

Two Objections to Virtue Ethics

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores two objections to virtue ethics: the self-effacing objection, which holds that virtue ethics is problematic insofar as it presents a justification for the exercise of the virtues that cannot be appealed to as an agent's motive for exercising them, and the self-centeredness objection, which holds that virtue ethics is egoistic and so fails to accommodate properly the sort of other-regarding concern that many take to be the distinctive aspect of a moral theory. I examine the relationship between these two objections as they apply to eudaimonistic virtue ethics. While defenders of eudaimonistic virtue ethics often appeal to self-effacement in order to deflect the self-centeredness objection, I argue that there is nothing in the structure of eudaimonistic virtue ethics that makes it problematically self-centered. Analysis of the self-centeredness objection shows that self-centeredness is problematic only on the assumption that the self is egoistic. Because eudaimonistic virtue ethics is predicated upon a non-egoistic understanding of human agency, it is not problematically self-centered. As a result, there is no reason for it to be self-effacing.

KEYWORDS

Virtue ethics, self-centeredness, self-effacement.

Introduction

In discussions of the basic structure of virtue ethics, two objections often lurk. These are the self-effacing objection and the self-centeredness objection. While those critical of virtue ethics believe these objections pose serious problems for the enterprise of virtue ethics itself, defenders of virtue ethics tend to brush them off. They recognize their existence, as well as virtue ethics' vulnerability to them, but seem to think the objections really are not bothersome. Something is amiss here: what critics of virtue ethics deem to be serious problems with virtue ethics, defenders of virtue ethics just aren't that worried about.

The self-effacing objection holds that virtue ethics is problematic insofar as it presents a justification for the exercise of the virtues that cannot be appealed to as an agent's motive for exercising them. The self-centeredness objection holds that virtue

ethics is egoistic insofar as its justification of the virtues fails to accommodate properly the sort of other-regarding concern that many take to be the distinctive aspect of a moral theory. While I think we can all appreciate the potential these objections have to create problems for a moral theory that is vulnerable to them, most defenders of virtue ethics have not tried to extinguish them. Where they address these objections, it often seems as if their goal is to show that while virtue ethics is vulnerable to them, this vulnerability does not really present the problem that the objectors think it does.¹

In this paper, I seek to develop a new, more satisfying, line of response to these objections, and one which sheds light on the basic enterprise of virtue ethics. As there are many varieties of virtue ethics, and the application of the two objections varies depending upon the kind of virtue ethics we are focusing on, my discussion will be limited to consideration of eudaimonistic virtue ethics (EVE), which many think is especially vulnerable to these objections. I take EVE to include any virtue ethical theory that motivates the virtues by appeal to their connection to the agent's flourishing. While Aristotle's virtue ethics and the contemporary theories that it has inspired are the most well known examples of EVE, my discussion will focus on EVE considered more generally. Because both objections target the framework of EVE, my question will be whether or not the framework of EVE necessarily is committed to features that make it self-centered and require self-effacement.

I'll begin with consideration of the self-effacement objection. After considering why self-effacement is problematic, I'll argue that whether or not EVE must be self-effacing turns on whether it is self-centered. I then move to consideration of the self-centeredness objection, I'll argue that this objection misconceives the nature of the self that lies at the heart of, and indeed, drives EVE. I'll conclude by showing that, because EVE is not vulnerable to the self-centeredness objection, it need not be self-effacing.

Self-Effacement

A moral theory is *self-effacing* if considerations that justify a particular act cannot be appealed to as motive to perform said act. In a well-known paper, Stocker (1976) charges both deontology and consequentialism with being self-effacing. According to Stocker, an agent who attempts to do the right thing for the reasons offered by either the deontologist ("because it is right/my duty/specified by the rules") or the

¹ Toner (2006) calls this move, as it is made with respect to the self-centeredness objection, the "complacency defense".

consequentialist (“because it promotes the best state of affairs”) frequently fails to do the right thing, because she has incorporated the justification for her acts into her motives. The woman who visits a sick friend in the hospital because it is her duty fails to act well: she ought to be visiting her sick friend not because it is her duty, but because she cares about her friend. While Stocker’s original critique was of consequentialism and deontology, others have since pressed this charge against virtue ethics, arguing that virtue ethics is self-effacing in the same sense in which deontology and consequentialism are self-effacing.² Hurka even suggests that the sense in which virtue ethics is self-effacing is “more disturbing” than the sense in which other moral theories are self-effacing, for virtue ethics is non-contingently self-effacing (Hurka, 2001, p. 247). Whereas other theories (e.g., consequentialism, might be require self-efficacy based on contingent features of our psychologies, self-effacement, on Hurka’s understanding of EVE, is built into the very structure of EVE given EVE’s justification of the virtues: “to avoid encouraging self-indulgence, [EVE] must say that being motivated by its claims about the source of one’s reasons is in itself and necessarily objectionable” (Hurka, 2001, p. 247).

Self-effacement is seen to be objectionable for good reasons. Stocker (1976) originally argued that self-effacing moral theories were problematic insofar as they generated a schizophrenia between one’s reasons and one’s motives, thereby making impossible a state of psychological harmony. He writes:

One mark of a good life is a harmony between one’s motives and one’s reasons, values, justifications. Not to be moved by what one values—what one believes good, nice, right, beautiful, and so on—bespeaks a malady of the spirit. Not to value what moves one also bespeaks a malady of the spirit. Such a malady, or such maladies, can properly be called moral schizophrenia between one’s motives and one’s reasons (Stocker, 1976, pp. 453–454).

There is something very plausible about this line of thought: when we think about a well-functioning agent, and especially about a flourishing agent, we think about a person who knows why she acts and identifies with those reasons, and incorporates them into her motivational outlook. A theory that presents as a flourishing agent one who (necessarily) sets up a clear divide between her reasons and motives seems flawed.

More recently, Stocker (1996) and others (e.g., Pettigrove (2011) have worried about a self-effacing theory’s potential to offer normative guidance. The concern is that reflection upon her reasons for action—upon why it is important to exercise the virtues—plays an important practical component within an agent’s deliberative process. Oftentimes, part of figuring out what to do involves thinking about *why* we

² See Keller (2007) for an overview.

ought to do it. But, if reflection on the reasons why we ought to do something interferes with our success in exercising virtue, virtue ethics must be self-effacing and so burdened with the problems associated with self-effacement.

Let us now turn to the question of whether EVE must be self-effacing. Keller (2007) argues that *any* virtue ethics is subject to the self-effacing objection to the extent that its theory of right action refers to a conception of what the fully virtuous person would do, a consideration that in some instances cannot serve as an effective motive to act virtuously (where an “effective motive” is one that enables the agent to successfully exhibit the virtues). Keller argues, for example, that the woman who helps her friend because it is what a virtuous person would do fails to be fully generous. According to Keller, we must conclude that virtue ethics—in general—is self-effacing, and that the virtue ethicist must “say that what makes an act right is its being what the fully virtuous person would do, but add that having the governing motive of acting like the fully virtuous person precludes the possibility of being like the fully virtuous person—so it is often undesirable for people to take as their motives the considerations that provide reasons for action” (Keller, 2007, p. 227).

Is it fair to say that EVE is self-effacing insofar as it is committed to understanding right action in terms of what the virtuous person would do? While I think Keller is right to posit that any virtue ethics, including EVE, is committed to this understanding of right action, I worry that Keller’s formulation of the self-centeredness objection may be based in a mis-understanding of the role this theory of right action plays within EVE. In determining whether or not a moral theory is self-effacing, what counts are the reasons a theory appeals to in order to *justify* any particular act as right. For some moral theories, these reasons, and subsequent justification, are quite transparent. According to a simple consequentialism, the reason why any act is right is because it promotes the best state of affairs. The fact that an act promotes the best state of affairs also makes that act right and so serves as its justification. The same reason, then, both explains the rightness of the act and justifies it as right. When it comes to virtue ethics, however, things are less straightforward. The reasons that explain an act as right are not necessarily the same ones that justify an act as right.

Consider again what Keller takes to be the virtue ethicist’s justification for right actions: “the virtue ethicist says that the primary explanation of why right acts are right is that they are in accordance with the virtues, or would be performed by a fully virtuous person” (Keller, 2007, p. 224). Notice that in this quote Keller writes that the appeal to what a fully virtuous person would do, or to what is in accordance with the virtues, *explains* why right acts are right. Keller’s discussion presumes this explanation of rightness also serves as the justification of rightness and it is here that I think he errs.

Sometimes explanations can serve as justifications. As we've seen, for the simple consequentialist, that an act produces the best state of affairs both explains what the right act is and makes that act the right act. However, it is a mistake to read the virtue ethicist's explanation of *what* acts are right as her justification of the rightness of the act, i.e., as an explanation of *why* right acts are right, and I worry that Keller may be making this mistake. For the proponent of EVE in particular (although the same probably holds for proponents of virtue ethics more generally), appeals to what a fully virtuous person would do have always been intended as an explanation of *what* agents ought to be doing. More specifically, the appeal to what a fully virtuous agent would do is meant to provide normative guidance to the person who is not fully virtuous, guidance which doesn't explain *why* she should do the right thing, but rather, practical guidance, which explains *what* she should do. These are importantly different tasks. An explanation specifies what it is the person ought to be doing. Aristotle, for instance, would say that the person ought to act for the right reason, in the right manner, and at the right time. This is *what* the fully virtuous person should do. But it is not what justifies her actions and likewise should not be understood as providing her with justifications for acting.³ For Aristotle, and EVE more generally, the justification for developing and possessing the virtues lies in the virtue's connection to flourishing. Their connection to flourishing *makes* them virtues and is what justifies their status as traits we ought to cultivate. While EVE holds that people ought to strive to act as the fully virtuous person, this is only because doing so enables them to develop a state of flourishing.

Because the justification of the virtues lies in their connection to flourishing, if EVE is self-effacing, it is so in a different manner than we find in Keller's analysis. Whereas Keller gauges whether or not virtue ethics is self-effacing by whether or not a desire to do what a fully virtuous person would do can serve as an effective motive, the real challenge for EVE is whether EVE's justification, which appeals to one's own flourishing, can serve as an effective motive.

Hurka (2001) argues that EVE is self-effacing in precisely this sense. He argues that EVE must be self-effacing because it justifies the virtues by appeal to egoistic considerations of flourishing that are incompatible with the demonstration of genuine virtue:

³ Pettigrove (2011) notes that different kinds of persons need different kinds of reasons and so that justifications vary depending on the person towards which it is directed. I agree that reasons may vary depending on the person involved, but want to resist the idea that justifications vary. An appeal to what the virtuous person would do might serve as a reason for the child to do something, given the child's lack of developed rationality to demand, expect, or appreciate more, but I do not think it would serve as a justification for the child's actions. The justification ought to refer to *why* the virtuous person would do it.

A flourishing-based theory . . . says a person has reason to act rightly only or ultimately because doings so will contribute to her own flourishing. If she believes this theory and is motivated by its claims about the source of her reasons, her primary impetus for acting rightly will be a desire for her own flourishing. But this egoistic motivation is inconsistent with genuine virtue, which is not focused primarily on the self. (Hurka, 2001, p. 246)

Hurka is surely right in stipulating the inconsistency of egoistic motivation with genuine virtue. The person trying to act compassionately while driven by egoistic motives presents a classic illustration of someone whose specific motive is an ineffective one, which prevents her from succeeding in her actions and from developing genuine virtue.

In order to evaluate Hurka's version of the self-effacing objection, however, we must first consider whether or not it is accurate to say, as Hurka does, that EVE is committed to an egoistic justification that gives rise to the egoistic motivation that proves incompatible with the exercise of genuine virtue. The self-effacing objection thus hinges on whether or not EVE is also subject to this, the self-centeredness objection. Let us now turn to consideration of this objection and then re-visit the question of whether it is self-effacing.

Self-Centeredness

A moral theory is *self-centered* if it takes, as its primary aim, promoting self-regarding concerns. This is problematic for those who think the function of a moral theory is to promote a concern for others, i.e., to inculcate genuine concern and care for those around us. Many think that EVE is self-centered and straightforwardly so: EVE justifies the virtues by appeal to the agent's flourishing, thus offering, as Hurka highlights, what appears to be an egoistic justification for the virtues. While EVE maintains that part of developing the virtues is developing non-instrumental, irreducible other-regarding concerns, the worry is that the structure of EVE nonetheless is such that it inescapably places priority on self-regarding concerns (of personal flourishing). This is why Hurka thinks it must also be self-effacing.

One response defenders of EVE make against the charge of self-centeredness is to distinguish between "formal" self-centeredness and "content" self-centeredness. Annas (1993, p. 225) makes this move in her analysis of the self-centered nature of EVE. According to Annas, ancient conceptions of virtue ethics, including Aristotle's eudaimonistic virtue ethics, are formally self-centered or egoistic insofar as they

maintain that an agent's own good serves as her final end. But this doesn't mean that their content is self-centered; rather, they direct an agent to develop other-regarding concerns. Where people worry about "egoism", Annas argues, is with respect to content self-centeredness, not formal self-centeredness. Thus, she concludes, even though EVE is formally self-centered, it is not problematically so, for its formal self-centeredness does not affect the content of its normative prescriptions.

Notice, however, what has happened here: Annas' defense against the self-centeredness objection is to say that the degree to which EVE is self-centered is not a problematic one, insofar as self-regarding concerns enter into the justification of EVE yet not the content. This is just to say that EVE is not self-centered in a problematic way because it is self-effacing—its egoistic justification does not factor into an agent's deliberations about *what* she should do.

This reply to the self-centeredness objection is unsatisfying on two levels. First, as we've seen, it commits EVE to being self-effacing, and so subjects EVE to the problems that come with being self-effacing. Second, allowing that EVE is egoistic in its justification of the virtues overlooks the central insight of EVE, which is that human beings are not egoists. This is a point Annas hints at in a later article, where she seems to depart from her earlier position and argues "that aiming at flourishing is not egoistic" (Annas, 2008, p. 215). I agree with this basic sentiment and think it needs and ought to be fleshed out more concretely than it stands in Annas's discussion. As I'll now argue, the reason that aiming at flourishing is not egoistic, is that human nature is not egoistic. This, I believe, is the central insight of EVE; EVE is based upon the view that we are not egoists. Recognizing this provides a response to the self-centeredness objection that does not require self-effacement and so defends EVE, decisively, against the two objections in question. More importantly, however, it uncovers what I think is the real issue at stake in these debates. This has to do with the picture of the self to which EVE is committed, a picture that, we will see, is not, in any sense, egoistic. By bringing to light this understanding of human nature and the vision of the self that lies at its core, we can reach a better understanding of the basic framework of EVE and what distinguishes it from other normative moral theories.

To make my case, I begin with evaluation of the self-centeredness objection. I argue that self-centeredness is problematic only if the self that lies as the object of concern is construed egoistically. Because EVE construes the self in non-egoistic terms, it is not problematically self-centered, nor is it at all mysterious as to how the development of other-regarding concerns can be justified by appeal to flourishing.

A Non-Egoistic Self

While a theory will be self-centered if it grants priority to an agent's self, I'd like now to suggest that self-centeredness is only problematic if the self prioritized by the theory is an egoistic one. Call an *egoistic self* one whose true interests can be described without making essential reference to the interests of others such that one person's interest usually (although not necessarily) stand in a zero-sum relation to the other, whereby one person's gain is the other's loss. Call a *non-egoistic self* a self whose true interests can be described only through reference to the interests of others, such that one person's interests usually (although not necessarily) stand in a positive-sum relation to the other, whereby one person's gain adds to the gain of the other and no one wins at the expense of another.

The justification of the virtues upon which EVE rests presupposes the existence of a non-egoistic self. It presupposes that one cannot flourish unless one takes into account the needs and interests of others and understands that doing so is not sacrificial of one's interests, for our interests are interconnected and their satisfaction dependent upon the other. This non-egoistic understanding of the self underwrites the very justification of the virtues, according to which developing and exercising virtue enables individuals to flourish; without the assumption of a non-egoistic self, this justification breaks down: virtue is not necessary for the egoist to flourish, and very well may stand in conflict with the flourishing of the egoist.

While my goal here is to illuminate the structure of EVE and not necessarily to defend the plausibility of this way of thinking about the self, it is worth taking a minute to explore some research suggesting it is both a viable and accurate way of conceiving of the self, lest we think this vision of a non-egoistic self is an ancient relic—an assumption that cannot be supported given our growing knowledge of human nature.

I'll first consider some research on motivation that supports the thesis that we function best when we operate as non-egoistic self, thus affirming in part the connection EVE makes between the virtues and flourishing.⁴ While there is a host of psychological literature attesting to this basic idea, I'm going to focus on a line of research by Jennifer Crocker that explores the effects motivation by self-image goals (representative of the egoist self) or compassionate goals (representative of the non-egoist self) has for the agent. Her research explores interpersonal relationships and everyday goal pursuit in general, and not exclusively instances of helping behavior, but the extension is clear.

⁴ I develop a full defense of this connection in Besser-Jones (2014).

In two longitudinal studies, Crocker and Canevello (2008) explored the motivational orientation of first-year college students and their success in learning, self-regulation, well-being, and relationships. Student's motivational orientations were assessed according to whether they were driven by compassionate goals (which reflect a non-egoist perspective) or self-image goals (which reflect the egoist perspective). The defining feature of compassionate goals is that they do not make reference to a benefit to oneself. They include:

- Be supportive of others
- Have compassions for other's mistakes and weakness
- Avoiding doing anything that would be harmful to others
- Avoid being selfish or self-centered. (Crocker & Canevello, 2008, p. 560)

Self-image goals are specified in terms of making reference to a benefit for oneself. They include:

- Get others to recognize or acknowledge your positive qualities
- Avoid showing your weaknesses
- Avoid taking risks or making mistakes
- Convince others that you are right. (Crocker & Canevello, 2008, p. 560)

Students completed surveys on their goals and experiences both before and after their first semester, and every week in between.

What Crocker and Canevello (2008) found was a significant correlation between having compassionate goals and experiences positive affective states (feeling "clear and connected") and between having self-image goals and experiencing negative affective states (feeling "afraid and confused"). Unsurprisingly, these negative affective states tracked higher levels of anxiety and depression (Crocker, Olivier, & Nuer, 2009). Student's motivational orientations also tracked the progress they made in their academic and social goals. Their research showed that students driven by higher than average level of compassionate goals made higher than average progress towards their other goals; it moreover showed a correlation between a weekly increase in pursuit of compassionate goals and an increase in the weekly (non-compassionate) goal progress (Crocker et al., 2009, p. 261).⁵

This research gives us good reason to expect that agents driven by compassionate goals will be more successful in whatever they pursue than will those driven by self-

⁵ In this particular study, goal progress was self-reported and not tracked by objective measures. The findings, though, are consistent with Moeller et al (2008), which identified the same correlation using objective standards of goal progress (e.g., vocabulary test scores).

image goals.⁶ And, this, in turn, supports the thesis that we operate at our best when we function as non-egoists. This is the spirit of Crocker's own explanation of this phenomenon and I think it captures in a very basic way the picture of human nature lying at the foundation of EVE.

Crocker believes that the positive effects emerging from agents who are high in compassionate goals arise largely because in embracing compassionate goals, one transcends the self. "When people *transcend* the self," she writes, "caring less about how others view them and more about the well-being of others, others are mostly likely to regard them highly and provide support, and relationship quality improves. Consequently, well-being improves" (Crocker, 2011, p. 142). Her thesis is that we improve our own well-being by improving the well-being of others, and that this happens most effectively when we are driven by compassionate goals, taking on a position she describes as an "ecosystem motivational perspective" (Crocker et al., 2009; Crocker, 2011). Individuals working from this motivational perspective take on, in Crocker's words,

a perspective in which the self is part of a larger whole, a system of separate individuals whose actions nonetheless have consequences for others, with repercussions for the entire system, that ultimately affect the ability of everyone to satisfy their fundamental needs. Like a camera lens aimed at the self but zoomed out, people with an ecosystem motivational perspective see themselves and their own needs and desires as part of a larger system of interconnected people (and other living things), who also have needs and desires. (Crocker et al., 2009, p. 254)

What Crocker calls the "ecosystem perspective" is analogous to what I've been calling the non-egoist self; the individual working from this perspective does not sharply distinguish between her interests and others and she does not calculate the personal costs of helping others; she just does it, and benefits as a result.

In contrast, individuals driven by self-image goals work from an ecosystem motivational perspective, which is analogous to what I've described as the egoist self:

Like a camera lens zooming in on the self, they focus on themselves and their own needs and desires. They view the relationship between the self and others as competitive or zero-sum—one person's gain is another's loss. They evaluate and judge people, including themselves, and they expect evaluation and judgment from others. They are concerned with the impressions others hold of them, leading to self-consciousness and social anxiety. They focus on proving

⁶ This, incidently, affirms the fundamental message of the paradox of egoism: living life as an egoist is self-defeating.

themselves, demonstrating their desired qualities, validating their worth, and establishing their deservingness. (Crocker et al., 2009, p. 252)

Key features of this egosystem motivational perspective are that the self is always in perspective and is invoked as the standard from which the agent evaluates her options as well as how she negotiates with others.

Crocker's analysis puts into concrete form the two different ways of understanding basic human agency that lie at the root of much of the debate between defenders of EVE and those who think that EVE is self-centered. Defenders of EVE believe that in order to flourish, agents must transcend the self and operate from an ecosystem perspective, as non-egoists. Those who think EVE is problematically self-centered may contest that the only reason agents have to adopt this ecosystem perspective is that it makes sense to do so from an egosystem perspective, i.e., they will say that the reason why we have to transcend the self is because it benefits the self, conceived as egoistic. But this misses the point. We don't adopt an ecosystem perspective *because* it makes sense to do so from an egosystem perspective. Rather, the ecosystem perspective enables us to flourish precisely because, at our core, we are not egoists. The best explanation of why we operate at our best when we operate as non-egoists is because we are, at our core, non-egoists.

A second range of research affirming this position draws on the deeply rooted needs we have for engaging with others in meaningful ways, research which we can see as both affirming and explaining why we operate best as non-egoistic selves. It has long been acknowledged that there is within human nature a need for relatedness.⁷ The need for relatedness shows itself earliest in the form of attachments between parents and infants. Infants need to develop attachments to an adult that make them feel safe and secure; this allows them to begin exploring new territory, all the while confident that they have a secure base to return to and to support them. The need for attachment transforms as we mature, but never disappears. We need to feel connected to others, to feel a sense of belongingness. Importantly, what we need as adults seems to be to develop interactions that exhibit mutual care and respect for both parties: it is not enough for others to be cared for; we need also to care for others—one-sided relationships do not typically fulfill our need for relatedness regardless of which side one is in.⁸ That individuals are driven by this need to engage well with others (and that their well-being is diminished when this need goes unsatisfied) affirms EVE's assumption that we are non-egoists, and that we flourish

⁷ Many different research perspectives affirm this need, ranging from attachment theory (Bowlby, 1979), to evolutionary theory (Fowers, in draft), to research on motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and self-esteem (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995).

⁸ I discuss the above research at length in Besser-Jones (2014).

when we recognize that we are essentially connected to others and that the interests of others do not stand in a zero-sum relation to one's own interests.

Revisiting the objections

Recognizing that EVE is predicated upon a non-egoistic conception of the self allows us to put into perspective the concerns regarding both self-centeredness and self-effacingness. We can now see that self-centeredness per se is not a problematic feature of a moral theory; rather, it is only problematic insofar as it works in conjunction with an egoistic conception of the self. A moral theory committed to an egoistic conception of the self ought not to be self-centered. But EVE is not at all committed to an egoistic conception of the self. Its central insight, as we've seen, has always been that developing and exercising virtue is part of flourishing, that an agent must act well towards others in order to flourish herself, and that *this is so because we are not egoists*. The self-centeredness of EVE is thus not problematic.

I have argued that the self-centeredness intrinsic to the structure of EVE is not problematic because it works in conjunction with a non-egoistic conception of the self. Recognizing this allows us to respond to the self-centeredness objection in a way that helps us to better understand the enterprise of EVE itself. That EVE assumes a non-egoistic self is one of the things that set it apart from many other moral theories. EVE recognizes that the answer to the question "how ought I to live?" is to develop the virtues. It recognizes that this will involve caring about others as well as oneself and it recognizes that this will enable an agent to flourish. It does all of this because it recognizes that the self is fundamentally non-egoistic.

We are beings who are intertwined with others and for whom treating others well—exercising virtue—allows us to cultivate a state of flourishing. This is the fundamental insight of EVE and one that makes perfect sense when considered in conjunction with the picture of human agency revealed above. It is also one, I think, that ought to be *recognized* and *reflected* upon by the virtuous agent; this, I'll now argue, both precludes and makes unnecessary self-effacement.

Self-effacement occurs when one cannot appeal to the justification of an act as also a motive to act. We've seen that Hurka believes EVE requires self-effacement because it offers an egoistic justification of the virtues that cannot be embraced as a motive, for egoistic motivation is incompatible with the development and exercise of genuine virtue. However, once we recognize that EVE offers a justification grounded in and dependent upon the thesis that we are *not* egoists, this picture changes significantly. EVE does indeed justify the virtues by appeal to flourishing, but the reason that this succeeds as a justification is because we are not egoists, and cannot flourish without caring about others and developing an irreducible concern for their

own well-being. Given this justification of the virtues, there is no need for self-effacement. Recognizing our interdependency, and the need we have for relatedness, can indeed serve as an important part of developing and embracing virtue; certainly, there is nothing inconsistent in reflecting on this justification and exercising virtue. Indeed, I've argued elsewhere that this kind of reflection helps individuals to identify and internalize the importance of acting well to others and so in itself plays an important motivational role (Besser-Jones, 2014).⁹

Conclusion

Recognizing that EVE assumes the existence of a non-egoistic self allows us to see that EVE is not problematically self-centered, and that EVE does not have to be self-effacing in order to avoid the self-centeredness objection. I've argued that thinking about how the virtues are justified—about the connection between oneself and others and of our mutual dependency—and being motivated by those thoughts, is perfectly compatible with exercising virtue. EVE need not be self-effacing, because it is not problematically self-centered.

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⁹ Here I depart from Annas (2008), who, following Aristotle, argues that the mature virtuous person will not need to engage in thoughts about virtue, and so reflection on their justification, when she is exercising virtue. While Annas maintains those learning virtue need to engage in reflection about virtue, such thoughts about virtue simply drop out of the picture once the agent begins to master virtue, I think that, given the motivational power such reflection promises, and given the consistency of such reflection with the exercise of virtue, it is important that even the mature virtuous person engage in active reflection on virtue, as she is exercising virtue.

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