Driver's Virtues

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Julia Driver's *Uneasy Virtue* offers a theory of virtue and the virtues without being an instance of virtue ethics. It presents a consequentialist challenge to recent virtue ethics, but its positive views – and especially its interesting examples – have great significance in their own right. Driver's defence of 'virtues of ignorance' has force despite all the challenges to it that have been mounted over the years. But there are also examples differing from those Driver has mentioned that favour the idea of such virtues. Perhaps certain virtues of religious faith and the virtue necessary for dealing as best one can with moral dilemmas both require ignorance. However, some of the examples Driver does discuss raise the question whether virtue status is based solely on consequences, rather than perhaps having (in addition) a motivational component.

Julia Driver's *Uneasy Virtue* offers a theory of virtue and the virtues without being an instance of what we now call virtue ethics. This is a distinction that, more than anyone else, Roger Crisp has emphasized, and the distinction is especially relevant and helpful to the pleasant task of attempting to understand the significance of what Driver is trying to do and has done in her book. It is a familiar fact of recent moral philosophy that virtue ethics of a kind that treats virtue as central to all of ethics has been undergoing a tremendous revival of interest and development. But a book like *Uneasy Virtue* demonstrates a slightly different, though related and possibly derivative, trend. As virtue ethics considered as a systematic approach to ethical theory or anti-theory has made its way into the light, it has done so in part by criticizing previously dominant traditions like Kantian ethics and consequentialism (together with utilitarianism, its most famous variant) not only for what they say about the virtue(s), but also for putting too little emphasis on virtue, for having too little to say about (the) virtue(s).

Kantians have responded to this challenge both by 'softening' some of their views about virtue (here I am thinking especially though hardly exclusively of the work of Barbara Herman and Marcia Baron); but they have in addition tried to show that Kant and Kantian ethics have more to say about virtue than most people, including virtue ethicists, believe. (I think work by the just-mentioned authors and also by Onora O'Neill nicely exemplifies this trend.) Consequentialists, and utilitarians in particular, have also been responding to renewed interest in virtue (and possibly to the fact of virtue ethics as a distinctive way of systematically doing moral philosophy). Articles by Robert M. Adams, Roger Crisp, and myself have addressed questions about

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how consequentialism does or should address questions about the virtues – though for the record it is worth noting that the classical utilitarians, Bentham, Mill, and Sidgwick, also discussed (the) virtue(s). I do not want to speculate on the extent to which the articles just alluded to were responding to the challenge of reviving virtue ethics, but Julia Driver's book manifestly and self-consciously does. What may be more important, however, is the fact that it *is* a book. Just as the new virtue ethics started expressing itself in books only relatively recently, so too it would seem that the response to the revival has only recently matured to the point of issuing forth in book form. I believe Julia Driver's book is, along with Thomas Hurka's *Virtue, Vice, and Value*, one of the first consequentialist examples of *this* trend.

Of course, it is a bit unfair to speak of Julia Driver's book in this fashion, because it views its significance from the point of view of virtue ethics (perhaps it is not surprising that a virtue ethicist like myself should do this). But my point has not been to put Driver's work in its place, far from it. We could view what I have just been saying perhaps conditionally. If virtue ethics is right or just important, then Julia Driver's book plays an important role in relation to that now-revived tradition. But certainly Driver herself is trying to show that consequentialism of a certain kind gives a better account of the virtues than virtue ethics itself does – one can say that she thinks that virtue ethics makes virtue too central and in effect sees her approach as performing the needed task of putting virtue in *its* place. If she can make good the argument against virtue ethics and in favour of a consequentialist approach to the virtues, then her book is far more significant than I have suggested, but the point nonetheless is that, whether or not she is on the right track in her own positive theory, what she has done here is quite significant.

Just below I want to say some things about why I think Driver in fact is not on the right track, about why I think certain forms of virtue ethics are more plausible about the virtues than consequentialism is. But I would like to begin by (to some extent) following the order of the book itself. The full defence of consequentialism cumulates with her ongoing discussion and comes to a head in the last chapters of the book, but some of the topics treated earlier hold interest apart from Driver's largest aim, and I want to begin by saying something about them. I think that quite apart from the issue of consequentialism, Julia Driver has come up with some very interesting ideas about the nature of virtue, and I would like to begin by saying something about why I think so.

In particular, what Driver has to say about the 'virtues of ignorance' represents a challenge to certain received views about virtue and especially to Aristotelianism's tendency to draw tight connections among virtue, knowledge and rationality. To the extent Driver's views

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are plausible, they 'soften one up' for consequentialism, but they certainly do not rule out all plausible alternatives to consequentialism, and the strength of her case for the virtues of ignorance is more intuitive than theoretical. The question of whether there are such things as virtues of ignorance seems an interesting one apart from overarching issues of moral theory, and I think Driver makes a pretty good intuitive case that there are. Of course, many objections to her idea have been made over the years, and the present book deals with some, but not (I believe) all of them. I have read much of the work that has been offered in criticism of Driver's views, and my reaction has always been that it leaves (most of) her basic ideas unscathed. So I think her work in this area represents an important contribution to our understanding of virtue.

I do, however, have one question for her and for the rest of us. Driver discusses in fairly consequentialist fashion why we value modesty and others of her virtues of ignorance, but I do not believe she ever explains why or how people develop the ignorance of their own true worth that is, on her view, essential to modesty. I think we should be curious about this issue. If we really value and admire a modesty based on ignorance, perhaps we do so because of the motivation that lies behind the ignorance and the modesty. Or perhaps when we find out what the motive behind such modesty is, we shall find it less plausible to suppose that modesty is a virtue. Driver does not want her discussion and defence of that virtue to rest on her later defence of consequentialism, but to have some kind of theory-independent intuitive force; but until and unless one can say more about the motivation (if any) behind the ignorance modesty involves, I think her intuitive case for this virtue of ignorance is at the very least incomplete.

Of course, in saying this, I am assuming that there is some intuitive force to the idea that the moral goodness or virtue of a trait depends to some extent at least on the motivation it involves or depends on. Consequentialism may ultimately reject this idea, but the idea is a quite intuitive one, and so the intuitive case for regarding modesty as a virtue of ignorance should, I think, involve an attempt to understand what motivation lies behind people's ignorance of their own true value. And this is something Julia herself does not provide. (What I am saying here applies to a lesser extent to some of the other virtues of ignorance, e.g. blind charity, because the ignorance involved in that trait seems understandably motivated by (extreme) love or devotion or generosity.) Also, if we can find the motivation behind modesty and, in particular, the ignorance it involves, then, *if that motivation is something we admire*, we might be able to use the intuitive plausibility of the claim that modesty based on ignorance is a virtue to support some form of virtue ethics, possibly of a sentimentalist variety, as a competitor of

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consequentialism about the virtues. So the search for what motivates the ignorance involved in modesty may also have repercussions for Driver's general defence of consequentialism.

On the other hand, I also think that the case for virtues of ignorance can be made even more widely (and therefore perhaps more strongly) than Julia attempts, and in what immediately follows I would like to suggest some examples of virtues of ignorance that she does not consider (and that do not seem to me to be mere variants on what she *has* talked about).

Consider the topic of tragic or moral dilemmas. There is a great deal of disagreement over whether there are or can be truly dilemmatic situations, situations where, through no fault of their own, agents cannot help but act wrongly (or violate some all-things-considered moral obligation). It turns out that there is no purely logical objection to the idea of moral dilemma, but for various reasons Kantian moral theory and certain forms of utilitarianism and virtue ethics all rule out the possibility of moral dilemmas. Still, what is one to say about tragic cases like Sophie's Choice, where one has to choose one of one's children to be sent to the death camps or else have them both taken to those camps? In the Styron novel, Sophie's guilt over choosing her daughter for death (and presumably she could have felt equally guilty if she had instead chosen her son) ultimately leads to her suicide, and that suicide represents a more enduring and punishing guilt than we may think was called for by what she did. But philosophers like Bernard Williams and others have noted how appropriate and called-for *some* strong degree of guilt seems to be, after whatever choice one makes in a case like Sophie's Choice, and he and others have also noted how this bit of moral psychology supports the conclusion that she was in a dilemma. If, as seems plausible, psychological reactions like guilt represent a belief that one is guilty and has done wrong, then if, as most of us think, moral theory ought to take ordinary moral beliefs into account, Sophie's guilt is evidence that she was in a moral dilemma and that dilemmas are possible. (Unless her guilt partly stemmed from realizing that she *preferred* her male child over her female child, but let me simplify on this issue and a couple of others.)

But there is another possibility we have not yet considered. It is possible that dilemmas are impossible but that it is a mark of virtue or moral goodness that one show oneself unaware of that fact in certain circumstances. It may be that someone who really loves her children will inevitably feel guilty and believe she has acted wrongly in a situation like Sophie's Choice, even if in fact she has not acted wrongly in saving one of her children rather than the other (or others). Even if there are no moral dilemmas, someone who is too quick or able to realize that they have not acted wrongly in a case like Sophie's Choice

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may show themselves to lack the virtue of parental devotion or love, and so, assuming that moral dilemma is in fact impossible, that virtue may be a virtue of ignorance. And the same point may also apply to the virtue of (deep) humane or humanitarian concern for the well-being of fellow humans (or animals) generally. In relation to that virtue, there may be situations where (through no fault of one's own) one will have to do something shocking or horrible to some human stranger or strangers (to avoid acting in some equally bad or morally worse way), and such situations may call for guilt in the sense that we would criticize or find less than ideal someone who did not feel guilty for what they had done (no matter what that was). If such scenarios are in fact not dilemmatic, then they too illustrate the way certain virtues – in this case that of humane or humanitarian concern for others – are or can be virtues of ignorance.

Now at this point Julia or some of you may be thinking that the parallel with what Julia says about, e.g., modesty is not complete. Modesty would seem to entail a kind of ignorance on every occasion when it is fully demonstrated or exemplified, whereas devotion to one's children or (humanitarian) love of humankind only potentially or dispositionally requires a certain ignorance. Someone who has never been in a seemingly dilemmatic situation may have the virtue of devotion to her children without ever actually being mistaken about having acted wrongly, and that certainly is a difference. Still, the present example may open up the possibility that the relations between virtue and ignorance are potentially even more complex and interesting than Julia indicated in her book. There might be some virtues that require a disposition to ignorance in certain circumstances, and, in order to mark the contrast with those virtues that require actual ignorance, we might end up having and wanting to distinguish between virtues of actual ignorance and virtues of potential ignorance. I do not know; but I *am* curious to find out what Driver herself thinks about this possibility.

But before I leave the topic of virtues of ignorance, let me mention another example, quite different, I think, from anything Driver considers, where the presence of virtue might seem to require actual and not just potential ignorance of certain facts. Most philosophers nowadays do not spend much time on theologically inspired examples because most of us are pretty secular in our own views, but since Driver's discussion of the virtues of ignorance attempts to explore some widespread aspects of ordinary moral/ethical thinking, it may be appropriate to mention some fairly ordinary moral thinking based on religious assumptions or faith.

Submission to God's will is a major ideal or commandment of more than one religious tradition. The very term 'Islam' is an Arabic word

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for submission, and the ideas that God is our shepherd and that we should act like God's children are certainly important in Christianity. But the virtue of submission to God's will is also sometimes expressed via ideas like: when God commands, we have no choice but to obey. Or like: we are all the instruments of God's purposes. Now clearly such thinking is not inevitable. Those who scoff at or rebel against or question religion may feel that they are definitely *not* instruments of God's purposes and may exercise (what they take to be) their choice *not* to obey God's commandments. But true submission to God or to God's will may require or entail that one not think such things, but, as indicated above, instead think the very opposite.

But are those submissive thoughts true and is it even possible for them to be true in a universe where God exists and governs things? Sartre thinks not. In *Being and Nothingness* he speaks of the 'bad faith' of those who think, for example, that they have no choice but to get up and go to work or to take care of a sick mother, and in his play *The Flies* he points out that such thoughts are bad faith even in relation to God. Even God's existence as an omnipotent being does not take away our choice of whether to obey or disobey him, and to think of ourselves as mere instruments of his purposes involves a mistaken belief that we lack choice that is similar to that exemplified, in *Being and Nothingness*, by the woman who leaves her hand resting in the hand of an ardent wooer/seducer, as if it had no relation to her will and were a mere thing.

Sartre thinks that the examples of bad faith he discusses involve real illusion, really false belief, rather than merely being examples of metaphorical speech. Those who say they are mere instruments of God's purposes do not think they are speaking merely metaphorically (the way someone who says a certain person has a heart of gold is clear on the metaphorical status of what they say). So if the fullest submission to God involves believing the sorts of things Sartre talks about, then such submission, he at least would say, involves illusion, ignorance of the truth. But of course Sartre also does not think that submission to God's will can be any sort of virtue – even if, *per impossibile*, God were to exist and have power over us.

Here, however, a person more tolerant of religion (and of irrationality) might disagree. They might see that some of the beliefs submission (actually and not just potentially) entails are necessarily illusory, but, taking some pages from Driver's book, they might nonetheless insist, contrary to Sartre, that submission to a really existent and known God's will is a virtue despite the fact and perhaps even because of the fact that it involves ignorance of one's own freedom, choice, and non-thinghood. They could say, in other words, that someone who loves God enough will submit to God totally and that someone who does not erroneously

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believe that they are the instrument of God's purposes and that they have no choice when God commands lacks what is or would be a virtue in a world where a certain kind of God exists. And perhaps it is even a virtue in a world where God does not exist, although that would be harder to make out.

However, this last point may raise worries that, once again, I have not really found an exact parallel to modesty and the other virtues of (actual) ignorance. For Driver wants to say that modesty is a virtue in the actual world, whereas I have at most pushed the idea that submission is a virtue in certain possible worlds (though it might be a virtue in the actual world if God in fact exists). So modesty, if Julia is correct, is an actual virtue of actual ignorance, whereas submission is only a possible virtue of actual ignorance. Still, to the extent Julia is exploring our concepts and moral dispositions, both modesty and submission illustrate the conceptual/moral possibility of virtues involving or requiring actual ignorance, and the theological example I have mentioned therefore illustrates the sort of tight *connection* between virtue and actual ignorance that her discussion of modesty is also supposed to illustrate.

But having said this much about the virtues of ignorance, let me proceed now to discuss Driver's larger or overall defence of consequentialism with respect to (the) virtue(s). Julia takes her defence of the virtues of ignorance to tell against the Aristotelian view that the virtues require motivational states or habits based in relevant knowledge or *phronesis*, and she then proceeds to argue (in chapter 3) that virtue and the virtues cannot be characterized in psychological and, in particular, in motivational terms. She begins by considering an example where a woman promises to meet her friend at the gym in order to ensure that she (herself, not the friend) really will get the exercise she needs. When the woman shows up at the gym, she has reasons both of self-interest and of conscience to be there, and Julia somehow thinks that this shows that an appeal to psychology and motivation cannot help us to distinguish generally between moral and other virtues.

But the fact that the woman will be doing what is morally right for a possibly non-moral reason does not, in fact, imply that we cannot distinguish moral from non-moral virtues on a psychological and, specifically, on a motivational basis. If she keeps the promise only because it is in her self-interest to do so, then, of course, she may be doing what is right, but since, in that case, we are unlikely to view what she does as, in a positive way, morally virtuous or morally good, such examples actually favour a motivational view of the virtues. Also, at one point (on p. 46) Driver says that the motive behind the woman's conscientiousness is self-interest, but I think this is an

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incoherent description generally and in the present case. The woman has self-interested reasons to make the promise, if she thinks she is a conscientious person, but if she conscientiously keeps the promise she has made (rather than acting solely from self-interest), then the conscientiousness is not *motivated* by self-interest. So although Driver uses this example to suggest that moral vs. other virtues have to be distinguished in terms of their characteristic consequences, I do not in fact think the example gives her any help in that direction.

Another case she mentions may, however, be more useful to her. Kantians hold that feelingful motives like benevolence are an unreliable and inadequate guide to acting rightly, but claim that a different motive, conscientiousness or the sense of duty, *is* central to moral virtue. But Driver invokes and expatiates on Jonathan Bennett's famous discussion of Huckleberry Finn in order to show the inadequacy of the Kantian motivational account of the virtues and move us towards consequentialism. Finn prevents the runaway slave Jim from being caught and returned to slavery, all the while thinking that he (Huck) is doing wrong and will burn in hell for it. This wonderful literary example seems to show that one can exemplify (moral) virtue while acting *against* conscience (and also in ignorance of moral truth), and so, like Driver, I find it telling against Kantian ideas about morality. But unlike her I do not think it necessarily ought to incline us in the direction of consequentialism. Driver herself sees Huckleberry's sympathy with Jim as constituting his virtue (p. 53), and she needs to consider the possibility that the virtuousness of his motivation depends on its character as motivation rather than on its typical or characteristic consequences.

This will not, I think, be an easy thing for her to rule out, because, for one thing, she wants to place less weight than Kantians do on the considerations of reliability that Kantians think show sympathy or benevolence not to be moral virtues. However, Driver goes on to consider another imaginary case that she believes *does* support a consequentialist account of virtues like sympathy over any 'internalist' or 'agent-based' view of them. She describes creatures called 'Mutors' who cannot live a long life unless they are severely beaten at a certain age. Only certain Mutors, who have no interest in the welfare of children and who take pleasure, for its own sake, in beating them at that precise age, are willing to beat Mutor children, and when Mutor parents take their children to these special individuals, the parents are moved by benevolence and in fact are helpful to their children. Julia wants us to think that the desire to beat Mutor children at the relevant age would count as a virtue, and, presumably, a moral virtue, in this strange society because of the socially beneficial role it plays. But this is really far from intuitive or convincing, and a large part of the reason concerns

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the cruel and sadistic motivation Driver attributes to those who are supposed to be exemplifying a virtue.

Driver subsequently mentions two other science-fiction scenarios where motives have consequences opposite to those they typically have in the actual world, and she shows herself to be far from immune to the intuitive appeal of motivational considerations in determining or judging what counts as a virtue. Thus she accepts Thomas Hurka's view that maliciousness is a moral evil even when it produces no painful or bad consequences, but she thinks consequentialism can account for this by making virtue status depend on a trait or motive's typical or characteristic, as opposed to its actual, consequences. However, she also considers cases where motives systematically produce effects different from and opposite to those they tend to lead to in the actual world. Thus (borrowing from an example of Jonathan Kvanvig's) she discusses a possible world in which all generosity leads to bad rather than good consequences, due to the secret machinations of an evil demon. She points out that on an actualistically consequentialist conception of moral virtue, generosity is a vice in the imagined world (and we may add that malice might also then count as a moral virtue in such a world). And she says that that is a 'strongly counterintuitive' result (p. 80). But the form of consequentialism she eventually opts for also has this consequence, and that fact surely favours the kind of agent-based view whose essential feature it is precisely to *lack* these particular counterintuitive implications.

So why then does Julia Driver favour a consequentialism with certain highly unintuitive implications over any agent-based approach? Her main reason, she says, is that such an approach 'dispenses with any connection between the agent and the world' (p. 80). Understood in one natural way, this point is fair and has to be granted. Although the motive of benevolence or generosity will focus on the world and on individuals in the world in order to be useful to them, an agent-based view does not make success or good consequences in the world necessary to right action or virtue status. In other words, what happens in the world matters *to* the benevolent person, but does not matter from the standpoint of agent-based moral *evaluation*. Driver finds this unattractive, as, I suppose, any committed consequentialist would. But is this implication of agent-basing really counterintuitive in the way it is counterintuitive to say that malice that systematically leads to good results (unbeknownst to anyone) would thereby count as a morally good motive? Hardly. Rather, the intuitiveness of holding that the malice just described would still count as a morally bad character trait (in all malicious people) is a reason for actually *favouring* agent-basing over consequentialism and thus for denying the role of worldly success in determining what is morally virtuous. When Kant denies

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any evaluative role to what he calls stepmotherly nature, he is making, basically, the same point, and what Kantianism and agent-basing thus have in common has, in fact, a strong intuitive moral appeal. So it may be a good thing (in a certain way or in one sense) to sever the connection between agent and world, and it becomes more difficult to see what moves or should move Julia Driver towards a consequentialist view of the virtues. (And this remains true even if the agent-based sentimentalist needs to be able to answer the familiar Kantian objection that feelingful motives like generosity and sympathy are not generally reliable in or adequate to getting us to do what is right.)

But, assuming that we are going with one or another form of consequentialism with regard to the virtues, the later chapters of *Uneasy Virtue* offer us a very rich discussion of the different forms such consequentialism might take. Driver distinguishes subjective versions of consequentialism, which tie the evaluation of motives (and also actions) to the maximization of *expected* utility or to *efforts* to maximize utility, from objective versions that make virtue status and rightness depend fundamentally on factors outside the agent or agents. And within the class of objective approaches, she makes an important distinction between tying virtue status to actual consequences and tying it to certain tendencies in the actual world. The latter, counterfactual view of what makes something a virtue ties virtuehood to what would usually or normally result in good consequences, to what happens, not, perhaps, in actual fact, but in worlds close to the actual world. This is the view Driver favours, and she then understands specifically *moral* virtues as traits conducive to human flourishing in the social context. This allows a trait to count as a virtue even if it never actually produces anything good, but Driver gives a number of arguments for preferring such an objective but counterfactualist view over various consequentialist alternatives.

I say 'various', rather than 'all', however, because Driver confines her attention to forms of virtue-consequentialism that tie virtue to the consequent well-being of human beings or sentient beings generally. This leaves aside forms of consequentialism that tie rightness or virtue status to factors other than human or sentient well-being. It is possible for a consequentialist to hold that natural or aesthetic beauty is a good thing apart from anyone's ever perceiving or being affected by it or to hold that the existence and preservation of certain eco-systems constitutes a good thing even apart from effects on human or sentient welfare. So it is possible for a consequentialist to make rightness and virtue partly or wholly depend on intrinsic goods conceived as independent of sentience, but Driver confines her attention to approaches that treat welfare or flourishing or desire-satisfaction as the only goods relevant to constituting a trait as a virtue, and it would

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have been useful and interesting to see what Driver has to say about the others sorts of view I have just alluded to.

However, for the most part, *Uneasy Virtue* pays close critical attention to the main alternatives within consequentialism and to the main alternatives to consequentialism. For my own part, I find what Driver has to say, intuitively, about the example of Huckleberry Finn and about various potential instances of the virtues of ignorance more compelling than what she says by way of a general defence of consequentialism. But in any event these phenomena that she brings to our attention can serve as a test and as an anchor for any general conception or account of the virtues or of morality generally, and therein, I think, lies perhaps the greatest *theoretical* contribution of this highly significant book.

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