain, but by the virtuous person’s *own* conception.³⁶

But what exactly is this “derivative” sense? And how different is it from the ordinary sense? Consider the prudential concept of ‘advantage.’ On the ordinary employment, something would be advantageous, if it (roughly) benefits us. But when this concept is employed in the intended derivative sense, that thing would count as beneficial *if and only if* it does not involve flouting the requirements of virtue. As a result, the honest person who comes across an abandoned wallet will *not* think of herself as obtaining a benefit (in the derivative sense, as opposed to the ordinary sense) because the wallet is not hers and it would be wrong to appropriate it. McDowell says:

“If someone really embraces a specific conception of human excellence, however grounded, then that will of itself equip him to understand special employments of the typical notions of “prudential” reasoning—the notions of benefit, advantage, harm, loss, and so forth—according to which (for instance) no payoff from flouting a requirement of excellence, however desirable... can count as a genuine advantage; and, conversely, no sacrifice necessitated by the life of excellence, however desirable what one misses may be by those sorts of canons, can count as a genuine loss.”³⁷

Simply put, the virtuous person has a fundamentally different conception of what counts as a ‘loss’ than the rest of us. It is because she deliberates in light of this derivative employment of prudential concepts that she will not take herself to suffer a genuine loss in the course of a virtuous action.

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid, p. 17

³⁷ Ibid

If my understanding of McDowell so far is correct, these two justifications together warrant the claim that when acting virtuously involves sacrificing something of value, this does not constitute a genuine loss for the virtuous person.

2.2. Response

Neither of McDowell's justifications seems convincing. I do not have the space here to address the full extent of these issues, so I will keep my arguments brief. Against the first, I argue that McDowell (or at least the way I understand him) misinterprets Aristotle's point about the self-sufficiency of a virtuous life. Against the second, I argue that McDowell is committed to a normatively unappealing understanding of prudential concepts.

Regarding the first justification, namely that the virtuous person's life is self-sufficient, I argue that McDowell conflates the notion of "self-sufficiency" on two important levels. On one hand, we might say that the virtuous person's life, as a *whole*, is sufficient (call this the "global" level). On the other hand, we might suggest that *every* detail or individual moment in a virtuous person's life is most choiceworthy and "lacking in nothing" (call this the "local" level).³⁸ These two ways of considering self-sufficiency lead to sharply different conclusions. McDowell identifies his point about self-sufficiency solely with the local level.³⁹ However, this is a mistake.

Aristotle does not think that every moment in a virtuous person's life is perfect *simpliciter*. Aristotle's discussion of self-sufficiency throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics* is largely in terms of the virtuous *life*, not singular moments within it.⁴⁰ In fact, Aristotle defines the very notion of virtue's self-sufficiency as "that which on its own makes *life* worthy of choice and lacking in

³⁸ I borrow these labels from T. H. Irwin (2006), p. 186, in C. Macdonald and G. Macdonald (2006)

³⁹ See J. McDowell (2006), p. 199, in C. Macdonald and G. Macdonald (2006): "I use the term "silencing" only in connection with what Irwin calls "local" silencing."

⁴⁰ NE 1101a9–16, 1098a16–22, 1100b8–11

nothing.”⁴¹ Furthermore, Aristotle certainly makes room for the idea that individual moments in a virtuous person’s life may not be optimal. At 1117b10, he says that the brave man can suffer death or wounds and he will find them painful, but he will endure them nonetheless because that would be the noble thing to do. Certainly, this does not seem like a moment in the virtuous person’s life that is lacking in nothing. Presumably, more textual details would need to be worked out, but it appears here *prima facie* that McDowell has misinterpreted Aristotle’s point about the self-sufficiency of a virtuous life.

That said, McDowell might have a way of escaping my objection if he adopted a global view of self-sufficiency. The idea here would be that even though the virtuous person can suffer genuine losses on individual occasions, these losses would not constitute any reasons for choosing a different kind of life. Individual sub-optimal moments in a virtuous person’s life need not render the entire life sub-optimal. Therefore, a virtuous life, taken in its entirety, may still be maximally choiceworthy and sufficient. But as previously mentioned, McDowell denies such a global characterization (*supra* note 38). So, I do not see a way for McDowell to escape my objection without amending his view of self-sufficiency.

The second justification, namely that the virtuous person employs prudential concepts in a derivative sense, is also problematic. Even if we leave aside the textual concerns (i.e. whether or not Aristotle actually intended such a derivative employment), McDowell’s view seems to be committed to a normatively unappealing understanding of these concepts. The point here is that in certain cases, the derivative employment of prudential concepts would distort their folk understanding so radically that it would be doubtful if they even refer to the same concept. In fact,

⁴¹ NE 1097b14–15; my italics

in some situations, by appealing to the derivative employment of terms like ‘advantage,’ ‘harm,’ ‘loss’ etc., McDowell would simply be, as it were, *defining away* the problem.

One need not look beyond the sort of cases I bring up in the earlier section to understand this point. Regardless of however the shopkeeper understands these concepts, it would be highly implausible to think that he does not suffer a ‘genuine loss’ when he sees all his hard work reduced to nothing in front of his eyes, or when his wife and kids lose the roof over their head. Similarly, it is dubious to suggest that the courageous soldier does not suffer genuine harm, whatever her conception of ‘harm’ may be, even as she loses her life in battle. In all such cases, McDowell’s point about derivative employment would seem highly implausible.

3. A Rejoinder

So far, I argued that McDowell’s view of silencing results in a counter-intuitive and implausible view of virtuous agency. I then analyzed the weak link in McDowell’s argument, namely his view of self-sufficiency and the derivative employment of prudential concepts. Finally, I considered potential responses and offered counterarguments against them.

In this section, I would like to propose a response on McDowell’s behalf to my initial objections. This response is not one that McDowell himself offers, but it is consistent with his overall position. This response rests on what philosophers call the “unity of virtue” thesis. I will argue that if this thesis is true, McDowell can get around my objection that silencing is psychologically implausible. However, if this thesis is true, McDowell’s view would succumb to a far more serious problem. This problem is that in certain situations, if the virtues are unified, we should not praise the virtuous person for performing virtuous actions.

3.1. The Unity of Virtues

The unity of virtues thesis, introduced by Socrates and endorsed by McDowell, holds that the full possession of one virtue requires the full possession of all the others,⁴² i.e. someone has virtue V1 if and only if she has V2, V2 if and only if V3, and so on.⁴³ The argument for this thesis is as follows: virtues should always issue in right conduct. But individual virtues, in isolation, cannot reliably lead to right action. In certain circumstances, different concerns pertaining to the other virtues must guide our recognition of what a particular virtue requires of us.⁴⁴ A just person cannot fully possess the virtue of justice without also being sensitive to the requirements of kindness, generosity, etc., because there will be cases where a lack of kindness or generosity will prevent her from hitting the mark with respect to justice. Hence, the domain of each virtue must be constrained by the other virtues. This is why the exercise of one virtue will inevitably require one to possess all the others.

Of course, this is not to say that in every situation, a just person would need to be kind in order to act virtuously. Some virtues may not be relevant in every situation. The point, however, is that virtues must be applicable across situations i.e. *had* the situation been such that in the course of performing a just action, the need for kindness came into play, the just person should know how to act accordingly.⁴⁵

If the unity of virtues thesis is true, the virtuous person has a philosophically rich and mature understanding of what constitutes virtuous behavior in a given situation. Therefore, this person harmonizes her values and motivations in accordance with this understanding. She only values those things that are in line with her conception of the virtuous life (evaluative harmony)

⁴² J. McDowell (1998), p. 53

⁴³ For the purposes of this paper, I discuss only the Socratic thesis of the unity of virtues, not their reciprocity (the claim that I take is maintained by Aristotle). I understand it is contested that unity and reciprocity of virtues are two distinct claims, but I will not discuss here whether or not that is the case.

⁴⁴ O. Bailey (2010) p. 2

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 2

and never experiences a conflict between different values. As a result, when acting virtuously requires her to give up something that would be otherwise valuable, it stops holding any value for her in the moment. Similarly, she is only moved by motivating reasons in accordance with virtue (motivational harmony) and is never tempted by courses of action that compete with virtue. This is why she is unified, at all times, behind evaluation *and* motivation.⁴⁶

To put the point somewhat differently, this person surely recognizes the value of various goods like material possessions, love, health and safety, etc. but *only* to the extent that a virtuous person would. She realizes that she ought to care about her life or her source of livelihood, but not any more than they *should* be cared about. Indeed, she understands that someone who worries excessively about, say, self-preservation could hardly hit the mark with respect to courage. And further, our admiration for this person need not be predicated on some ascetic-like ability to detach herself from worldly goods. Rather, we must think of her as praiseworthy because she has trained and habituated herself in various ways to recognize the relative importance of goods like material possessions, health, friendship etc. in comparison to the conception of life that she finds worthwhile.

In essence, then, even though goods like safety or well-being would generally be valuable to the virtuous person, in comparison to the greater good of leading a life which she finds worthwhile, these particular goods pale in significance. Hence, when she faces the stark choice between pursuing her conception of a worthwhile life and pursuing a good that is, here and now, incompatible with this conception, there is no real question about what to do.⁴⁷ This is why the virtuous person does not experience evaluative or motivational conflict. In the fully courageous soldier's mind, then, there is harmony between her concern for safety and her commitment to duty.

⁴⁶ Again, with the exception of tragic predicaments

⁴⁷ I am indebted here to J Seidman (2005), p. 74

So, even though there is nothing preventing her from caring about her own life, when this concern stands in the way of doing the courageous thing, her duty silences self-preservation. And further, when the discharge of her duties results in great harm or death, unlike the continent person, who merely mourns such losses, the virtuous person takes a more forward-looking approach. She plays with the cards she's dealt, so to speak, and tries to make the most out of them.⁴⁸ Jeffrey Seidman captures this nicely:

“[Hers] is the perspective which people generously ascribe to philosophers, when they speak of 'taking a philosophical view' of their troubles. The idea finds expression in the many religious traditions in which the appropriate attitude towards one's world is of gratitude for blessings, married to a forward-looking sense of one's obligations which leaves little scope for self-pity in the face of losses.”⁴⁹

All in all, the fully unified virtuous person who has such an attitude towards her misfortunes would never endure a genuine loss in the course of performing virtuous actions.

If this response from the unity of virtues is correct, McDowell's view of silencing would not succumb to my charge of psychological implausibility. However, if this response is correct, it would also lead McDowell to a far more serious problem. The problem is that the unified virtuous person cannot always be considered praiseworthy for acting virtuously. As I explain below, in certain situations, to be unified in this manner is just to manifest some sort of *insensitivity* towards the requirements of the situation.

3.2. Response

The unity of virtue thesis holds that the virtuous person is fully unified behind all the virtues, evaluatively *and* motivationally. This unity manifests itself in two important ways: action and emotion. Virtue theorists hold that for virtue, it matters not just that a person performs right actions, but also that she *feels* the right way about performing those actions. This view has

⁴⁸ This reading of virtue is consistent with Aristotle, see NE 1101a7-14

⁴⁹ J Seidman (2005), p. 75

its roots in Aristotle, who argues at various places in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that virtues are concerned with both feelings and actions.⁵⁰ He holds that in every situation, there will be a range of actions and emotions available to a person.⁵¹ The virtuous individual is someone who finds the mean: the state that strikes the right balance between actions and passions.⁵² This person acts in the right manner and has the right feelings, at the right time, for the right reasons, towards the right people, and in the right way. Hence, the realization of virtuous behavior requires the presence, in a given situation, of a characteristic set of actions *and* a corresponding set of emotions.⁵³

Now, my aim here is not to provide a full analysis of the relationship between actions and emotions for virtue. I simply wish to contend, based on the considerations presented above, that emotions are morally significant for virtue. If this is right, then it must be true that someone cannot be fully virtuous absent the right emotions. Of course, what counts as “right” emotions is not immediately evident from Aristotle’s remarks (or mine), but I suspect that a lot hinges on how we answer this question. So let me begin by asking: what *exactly* are the ‘right’ emotions for a virtuous person to feel?

On McDowell’s reading of Aristotle, the virtuous person experiences a kind of unity in her emotions. That is, owing to the evaluative and motivational unity of virtues, this person experiences *only* those emotions that correspond to the particular virtue in a given situation. As a result, she never struggles with ambivalence (except in the case of tragic predicaments). Consider courage. Aristotle conceives of it as the mean between fear and confidence.⁵⁴ For McDowell, a courageous person is someone who acts and feels appropriately in the face of danger. She stands

⁵⁰ NE 1106b17-25, 1107a4-7

⁵¹ NE 1104b12-14

⁵² NE 1106b25-35

⁵³ Although I will use the term ‘feeling’ to describe the experience of an emotion, I understand that emotions are both cognitive and affective states. My usage is not aimed at undermining this view. I only use ‘feeling’ in its most colloquial sense.

⁵⁴ NE 1107a33

her ground when this is appropriate, but also feels fear or confidence depending on the particular features of the situation. When the situation calls for fighting the enemy, she proceeds fearlessly into battle, feeling only confidence. However, when there is only a tiny chance of success, she, unlike the overconfident person, experiences fear and recognizes that the virtuous thing to do would be to flee.

What is interesting about this reading of Aristotle is that the virtuous person acts out of a certain sort of serenity: her emotions are unified and quiet, and as she proceeds into battle, she does so with the belief that she cannot be harmed. McDowell says:

“Genuinely courageous behaviour, on this view, combines a lively awareness of risk, and a normal valuation of life and health (see *Nicomachean Ethics* 3. 9), with a sort of serenity; taking harm to be, by definition, what one has reason to avoid, we can see the serenity as based on the belief, paradoxical in juxtaposition with the valuing of life and health, that no harm can come to one by acting thus.”⁵⁵

In other words, as the courageous person arrives at the judgement of what she should do, there is simply no emotional remainder left for her. Whatever speaks in favor of doing or feeling otherwise, according to McDowell, has already been silenced in accord with her belief that no harm can come to her.

I contend that the virtuous person’s unity of emotions would undermine her praiseworthiness as a good person. In certain circumstances, having univocal feelings about doing the right thing or experiencing no emotional remainder is just to manifest some sort of insensitivity towards the requirements of the situation. This is especially true when one’s virtuous conduct results in a sub-optimal, but not tragic, outcome. When virtue leads one to such sub-optimal results, a wise person recognizes that there was something important to be had that this result lacked, or that things would have been better, all things considered, if she could have acted virtuously without

⁵⁵ J. McDowell (1998) p. 92

causing the sub-optimal result. This realization holds even if she acted in a way that was, under the circumstances, the appropriate thing to do, or even if she had no reasons for acting in ways other than she did. Unless we are committed to holding that virtuous actions lead one to the best possible outcomes in every situation imaginable – which I do not think McDowell is committed to – we must accept this to be true.

Now, to the extent that the virtuous person is good, she must feel and exhibit some sort of emotional response, over and above those called for by the relevant virtue, that acknowledges the undesirability of this outcome. She must exhibit this emotional reminder even if she acted in a way that was, by her own lights, the most appropriate thing to do. Such an emotional response is simply what we would associate with our understanding of a good character. Consider an example: In Aeschylus's tragedy, Agamemnon is faced with a dilemma. He must either sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia, to appease the goddess Artemis or abandon his expedition against the Trojans. After some display of ambivalence and anguish, Agamemnon ultimately decides to kill his daughter.

At this point, we would surely think that something is wrong with Agamemnon. What kind of father becomes ready to murder his daughter, even if to appease a goddess? Those brief moments of ambivalence or anguish might display the helplessness or the terrible nature of Agamemnon's situation, but they would hardly serve to vindicate him. Yet, what I find even more worrisome is that if McDowell's view of silencing is correct, a morally virtuous Agamemnon would not even feel those initial moments of hesitation. In fact, as he would stand by the altar, prepared to raise his dagger, he would not be conflicted even for a second. For him, the life of his daughter, here and now, counts for *nothing*. Surely, if we thought something was wrong with the ambivalent Agamemnon, the virtuous Agamemnon must be some sort of monster.

One might push back that Agamemnon's case falls under the "tragic predicament" exception that McDowell makes for when the unity of virtue must break down.⁵⁶ Even if this is the case, the point of this rather dramatic example was simply to highlight fully the unseemliness of remaining emotionally unified in some situations. We can certainly imagine less dramatic examples to prove this point. The person who is faced with a non-tragic career choice between a secure but boring job and an exciting but risky one may recognize that all things considered, she has univocal reasons to pick the former. There is simply no perspective – prudence, morality, etc. – from which the latter choice could be justified.

In this case, even if she ultimately ends up in the former career, it can still be true that she feels sad about this choice. When all is said and done, there is nothing stopping her from feeling a sense of "emptiness" that comes from abandoning her chance at an exciting and fulfilling career. In fact, she can look back at this moment of decision and wonder what could have been, had she taken the road less traveled. So, even though she acted in a manner that was virtuous, there was still something valuable that this choice lacked, and her emotions should reflect this. In fact, if she is an emotionally mature, good person, one would *expect* her to have these feelings.

These observations point towards the fact that a person who, even as she acknowledges the sub-optimality of the virtuous outcome, remains singularly one-dimensional in her emotional response lacks the complexity and profundity that permeates the emotions of any mature human self. The courageous soldier who always remains serene in the face of danger, for whom the value of life and health count for nothing, is suicidal, not brave. Such a person could hardly be the epitome of praiseworthiness that McDowell takes her to be. In fact, as Aristotle says in Book III

⁵⁶ J. McDowell (2009), p. 73

of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, death and injury are painful, even to the virtuous person, and as a matter of fact, *more so* for the virtuous person, because she has more to lose than the rest of us:⁵⁷

“Death and wounds will be painful to the brave man... but he will face them because it is noble to do so or because it is base not to do so. And the more he is possessed of virtue in its entirety and the happier he is, the more he will be pained at the thought of death; for life is best worth living for such a man, and he is knowingly losing the greatest goods, and this is painful. But he is none the less brave, and perhaps *all the more so*, because he chooses noble deeds of war at that cost.”⁵⁸

Hence, if my analysis thus far is correct, real virtue involves the full appreciation of all the potential dangers and harms associated with the pursuit of the virtuous action, and proceeding, not despite this, but *all the more so* because of it.⁵⁹ For these reasons, McDowell’s virtuous person does not always deserve our admiration.

4. Reworking the Concept of Virtue

In this paper, I argued that although McDowell’s picture of virtuous agency has many admirable qualities, it has some significant flaws that diminish its overall appeal. The most glaring flaw in McDowell’s picture is its excessive emphasis on harmony in both value and motivation. The fully virtuous person can never experience evaluative conflict, suffer genuine losses, or comprehend reasons to act against virtue. I have shown in this paper that the virtuous person who is unified in this manner lacks a certain sort of emotional maturity that we would expect from any reasonably good person. This emphasis on unity what makes McDowell susceptible to most of the criticisms I lay out in this paper.

However, this does not have to be the case. McDowell’s proposal of silencing could be reworked to accommodate my criticisms. Part of this revision would consist in allowing certain sorts of disunities and conflicts to be compatible with virtue. Particularly, McDowell’s view could

⁵⁷ I owe this point to S Stark (2001) p. 449

⁵⁸ NE 1117b10; emphasis added

⁵⁹ Stark, p. 449

benefit by allowing the possibility of *evaluative* disunity. The virtuous person need not be some sort of a moral saint who never thinks about the possibility of acting wrongly. Such a person might very well regard things in competition with virtue important. So long as this evaluative conflict does not carry over to the realm of motivation or influence the virtuous person's judgement about how to act, there is no reason why we must adhere strictly to a unified conception of virtue. In what follows, I attempt to flesh out this reworking of McDowell's view.

4.1 Silencing and Amplifying

So far, I argued that the "silencing thesis" presents us with a philosophically unattractive picture of virtuous agency. This is because McDowell's view places excessive emphasis on the role of evaluative and motivational unity in performing virtuous actions. This fact, by itself, is not a fatal blow to McDowell's view but it is severe enough to warrant a reworking of its canons. Now, in this section, I wish to propose precisely this reworking of the silencing thesis in order to better account for these challenges.

On McDowell's view, the difference between virtue and continence is primarily a matter of resistance to temptation. The virtuous person never struggles with competing, non-virtuous temptations because her ability to silence ensures that any potential consideration that does not align with virtue never offers her a reason for action. Hence, in perceptual terms, the agent only views *the* morally salient feature in a given situation. In one sense, then, her ability to silence makes her, as it were, *blind* (or metaphorically, *deaf*) to non-virtuous considerations. But clearly, this leads to all sorts of problems outlined earlier in the paper. Hence, in this section, I wish to *reject* the idea of silencing. I propose that instead of characterizing virtuous agency in terms of the metaphor of silencing, it might be better to characterize it in terms of another comparable metaphor: amplifying.

Whereas on the silencing thesis, the virtuous person deliberates by silencing non-virtuous reasons, on the amplifying thesis, she deliberates by *amplifying* the voice of virtuous reasons. The difference between silencing and amplifying is a crucial one. Instead of requiring that the virtuous person remain blind to non-virtuous considerations, the amplifying thesis allows her to view an entire *landscape* of moral and non-moral considerations. However, among all these different considerations, her perception makes the virtuous reason for action salient - it puts that reason under a certain sort of perceptual *spotlight*, so to speak. Hence, what the virtuous person perceives, on this view, is a variety of considerations – virtuous and non-virtuous – from which the virtuous reason is highlighted. By the way of analogy, if on the silencing thesis, the virtuous perceives reasons like a single illuminated flare within a pitch-black room, then on the amplifying, she views them like an entire spectrum of flares of varying luminosity and focus, the brightest and clearest of which is the one that represents the virtuous reason for action.

Along similar lines, then, on the amplifying thesis, the continent person also views an entire landscape of virtuous and non-virtuous considerations, but what separates him from the virtuous person is that his perception – owing to his faulty grasp of the *kalon* – fails to focus on and highlight the virtuous reasons for action. His less-than-noble inclinations fog his vision of the landscape and render him unable to discern the morally salient reason. Hence, to him, things do not appear so simple. He deliberates, as a result, by comparing the relative weights of *all* the reasons for action in front of him, and only eventually arrives at an all-things-considered judgement that he must act on virtuous reasons.

Now, to explain exactly how the amplifying thesis differs from the silencing thesis, I will lay out the specific features of the amplifying thesis and contrast them with the silencing thesis.

4.2 Motivation, Values, and Amplification

First, I propose that on the amplifying thesis, because the non-virtuous considerations are still visible to the virtuous person, they offer her normative, but not motivating, reasons for action.⁶⁰ So, the virtuous person finds herself to have normative reasons for acting in both ways, virtuous and non-virtuous, but is only motivated to act on the former. This naturally leads to several worries: firstly, on McDowell's view, the virtuous person's perceptual judgements necessarily result in action. Hence, if the virtuous person is able to perceive a non-virtuous consideration as a reason for action, it seems that that reason should be sufficient to move her to act in a non-virtuous manner. But that would be unacceptable – at least insofar as an Aristotelian conception of virtue is concerned. How, then, do we preserve the amplifying model without, in any sense, compromising the motivational unity of virtue?

Relatedly, there is also the question of the difference between virtue and continence. That is, if the virtuous person is able to recognize (normative) reasons to act non-virtuously, how is she different from the continent person? In other words, on McDowell's silencing thesis, the primary difference between the virtuous and the continent person was that while the former perceives only reasons in accord with virtue, the latter perceives both virtuous and non-virtuous reasons for action. As a result, the former cannot be motivated to act non-virtuously, whereas the latter can be. But by eliminating silencing, I have, it seems, blurred the distinction between the virtuous and the continent person. Indeed, if both agents can view both types of reasons, how do we preserve the motivational unity of the virtuous person, and separate her from the merely continent person? How do we, that is to say, ensure that the virtuous person is never tempted by considerations in competition with virtue?

⁶⁰ Reasons, I take it, perform both normative and motivating functions. See <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/reasons-just-vs-expl/>

In response, I think what is so radical about the amplifying thesis is that it involves not only a reworking of the perceptual model, but also a fundamental rethinking of the McDowellian conceptions of virtue and continence. That is to say, *pace* McDowell, the amplifying does not appeal to perceptual claims *alone* in separating the virtuous person from the continent person. Rather, on the amplifying thesis, their difference is understood in terms of their motivational and evaluational structures, over and above their perception. Let me elaborate.

In a highly influential essay, Gary Watson offers an account of agency wherein an agent's practical reason consists of two systems, one of which moves her to action (call this her "motivational system"), and the other yields judgements about the relative value of various states of affairs (call this her "evaluational system"). For Watson, freedom of agency consists in the agent's capacity to "translate [her] values into action."⁶¹ On this account, an action is free when an agent's motivational and evaluational systems coincide – when, that is to say, her actions stem from her evaluative systems.

Watson says that in general, while an agent's evaluational and motivational systems overlap, there might be cases where they come entirely apart. A mother who has a sudden desire to drown her bawling child in the bathwater, for instance, may not value this desire at all, but she desires it nonetheless – she desires it *in spite of* herself. However, it is not as if that she places an initial value on this desire which is later outweighed by other considerations; rather, she does not even assign a positive value – however small – to this desire on her desirability matrix.⁶² This appears to be a case where a person is motivated to do something that she does not value at all.

It seems to me that Watson's point about the rift in one's evaluational and motivational systems is on to something important about virtuous agency. Based on this point, I would like to

⁶¹ Gary Watson, *Agency and Answerability*, Pg. 26

⁶² Gary Watson "Free Agency" Pg. 342

propose the difference between virtue and continence in terms of the relation between their motivational and evaluational systems. That is, if it is possible for someone to be motivated to do something in spite of not valuing it, it also seems possible, in principle, for someone to value something but not be motivated to do it. Granted that I am not entitled to assume this symmetry, but my intuition is further strengthened by the fact that an agent's evaluative and motivational systems are entirely distinct and independent of each other, meaning that it could be possible for an agent to be motivated without valuing, and value without being motivated. Furthermore, I do think that an analysis of our everyday behavior suggests that under certain circumstances, values could be motivationally inert. I could, for instance greatly value the activity of painting and regard it as a part of my conception of the good life. However, after a particularly busy day at work, the last thing I would want is to pick up the brush. Similarly, even if I really value my educational pursuits, there may be days when I simply do not wish to get out of the bed and go to class. Michael Stocker captures such cases nicely:

“Lack of this desire is commonplace. Through spiritual or physical tiredness, through accidie, through weakness of body, through illness, through general apathy, through despair, through inability to concentrate, through a feeling of uselessness or futility, and so on, one may feel less and less motivated to seek what is good. One's lessened desire need not signal, much less be the product of, the fact that, or one's belief that, there is less good to be obtained or produced, as in the case of a universal Weltschmerz. Indeed, a frequent added defect of being in such "depressions" is that one sees all the good to be won or saved and one lacks the will, interest, desire, or strength.”⁶³

Admittedly, most of these examples involve some sort of excusing condition with respect to the inertness of value. It might be hard to imagine someone who is simply not moved by something she considers valuable without any such conditions at play. But I do not think it is impossible.

Even though most of us have a variety of values that move us to act in certain ways, there are instances where, either due to the surrounding circumstances or due to some other reason, we

⁶³ Michael Stocker, “Desiring the bad: An essay in moral psychology” Pg. 744

come to realize that it is simply not the right moment for us to be moved to act on them. Regardless of how much I value the activity of painting, when I have an impending class deadline, I must recognize that now is not the time to pick up the brush. This seems generally true of conflicts between our values and our judgement of what is, under those circumstances, ‘the thing to do.’ In those circumstances, our evaluational systems become motivationally inert. But just because our values sometimes fail to move us to act does not mean that they are no longer valuable to us. My judgement that now is not the time to pick up the brush does not commit me to denying that the activity of painting is valuable. So, it seems, there could be cases where one’s values could be mute on the question of motivation (without there being any extraneous conditions). If this is right, then there may be instances where what the virtuous person values stands against her conception of virtue, but this does not mean that she will be motivated by those values.

Let the above observation serve as the starting point of my revised conceptions of virtue and continence. On this proposal, a virtuous person is someone who has a plurality of values, some of which may not be compatible with her conception of the virtuous life, but she is never tempted to act on them. So, even though she may be conflicted about her values, she is never conflicted about her motivations. Therefore, she never struggles with competing temptations and can be relied on to act virtuously. In contrast, a continent person is someone who, when his values conflict with his judgement about ‘the thing to do’, is tempted by them. He is someone whose motivational and evaluational systems are in constant tension with one another. This distracts his motivational energies from the *kalon* and leads him astray. Resultantly, he has to overcome inclinations to act otherwise.

In light of this revision, we might plausibly ask: if the virtuous person can have values that do not align with virtue – and if these values provide her normative, but not motivating, reasons to

act – how might one make sense of this fact in light of McDowell’s claims that the virtuous person is immune to losses? The very idea of valuing something, at least in a colloquial sense, seems to be inextricably linked with a vulnerability losses or benefits depending on whether that object is diminished or enhanced. So, to reiterate, how might one resolve the tension between values and losses?

4.3 Values and Genuine Losses

The above remarks about value and genuine losses bring me to the second crucial difference between my proposal for the amplifying thesis and McDowell’s conception of silencing. Importantly, I wish to *reject* the doctrine that the virtuous person can be invulnerable to losses. I wish to contend that part of what it means to virtuous is to acknowledge that often times, acting rightly comes at a price and a mark of a good character is that one recognizes this.⁶⁴ In certain situations, then, being emotionally vulnerable to losses and acknowledging the limits of one’s mortality need not render one intemperate - in fact, these factors make one all the more admirable. Hence, on my proposal, emotional vulnerability is compatible with a virtuous character. And to be sure, I am not the only one advocating for such a conception of virtue – there is substantial philosophical precedent supporting my proposal. Aristotle, for one, says:

“... the brave person will find death and wounds painful, and suffer them unwillingly, but he will stand firm against them because that is noble... Indeed, the more he has every virtue and the happier he is, the more pain he will feel at the prospect of death. For this sort of person, more than anyone, finds it worthwhile to be alive, and is knowingly deprived of the greatest goods, and this is painful. But he is no less brave for all that; presumably, indeed, he is all the braver, because he chooses what is fine [*kalon*] in war at the cost of all these goods. Hence, it is not true that the active exercise of every virtue is pleasant; it is pleasant only insofar as we attain the end.”⁶⁵

⁶⁴ A similar point has also been suggested by Baxley “The Price of Virtue”

⁶⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1117b8-16; Note that at various points in the NE, Aristotle uses the word “kalon” to refer to the “noble” the “fine,” the “right,” and various cognates of “honor” etc. For a proper treatment of this topic, see T H Irwin “The Sense and Reference of Kalon in Aristotle”

Hence, by rejecting McDowell's view about the virtuous person's invulnerability to losses, I do not endorse a standard of virtue that is estranged from its Aristotelian affiliations. In fact, for what it might be worth, I am inclined to argue that my revised conception is better suited to capture Aristotle's remarks about virtue because it represents an ideal that is more humanly grounded and realistic.

5. Concluding Reflections

In this section, I would like to briefly discuss the advantages of the amplifying thesis over the silencing thesis. The main advantage, as I see it, is that it inherits the best features of McDowell's view but none of its problems. I contend that the amplifying works just as well with McDowell's larger metaphysical and epistemological picture of virtue as the silencing thesis. Indeed, the perceptual model is still intact, i.e. the virtuous person is still able to single out morally salient features in a situation; her reliable sensitivity to act virtuously is uncompromised, i.e. she still "gets things right" and understands what it is like to perceive salient values; her cognitivist and internalist conception of motivation is unscathed, i.e. her perception is still motivationally efficacious. The only differences between the amplifying thesis and the silencing thesis are i) *how* the virtuous person perceives things, i.e. instead of viewing virtuous reasons within a perceptual vacuum, the virtuous person views them on a landscape, together with the non-virtuous reasons for action, ii) *what* virtue consists in, i.e. instead of requiring that the virtuous person have no values other than those that align with her virtuous nature, the amplifying thesis makes room for her to possess a plurality of values, without corrupting her motivational unity, and ii) the virtuous person is no longer invulnerable to losses.

Besides leaving McDowell's broader project untouched, a virtuous person acting on an amplifying model of practical reason does not succumb to any of the problems I outlined earlier

in the paper. That is, the amplifying thesis honors our intuitions about why, in certain situations, recognizing the price of one's virtuous behavior is the mark of a good person. Additionally, on the amplifying thesis, the virtuous person also need not be alienated from her affective life – she can very well have a range of projects, commitments, relationships, etc. so long as they do not motivate her to act intemperately when they stand against her conception of the virtuous life. Finally, and most importantly, the amplifying thesis represents a standard of virtue that is humanly achievable and does not require one to lead a life of constant detachment from worldly things, nor become a moral saint.

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