

“Educating virtue as a mastery of language”

That only those who have mastered language can be virtuous is something that may strike us as an obvious truism. It would seem to follow naturally from, indeed simply restate, a view that is far more commonly held and expressed by philosophers of the virtues, namely that only those who can reason can be virtuous properly said. My aim in this paper is to draw attention to this truism and argue its importance. In doing so, I will take the starting point for my reflections from a couple of concrete occasions in which the desire to offer a foothold to the language of the virtues encounters an obstacle that might be described as a recalcitrance of language: certain intuitions that seem decidedly linguistic get in the way to suggest that this vocabulary is out of place or out of order. Taking my cue from the discomfort of our linguistic intuitions, what I will be suggesting is that certain difficulties do indeed attend our use of the vocabulary of the virtues, and that there is a particular way of understanding their inevitability, one which is closely connected to the context of moral education. My hope is that reflecting on these difficulties and on the task of moral education with which they are associated can help us illuminate and recover the insight that a mastery of language may be indispensable for a mastery of virtue.

1. An occasion for (the) virtue(s)?

So let me start from some very homely beginnings by summoning a scenario that will hopefully not strike most of us as entirely unfamiliar.

Imagine, then, you're at your family home and one of your distant relatives is visiting; disagreeable aunts and uncles abounding in the world of extended families, this is someone you have little desire to engage with, and would prefer to unload the entire burden of entertaining her (call it a her) to the culpable member of your family who had the misconceived idea of inviting her. This is also a time, as it happens, when you have just started work on an exciting new project. This being the beginning of summer and the start of true intellectual *otium*, all you can think of is to pick up your cup of morning coffee and set down straight to work. You stop by the kitchen and it should be just your luck that you find her sitting at the kitchen table with a cup of coffee in front of her, looking up to give you that sweet, dull smile of hers upon your entry. You flinch with annoyance. Might a quick getaway still be possible? you wonder, while your aunt continues to smile sweetly. A sense of guilt has already crept into your animosity. Dash it all, you realise she's a gentle and good-natured type overall, though you have always

found her unbearably dull. You know, too, that it's all for the best that *someone* has the idea of inviting aunts and uncles over once in a while, otherwise you would have a family only in name. And what are families about if not about having relationships with people you don't personally feel you have much in common? Reproaching yourself for your ill temper, you say to yourself, "You shouldn't be like that. In these circumstances, you should be –" And now you pause: what is that word you're reaching for in order to describe the attitude called for in this situation?

A mundane scenario? Perhaps. But then it may be questioned whether there is any scenario that is so mundane that it may not express, and conversely train, character. Whether it does or not will partly no doubt depend on the particular moral weaknesses an individual brings to bear on it. For our purposes, all we need to agree on is that certain important weaknesses could find expression in this type of situation and lend it moral significance. So let us consider the responses which pick them out.

Here then are some of the ways of continuing one might propose:¹ it is an exercise of *stoicism* that is here called for; you should be more *philosophical*; more *patient*, more *tolerant*, or *forbearing*; perhaps *flexible – adaptable – or mature*; or it is a call to be more *self-denying*; to be *benevolent – kind*. Perhaps you need to be *fairer – gentler – or simply downright friendlier* or more *genial*. You shouldn't be so *rigid – harsh*; so *irascible*.

There is, clearly, no single right way of answering the question, and the choice of word would depend on many factors, not least on the particular moral weaknesses which the individual himself or herself or others in a position to judge his or her character would identify as finding expression in this situation. For my purposes, it is of little importance that we settle on a single answer and it will be enough if we can agree that there is one key trait of character found in traditional handbooks of the virtues which this scenario would be especially likely to flag. For whatever the spirit of moral pluralism with which we approach it, it seems that any student of the virtues would read it as an excellent illustration of an important deficiency, and this is a tendency, let us say, to put one's concerns – one's goals and desires – ahead of others – a deficiency one might easily identify as a failing of something not unlike the virtue of benevolence or kindness.

Indeed, it would seem that many of the other ways of interpreting the failing exhibited here (such as a lack of patience, flexibility, self-denial, and so on) could hardly be specified without making reference to the concerns that fall under the scope of the virtue of benevolence. For the command to be flexible, for example, only makes sense in the context of an evaluative understanding that what is relinquished (which one would prefer to rigidly or inflexibly pursue) is less important than what one must respond to by a display of flexibility (that it is more important to attend to the person commanding attention here, now, than to one's plans and goals) – this being a sense of what matters which benevolence imports. Otherwise, we might not call a person who doggedly pursues his goals 'rigid' and might instead choose to call him 'persevering'.² The same goes for talk of self-denial and

¹ There are other ways, of course, which need not be spelled out in terms of qualities of character or virtues, and are instead formulated in terms of actions. The formula 'you should *be* –' already excludes these kinds of possibilities. But as my purpose in this essay is not to undertake a broad-flanked defence of the claims of virtue, I bracket these alternatives.

² But it would still be a substantive debate whether in a given case, after all the relevant information had been taken into account, the right course of action was to pursue one's goals single-mindedly instead of being side-tracked by other appeals. To call someone who opts for single-minded pursuit 'rigid' as against 'persevering' already involves taking sides in the debate.

patience, and with some qualification, could apply to other candidates. In all these cases, one might legitimately respond by asking: What for? And only an articulation of the reasons for prioritising one good over another – reasons that would for the most part fall under the scope of benevolence or kindness – would seem to do.³

What happens then when, armed with this dazzling inventory of moral possibilities, one tries to use it and to form the appropriate commands? What happens next might seem to depend on your ears. And falling on my ears, an admonition to be philosophical, or stoic, or patient, or tolerant, or forbearing, or self-denying, or adaptable or mature, seems perfectly in order and intelligible as a command one might give to oneself or to others. It is when it comes to the more time-honoured members of the virtue list, and more particularly when it comes to the virtue of benevolence or kindness which this scenario seems especially disposed to flag, that things seem rather different. “In these circumstances,” I admonish myself, “you should be more benevolent!” What is it, as I stood at the kitchen doorway speaking to myself under my breath, that would embarrass me in such a command, even though I would have imagined that speaking to myself in private I might say anything I wished without fear of sounding foolish or absurd? Is it simply the embarrassment of a moral foible brought to light, or of the extraordinary occasion of the first person speaking to herself in the moral imperative, the way one might address a child?

The embarrassment I have in mind, in fact, has little to do with the blushes of moral self-condemnation or with the mortified reluctance of the first person to be addressed in the second, and would have equally attached to the sound of oneself admonishing another (“be (more) benevolent”; “be kind”). It is rather a discomfort of a decidedly linguistic sort; and it is after all, *pace* the wishful privacy of whispers *sub rosa*, by now a familiar notion that having private thoughts does not mean they can be made in a private language. This ought to be even truer applied to moral language, which is paradigmatically spoken to another out loud, and is less frequently used in moral self-education than it is in the moral education or correction or appraisal of others.

One linguistic difficulty would seem to assail us immediately and pose as a particularly deep one. For part of the problem would seem to consist in the fact that benevolence – to the extent that we think of benevolence as a virtue and specify this in conceptual terms familiar from Aristotle – is a quality, or state; and a quality or a state is not something one can choose or not to *be* at a given moment, much less command oneself to assume.⁴ This would suggest that the problem is a broad one to do with the use of commands formulated in virtue terms. And certainly a deep problem this would be, if we accepted that one of the key tasks of the language of the virtues, other than to serve us in descriptive or explanatory roles (as on those occasions when people's character traits appear in explanatory accounts of actions or events), is not to describe, but to prescribe – to serve as a tool in the task of moral education. In this, the ability to speak to oneself, or to another, in the imperative, would appear to be a cornerstone. If so, this would seem like a

³ The same could not, though, be said for being stoic or philosophical, where what is prized (and this virtue-command evokes), is not the ability to put a concern with others' well-being ahead of one's narrower interests, but a broader and more principled concern with the acceptance of unwelcome circumstances than the one expressed by the term 'flexibility' or 'adaptability'. What is discouraged is the desire to shape the world to one's will and control things that should rather be accepted, and an inability to be at peace with the ways of contingency and fortune. This small scenario might be taken as an expression, and testing ground, for a deeper attitude such as this one.

⁴ Cf. White (1991): 217: “It would be just as ridiculous to order someone to be virtuous as it would be to order them to love us”.

difficulty, or paradox, endemic to an ethics of virtue, as against other forms of ethics, and then to learners of virtue, as against the already and actually virtuous. For they, perforce, must bid themselves to be something they are not – at most, they can then hope to mean: act as if you were.

But without wishing to discount the difficulties that an ethics of virtue needs to confront, need this be one of them? For it seems that commands to patience, fairness, or stoicism, are no less commands to being and yet there seems nothing out of order in using them here – “be patient,” I tell myself as I stand in the doorway, “be a bit less rigid,” “be stoical.” What seems to be the problem with the term 'benevolent' is that it trails certain additional implications which get in the way of its appropriateness. To help pick these up, it might be helpful trying out another few remarks on our ears to tune our hearing. I say:

- (1) “He's the most benevolent person I've ever met!”
- (2) “My girlfriend is a benevolent person.”
- (3) “They're a benevolent pair of kids.”

Unlike the first statement, the last two remarks fall with difficulty on my ears. What seems to be askew? Concerning (3), I would like to put the difficulty by saying that the trouble is in some manner a question of age; we simply cannot – we *do* not – speak of kids as 'benevolent'. But why ever not? What makes the term a more 'grown-up' kind of word? We may recall, in this connection, Rosalind Hursthouse's observation that in educating children to the virtues, we tend to use the term 'fair' as against the term 'just' (Hursthouse 1999: 38). So let us restate the question and ask: What makes justice and benevolence grown-up kinds of words? Part of the reason might appear to lie in a reluctance, which Aristotle has notably articulated for us, to ascribe the full virtues to children; and that is because they lack the preconditions. Kids cannot be benevolent because true benevolence requires a certain core of cognition and choice which children have not yet developed. That *may* be part of what makes benevolence a more 'serious' or heavier word. But then why not say it of a girlfriend with natural ease? It might perhaps be hazarded that this, too, is a word we typically associate with the relationships of youth when hearing it without further specification of context. And although here it might be questioned whether our Aristotelian scruple, which would not allow 'benevolence' to settle upon children with comfort, ought to put it out of reach of the younger generations altogether, it is precisely the question of context in which we should look for our next clue.

For surely part of the difficulty arises as a result of the baldness of the free-hanging statement, which leaves us in need of an account of the attendant circumstances and of the pragmatic occasion in which it is situated. And in this sense, it could be said that *any* statement requires an occasion to sound intelligible or in order. Even to say, most innocuously and uncontroversially, “my girlfriend is a splendid person” would require a context to stand – did someone solicit or deny that? If this demand for a context for statement (2) was met, it seems to me that it would be most at home in response to precisely some such occasion, in which someone had cast her motives or character in doubt. But then if that is the force, one would have to suspect that the force of benevolence must be a little stronger than a statement which had lacked such occasion. And here our first example – “He's the most benevolent person I've ever met!” can help support and clarify that intuition. What that example points to in a general way is that benevolence is a term perfectly at home when situated in a remark that is uttered with emphasis and emotional

charge, such as the one displayed in a statement made in the context of doubt or denial.

So what this line of exploration suggests is that the word 'benevolent' has a certain additional 'heaviness' or force. Having brought this out, it will be easier to say something more about it and observe that, fumbling for my words in the doorway, I would experience the inappropriateness of the term as an excess of grandeur and of a burdensome *gravitas*, which I could ill afford to step into without seeming absurd. The easy passage to comedy – witness the greater susceptibility of 'benevolence' to mockery or humour: “quite the benevolent fellow” can be spoken in irony in a way that “quite the courageous fellow” cannot – suggests a vocabulary whose grandeur lends it to greater heights and greater emotive occasions, but also, like all things whose grandness we have the detachment to remark, to the lows of comedy – their grandeur a piety that is not entirely our own. A word like this is decidedly not a word I am capable of using in a command to myself to make small talk with my aunt or cousin sitting a trace dully in the kitchen without laying myself open to laughter.

So what can the above discussion be taken to show? All that this brief struggle with one of our traditional virtue terms might be taken to show is that a small subset of the virtue terms we have on our standard list trails connotations that do not serve us well when we try to use it as part of our active moral vocabulary. And all *that* might show is that some virtue terms on the standard list, in a tradition carrying the weight of its many years and the cumulative voices of numerous participants on its shoulders, have fallen into desuetude or acquired baggage they find it onerous to bear. Such a story might, for example, be said about the term 'charity', which carries the twin burdens of a Christian legacy as well as the associations derived from a certain kind of philanthropic activity implying an unequal relation between giver and receiver (thus, I could hardly command myself to be 'charitable' on this occasion without falling into the vice of condescension). Or there might be a deeper, and more saturnine, way of telling the story – a MacIntyrean narrative about the decline of our moral language, in which such instances of obsolescence would stand sign for a deeper diagnosis of moral disarray and of a moral language that is a reliquary of meaningless fossils. Words like 'benevolent' might be a relic, perhaps, of a language that was once spoken in earnest and can be no longer.

This would seem far too much to be saying and concluding on the slender cast of examples I have presented, and in fact it is in a rather different direction that I would like to press my account. Attending to the other virtue we left behind – kindness – can provide me with the leverage for doing so. “In these circumstances,” I whisper to myself, “you should be kind.” The account of the difficulty sketched out with respect to 'benevolence' can now be easily transposed here to identify the trouble – for trouble, in my view, is still in attendance. Once again, it could be described as a problem of excess gravity. For even without endorsing a radical claim about the impossibility of morally irrelevant actions, and while clinging fast to the view that there is no scenario that is so mundane that it may not express and conversely train character,⁵ once again what seems to get in the way of the application of the word is a sense of discrepancy or disproportion between the force or gravity it carries, and the relatively short stature or insignificance of the situation at issue. This is not, though it could

⁵ When taken as a question concerning the *expression* of character, the intuition has a noble pedigree. In the words of Plutarch, in the introduction to his *Life of Alexander*: “the most brilliant exploits often tell us nothing of the virtues or vices of the men who performed them, while on the other hand a chance remark or a joke may reveal far more of a man's character than the mere feat of winning battles in which thousands fall, or of marshalling great armies, or laying siege to cities.” (Plutarch 1973: 252).

have been, a way of stating a disagreement with the moral appraisal placed on the situation in the above discussion – perhaps, after all, one should follow through with a 'healthy single-mindedness, dedication, and diligence' in pursuing one's tasks and plans, and the occasion for kindness should not be allowed to trump this call. It is rather that, even if one grants the need to respond to the person before one instead of 'rigidly' pushing ahead with one's plans, the use of the term 'kindness' as a way of describing this response seems unreasonably strong. To pause, exchange a few words of good morning, even to sit down and share a quick morning chat with a visiting relative who is sitting idly in the kitchen without (and here is the clincher) giving sign of the least bit of real misery – but *kindness*?

Yet – do I really mean to speak of *describing* this response? Because perhaps this is the location at which the most important distinction needs to be sought: an observer who had happened to observe my action may not have described them, or me in the light of them, as kind – an observer, for that matter, would have needed far more numerous pieces of evidence to call me that, even if this should have been counted as one. But what the observer would have been ignorant of is how hard or contrary to the grain of my nature I had found it. An observer would not have known that this situation was – for me though it might not be for others – a situation of moral significance, and this is one reason why he might be unwilling to describe me in such terms. Of course, we may remark that, if he felt any bit like Aristotle, he might be unwilling to describe me as such *even if*, indeed especially if, he knew of my hardship – at most, he might describe me as continent.

But let me put this last point aside for a moment to say that, for me, in this situation matters are different. For I am interested, not in describing myself, but in training or educating myself to virtue; and I need to flag this occasion as one that calls for kindness in order to adequately realise the stakes and motivate myself to engage in a course of action different from what might have come more naturally to my temperament. What this suggests is that the perspective of describing may be different from the perspective of training or motivating to virtue; and what it therefore suggests is that, when our interest lies in cultivating character, big words may be needed for small events. To spell the thought out more fully then: in pursuing our aims of self-transformation, we may need to allow an occasion to attract a description that carries greater moral weight than the occasion might appear to warrant in itself and taken in isolation, because it is only by attaching such extraordinary weights to more-than-ordinary circumstances that we can develop new habits of moral perception and response; and this means that the learner of virtue may need to use language in ways that seem extraordinary or inappropriate to the ordinary ear. And perhaps the disagreement with Aristotle can after all be eschewed, and one might say that the purposes of judging character and training character simply part ways here. For unless we commit ourselves to a staunch moral perfectionism, there may be situations in which the moral 'stakes' are insufficiently important for them to count as evidence for a judgement on character. But these same situations may nevertheless be important considered as training ground for character. The 'stakes', on this view, change sizes depending on our purposes, and our words need to follow their measure.

2. The viewpoint of character

The above discussion has taken us part of the way. One of the most important points to have emerged from the attempt to explore the different kinds of 'gravity' responsible for

producing a sense of unnaturalness in one's use of virtue terms is the significance of the distinction between a viewpoint we would call descriptive and a viewpoint we would call educational or prescriptive. But to push things further and develop this line of direction more fully, I want to turn to a different kind of occasion for the language of the virtues and the problems it brings to the surface. Imagine, then:

The time is nearly noon and you're on next. It's the first paper you're giving, ever, in your first big conference, ever, and dozens of strangers are packed in the room. If you're any bit like most first-timers, you're terrified. Yet your situation is even more special: the truth is you've been postponing this plunge into the deep for ages, even though you're already into a prestigious second post-doc and aware that time is ticking and the expectations are thickening on the ground. But it's something you've always known you had to struggle with – speaking in public has been the biggest bugbear of your life. You've struggled with the surface issues, the deep issues, gotten all the way to your problems of trust, your fears of failure, your desire to please, the self-consciousness that is really the consciousness of a judgemental other, probably related to your mother. But now the moment has come. You rise from your seat, dozens of eyes are fixed on you, and as you take the podium, your words begin to quiver haltingly through a parched throat. “I know her,” someone in the crowd murmurs, “she's always been a diffident person.”

People like our hapless nervous public speaker abound, and pressed to do so, might often call themselves diffident, self-critical, self-conscious, and be similarly described by others. Now let us consider: what kind of descriptions are these? I am thinking here, rather narrowly, of a specific way of classifying the different modes of attention and description we might direct to persons which Christopher Gill did us the service of setting out in a series of early papers. There, he drew a heuristic distinction between what he called a 'character-centred viewpoint' and a contrasting 'personality-centred viewpoint'.

The first viewpoint is expressed, for example, when we describe a person as 'kind and warm', or as 'weak and self-indulgent'. Characterisations of persons emerging from this viewpoint are overtly evaluative and typically aim to place the person in an evaluative framework. Under this scheme, the person is regarded as the possessor of good or bad qualities that merit praise or blame. Equally important, from this viewpoint the person is considered under his aspect as an agent who can be held responsible for his actions and for the traits in question. By contrast, descriptions of persons that emerge from the personality-centred viewpoint do not pursue evaluation in a similar overt way – contrast: 'he's sensitive and introverted' with 'he's weak and cowardly'. Often, people are presented as standing in a passive relationship to the aspects picked out through this viewpoint; they are aspects that do not lie entirely under their direct control and may be the product of forces or desires that “seem, or are, external to the conscious, deliberation self or 'ego'.” From this viewpoint, one's effort is typically directed, not to judging or evaluating, but to explaining or understanding, and thus also to coming to share the person's point of view with a fair degree of empathetic intention.⁶

So how, in terms of this distinction, would we classify the descriptions made of our hapless would-be orator? Even from this slim version of Gill's distinction, it is perfectly clear that the viewpoint taken on by both our would-be orator and those confident enough

⁶For this distinction, see for example Gill 1983 and 1986 (of which p. 253 quoted in the text).

among the audience to describe her is the second one – that of personality. “She's diffident,” “she tends to be too self-critical,” “she's always had trust issues”; “it all goes down to my desire for approval,” “the reason I'm so self-conscious has to do with my mother.” In all these descriptions, one's effort is directed toward explaining and understanding characteristics that the person is not presented as having entirely within her control, and, from the side of the third persons offering these characterisations, imports an intention of sympathetic involvement.

But now it might be asked: how exclusive or hard-and-fast is this distinction? How restricted is one's ability to move from one to the other? Might it be possible, for example, to move seamlessly from one to the other by – daring though it sounds – *re-describing* the person characterised through one of the viewpoints in terms that belong to the other – by performing, perhaps, a certain kind of *re-interpretation*? This possibility might seem more compelling when one considers the direction leading from character to personality. For then, the transition would seem to fall into a familiar script: a moral judgement is replaced by a sympathetic attempt to explain vice, or, correlatively, by a reductive explanation of virtue. (“He's only so generous because it gives him a sense of power.” “She's only so cold-hearted because she's scared of being vulnerable.”). But what about the conversion in the opposite direction? In considering this question, I want to put aside for the moment the question *why* one would be interested in this conversion, and having remarked what will be immediately evident – that the interest in the person taken by an ethics of virtue is represented by Gill's character-centred perspective – let me simply put down, as a temporary place-holder, the thought that this is something that anyone with an interest in the place of character and virtue in the moral life might be concerned with.

What might seem to encourage the prospect of such a conversion in this particular case is that, while the traits of our unhappily nervous public speaker whom we describe as 'diffident', 'self-critical', or 'excessively self-conscious', may strike us as ones rooted in a peculiarly modern perspective,⁷ one may nonetheless find a distant precursor to them in Aristotle's writings in the location where the quality of *aidos* or a sense of shame comes up for discussion. Writing about *aidos* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle himself had suggested a certain consanguinity between that quality and a characteristic with a far more central presence in the list of the virtues and vices, namely cowardice: “its [*sc.*, *aidos*] expression is similar to that of fear of something terrifying” (Irwin); “it has an effect very like that produced by the fear of danger” (Thomson).⁸

The two perspectives then with their respective vocabularies might not seem to be leagues removed from one another. Aristotle's own discussion, however, suggests two reasons why an effort at conversion would not work in this particular case and why 'modesty' or 'shame' would not readily collapse into cowardice. *Aidos* is more akin to an emotion than a state, and it has a different object – its object is fear of disrepute, not of physical danger. These reasons evoke the ones we might have put forward ourselves to explain our reluctance to perform such a wilful re-interpretation. Our instinct would go against it because our tendency is to consider such characteristics more in the way of

⁷ 'Modern', in a sense that would be encompassed by Warren Susman's account of the decline of character and the rise of personality in the last century. See Susman 1984, chapter 14.

⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 4, 1128b10-35, respectively trans. Irwin 1985, and trans. Thomson 2004. Interestingly, Aristotle opens the discussion by framing it as a question about whether *aidos* is to be considered a *virtue*. This must no doubt be linked with the fact that he first considers its appropriateness for youth; for adults, as the following passages make clear, *aidos* is hardly commendable.

afflictions (cf. “aspects of ourselves lying outside our control”) than blame-bearing faults – people who have them should be pitied, not reprov’d (cf. Aristotle’s: ‘an emotion’).⁹ Moreover, we generally think of other-related virtues (and vices) as more paradigmatic and exemplary of the virtues, while self-related virtues and vices (such as the virtue of self-love) tend to occupy second place in our thinking. Traditionally, courage has had a strongly other-related focus: a courageous act serves the good of those for the sake of whom one masters one’s fears to fight (cf. Aristotle’s: ‘different objects’).

Yet talk about tradition and a ‘traditional’ analysis of virtue terms like ‘courage’ or ‘cowardice’ might still seem to leave open the possibility that a different analysis could be performed upon these terms to ‘modernise’ them. And put in these terms, the response would now seem to be: this, surely, is not an option; for it is not a matter of a ‘tradition’ the way it is a tradition to conduct a religious ceremony one way as against another or to sing carols at Christmas, but rather it is a matter of the use of this term in ordinary language. To speak of a person who blushes and loses their words when they get up to take the podium as cowardly would be a singularly unusual way of speaking.

What would be so unusual? The unusualness would reside in the implications: on the one hand, as already suggested, to call this behaviour cowardly would imply that the person should be held responsible and open to blame.¹⁰ But at the same time, and going beyond what was said above, it would also import a certain judgement on the ‘stakes’ of the occasion: it would imply that the context of the behaviour is one of certain moment, on which significant things hang. Thus, to call our diffident orator cowardly when the context was a conference paper on logic might seem inappropriate – unless, perhaps, the paper revealed matters of unusually grand import for human self-understanding; matters which might, additionally, be expected to cause offence or strong reaction. In that case, failure to muster the nerve to present them, however acute one’s personal discomfort, would mark a failure to appreciate that short-lived hardship is worth confronting when greater interests will thereby be served. And this points to a further implication: the use of the word ‘cowardice’ would seem to be in good working order when the relevant action has been characterised by failure or omission. The diffident speaker who gave his paper notwithstanding the costs of his discomfort is thereby not cowardly but might indeed be called courageous; even if, that is, it was an ordinary academic paper lacking in grand human implications. We would not, then, describe him as cowardly, and it might seem as if the reasons for this are a matter of ordinary linguistic usage. The word as we use it simply will not do in this context. And so to speak of a diffident person as cowardly, in that sense, ‘cannot be done’.

That would be one way of explaining the reason why this particular (‘personality-centred’) way of characterising people would resist an assimilation to one of the central virtues: unless the context could be suitably interpreted, to do so would be ungrammatical. But would this explanation be entirely sufficient as it stands? What it seems to leave out is the fact that the use of this type of words is not merely a matter of what is ‘dictated’ by, and

⁹ This is supported by both intuition and literary example. When, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Georgiana Darcy behaves with an “embarrassment which, though proceeding from shyness and the fear of doing wrong, would easily give to those who felt themselves inferior, the belief of her being proud and reserved,” her sensitive observers react with pity (Austen 2001:173).

¹⁰ That this is the force of our virtue terms seems to be the starting point for those who go on to raise deeper questions about the responsibility one bears for one’s own character and about whether ascriptions of virtue or vice terms are compatible with a belief that people’s characters lie out of their control. A good port of call for considering such questions is Trianosky 1990. See also Kupperman 1991, chapter 3.

in accord with, the pragmatic occasion, but also a matter contingent on the moral purposes and standards of moral appraisal of the particular users of language. For as will be evident from the analysis of the use of 'cowardice' above, whether the word is appropriate depends on the evaluative appraisal placed on the situation in question. A person who attached little weight to the revelations which our diffident speaker would cry over the rooftops in a sonorous voice (and if the idea of a portentous conference paper on logic does not convince you, it will be easy to think of examples that carry greater conviction) would hardly be capable of applying the term 'cowardice' in a way that a person who cared deeply about such matters would.

Having gained a handle on the notion of moral purposes, it becomes easier to identify an additional factor that could also be called a 'moral purpose' and might influence our use of language – and here I can finally lay aside the temporary place-holder I set down earlier when considering whether one could pass from the personality-centred to the character-centred perspective, suspending the question of why one might *want* to do so. For it is certainly possible that our use of language in a given instance might be, not merely evaluative in the sense that is opposed to factual (the familiar contrast between calling a person swarthy and calling him a villain), but evaluative in the sense that it is guided by the values one desires to achieve – in other words, protreptic. In that case, a person who is guided by a certain understanding of the character he aspires to acquire and the kind of person he is striving to become, might be ready to use language in ways that might strike us as 'ungrammatical' in the strict sense, because this would best further his efforts of moral self-change. Concerned to cultivate the virtues, he may describe some of his behaviour using the language of the virtues and vices even where doing so might be characterised by others as inappropriate or harsh.

I might choose then to describe my diffidence as cowardice or as a failure of good will, if I think this assimilation might help me, and brace me, to address the elements of my anxiety and rally toward the vision of character I aspire to. "Be courageous," I tell myself as I mount the stage. "It's cowardly of you to think of bolting for the door." Or: "It's impatient of you to think you could free yourself from all the symptoms of your fears overnight; be patient with your quivering voice and your deepening blush." Or again: "Show some faith or good will – why think others are out to get you?" Considered this way, the use of moral language would become an element in my effort to relate to the aspects of my being that I find difficult to control and with respect to which I feel most passive: I need to be patient with them; I need to show fortitude; I need to show faith.

It may help us put this point more significantly here if we relate Gill's distinction between the perspective of character and that of personality to another well-known distinction, namely the Kantian one between theoretical and practical standpoints on the self, or (and in a nutshell), the self considered under its aspect as natural, causally explicable phenomenon and the self seen under its aspect as agent – a comparison suggested by the important role played in Gill's distinction by the person's control over their traits and their relationship of activity or passivity toward them.¹¹ On this reformulation of the distinction, we could say that the character viewpoint would supersede the viewpoint of personality in a way similar to the way in which the theoretical standpoint might be said to be capable of being overcome by the practical one, and that is by a decision that becomes expressive of one's agency, so that the distinction between the two perspectives is as good as our ability

¹¹ For the Kantian distinction between standpoints, see Korsgaard 1989, esp. pp. 119-20.

to ask someone, or to ask ourselves, to take responsibility for something presented from the theoretical standpoint as a feature lying outside our active control.¹² And in that sense, in turn, it might be said that the words I use of myself – 'courageous' or 'cowardly', 'patient' or 'good-willed' – are ones that have, less a descriptive role than prescriptive task.

If we grant this possibility, it would involve the recognition of an asymmetry between the descriptive use of the language of character – which was, in fact, what Gill seems to have had predominantly in mind in articulating his distinction (“our primary concern is with placing or locating the person in an evaluative schema or framework,” 1986: 252) – and a use of language that is guided by the purposes of moral change and which we might call protreptic. The asymmetry is not, though Gill's remark would suggest this, an asymmetry between first-person and third-person uses of language. And other than considering the appropriateness with which my friends in the audience might whisper to me as I go past – “Now that's courageous of you, well done!” – the lack of such an asymmetry is most revealingly suggested by considering, rather differently, the early moral development of children. Of this, we have an illuminating account from Ben Spiecker. On this account children acquire membership in the social world through a gradual process of initiation which unfolds as parents talk to, and talk about, beings that still lack language, using terms that can be said to have, less a true descriptive application, than a creative aim – to help the would-be person grow into full humanity. A key element in this process is the attribution of intentional states which teach the child to think of itself through a shared language and thus draw it into the shared human world.

Something similar could be said about the acquired membership of the moral world. Just as a young infant is not 'undecided' or 'making a pretence' but speaking makes it so, so to describe a child's actions as courageous or cruel or considerate may be to use language in anticipation or on credit, with a view to the language in which the child should learn to think about its actions. One might say: it is an 'as if' use of moral language; a kind of hopeful *mimesis*; a 'fiction' which becomes true by virtue of being played out.¹³ This would resume the point, made earlier when discussing the paradox of a command to benevolence, that the moral learner must bid himself to be something he is not, so that at most he can mean: act as if you were. The moral learner uses the language of being in order to become.

This account of the protreptic purposes that guide our choice of moral language would explain why a person concerned with education and self-education might desire to use a vocabulary that carries distinct moral force, and in particular, the language of character and the virtues. At the same time, it would leave room for a deeper explanation of the

¹² The importance of a decision in moving away from the theoretical standpoint is one of the insights that I take Richard Moran to have articulated in Moran 2001. This, I should emphasise, is not to advocate the blanket use of a moralistic approach to emotional difficulties; as with any insight, there are wise and unwise ways of applying this one, and it is not my intention here to circumscribe these with precision.

¹³ Much of my language here is indebted to Ben Spiecker's essay: see Spiecker 1991, esp. pp. 217-9. See also, in this connection, the interesting discussion of “habituation as *mimesis*” in Fossheim 2006, which, as the title of his essay suggests, proposes an Aristotelian account of the motivation to become virtuous among children and young people. Fossheim takes Aristotle's view that we become by doing to involve the idea that “a person can in important respects be said to perform a virtuous action before the person has herself become virtuous in any fully fledged sense” (p. 113) – yet another application of the as-if or anticipatory character of moral language. This “as-if” application of the language of the virtues is, after all, a proposal one can read back into Aristotle's distinction, in Book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1105b4-8), between the predication of virtue terms of persons, and of actions, which seems to offer a way out of the circularity of saying that people become virtuous by doing virtuous acts, but that virtuous acts can only be done by virtuous persons. One thus becomes a just person by doing just acts – or, differently put, by acting as if one were.

sources from which this language derives its special moral force and the strength of its appeal over the moral learner. For what terms like 'courage' and 'cowardice' have in common is the fact of their belonging to a recognisable tradition of moral inquiry, and the decision to adopt them in one's quest for self-change is a way of enriching this quest by recognising oneself as a participant in a larger human community whose purposes one shares; and this is a participation one best enacts by sharing its language. The decision to jettison relative neologisms like 'self-consciousness' or 'diffidence' in favour of the language of a need for 'courage' or (a strange hybrid of old and new) of a spirit of 'stoicism' can then be additionally read in terms of a desire to situate one's moral quest within a longer history of human endeavour that places one in contact with a larger moral community. (And such an appreciation of the importance of tradition might suggest that the answer to the question whether this protreptic and tradition-bound understanding of the use of virtue terms should after all encourage us to overcome our scruples about a grand-and-comical word like 'benevolence' would be: possibly yes.)

This might sound like a bookish answer, the kind of answer a philosopher might give and like to hear, in more ways than one. Because it is mostly philosophers who are likely to be familiar with this longer tradition; and because only philosophers would be strongly inclined to think of moral learning in such intellectualist terms – in terms of a mastery of concepts, and of virtue terms in particular. Concerning the first point, if it were a fact that only or mostly philosophers know of this longer tradition, this would not show that it ought to be one. Even those who reject MacIntyre's controversial diagnosis of our present condition can still agree with him that “there is no way to possess the virtues except as part of a tradition” (MacIntyre 2007: 127). There is much to be said for a wider recovery, or perhaps a wider availability, of this tradition.¹⁴

As for the second point, with this I seem to arrive at what has emerged from this discussion as its central nub. My discussion above converged at separate locations – in considering our use of 'kindness' and our use of 'courage' and 'cowardice' – on two key motifs: that the speaker's use of language may depend on his or her moral purposes; and that a project of moral (self-)education in the virtues may involve taking on extraordinary or ungrammatical language. Both themes point to the notion just framed as a criticism of excess intellectualism: namely, that moral learning needs to be understood in terms of the mastery of concepts; or, restated: as a process that involves the mastery of new language.

3. Moral education and the mastery of language

So it cannot be a matter of denying it, but of defending and clarifying it. It is an invitation to look upon the learning of virtue as one that has the growing mastery of concepts at its centre, and in which the moral task involves the acquisition of new patterns of naming and perceiving. Part of the habits the moral learner must acquire are then to be understood as linguistic ones, and demand learning to engage with actions and circumstances through fresh linguistic sieves that bring the concepts of the virtues to bear on them. Acquiring this kind of habit is exacting not only for the reasons that make the acquisition of any new

¹⁴ And in talking of availability, I am also thinking of the availability of an understanding of philosophy as 'practical' in the sense in which Pierre Hadot has described it – because what is at issue is not merely the formal inclusion of philosophy in school or university curricula, but a particular way of approaching philosophy, as a claim over our way of life. See Hadot 1995 and 2001.

language exacting, and in a certain sense unnatural, but because this kind of language, unlike most foreign languages we learn, is rarely a communicative necessity imposed as it were from the outside. Seen in this light, every unfolding circumstance becomes a potential occasion for the practice of a new idiom – an index of the virtues – by asking: what quality of mind and character am I being called upon to exercise? It is this kind of question we may imagine our impatient and possibly unkind first character asking himself as he fights off his belligerence in the doorway, and our diffident would-be orator as she struggles with her nerves on the podium.

It might of course be pointed out that this vision of a ceaseless encounter between moral language and the world is misleading in at least one respect, and this is that such encounters are much narrower than my account suggests. Not every situation provides material for the language of the virtues. We may think here of the illuminating remarks made separately by Martha Nussbaum and Philippa Foot about the occasions on which the virtues come into demand. Nussbaum has named general spheres of life or 'grounding experiences' which fix the reference of virtues – spheres in which "human choice is both non-optional and somewhat problematic" (Nussbaum 1988: 37) – and Foot has talked about occasions of typical human difficulty, in which there is "some temptation to be resisted or deficiency of motivation to be made good" (Foot 1997: 169). Yet what is important is that very often what is involved in the acquisition of the virtues is precisely learning to see something *as* a temptation or deficiency; the lazy person who has not yet seen his idleness as a temptation, or the cold-natured person who has not yet seen his cold-heartedness as a deficiency, have a longer task of self-change ahead than those who have learned to read their character under the aspect of its flaws. I need to have problematised my fearfulness before I can see an experience as an occasion of vice or virtue, courage or cowardice; I need to have problematised my disinclination to part with money in order to see something as a foothold for generosity. And this is simply to resume the point made earlier with reference to the first of my examples: what makes a situation an occasion for the virtues is the moral weaknesses an individual brings to bear on it.

This means that a large variety of situations need to be probed against the inertia of contentment or indifference. In other situations, old dilemmas in which the space for moral questions lies already open but questions have been left without resolution – do I give to the person asking me for cash on the street who I worry may be a con, do I remind a friend of the debt he has forgotten, what do I do with my impossible mother with whom communication always breaks down and who exasperates me beyond words – can be approached again with new terms. Maybe I should prefer to be kind and trusting rather than doubtful and suspicious, even if it means I sometimes get things wrong as a result and the person I took to be in true need was in fact a sophisticated professional faking his limp (if it is pride that makes me bristle at the thought of being hoodwinked in the hour of a generous act, is this a pride I desire in myself?). If I value the ideal of being a generous person, maybe this is a reason for me to forget about my debt; perhaps I should make a decision for kindness, and this would instantly resolve my inveterate frustrations with my mother like a Gordian knot.

Some such understanding of what the learning of virtue may involve – a new categorial approach to the unfolding circumstances of daily life – may have been betrayed by my earlier discussion of kindness. The discrepancy between the situation and the name, I suggested earlier – a grand name for a mundane situation – may need to be tolerated for the purposes of moral education. But this discrepancy might now be seen to have a broader

root. Anchored in a broader understanding of the process of linguistic learning which the acquisition of the virtues may demand, it might be seen as a discrepancy, and artificiality, which is ineliminable in the effort to order the world along new linguistic lines. The word 'kindness' or 'humility' or 'fortitude' may feel as strange in my mouth as any other new vocabulary I learn to use for the first time and in which, until it becomes my own through habit, I feel as awkward if I was wearing someone else's clothes.

This emphasis on artificiality – just like my earlier emphasis on the inevitability of ungrammatical language – might create misgivings and lead to a reprise of the accusation of 'bookishness' raised above. There is something awry, it might be said, with this list-like understanding of moral learning, in which the moral learner is pictured as approaching reality armed with a shopping list of virtues which he then seeks to match to actions and occasions. In its abstractness, it is a picture of the kind of person who imagines she could learn to speak a language by following her finger down a dictionary (dictionaries, books of philosophy – little difference there!) and then using words without ever having seen examples in living use and in the stream of language. And it might thus be said, more polemically, that this approach resurrects a conception of the moral life which writers on the virtues have found particularly graceless and have typically associated with an ethics of duty or principles – the list-like approach to the moral life. What would the virtues of a virtue ethics come to were we to explicitly embrace that?

The best way of countering this criticism is to see that the picture of mechanistic list-waving categorisation which it conjures as the proposed image of the moral life is an inaccurate and misleading one. After all philosophers, even philosophers drawn to an ethics of principles, have long known that the application of rules – and thus the application of concepts – to occasions is by no means a mechanistic task. But this is equally, and even more so, when it comes to the virtues. It in fact takes dedication, sensitivity and a concerted exercise of judgement to determine the term of virtue or vice that settles best on a given situation and most aptly responds to the difficulty or temptation it presents one.

Is the heavy heart with which I generally set out to prepare the next day's teaching, and which always seems to open the space of a response, best admonished by describing it as a call for *patience*? But that diagnosis does not go deep enough; it seems to miss the point if it advises me to construe my relationship to my work as a form of waiting or suffering. For *perseverance* then? Can I be content with the implication that in preparing to teach I am striving, and enduring hardship, with an eye to future consequences and results that will repay the effort? Is this instrumental type of striving a way in which I can accept to understand my relationship to the task of teaching? For *dedication*, perhaps? This word might settle better if I feel the language of 'striving' and 'ulterior ends' will not do, though by carrying the precisely opposite connotation – that of a task charged with intrinsic importance – it now forces me to confront directly the nature and grounds of my commitment to my teaching role. For *enthusiasm*? Yet to my linguistic ear that sounds more like an emotion I must crank up rather than a trait of character I am called upon to be (in however creative and anticipatory a sense); and can my linguistic intuitions avoid being influenced by the fact that this term has absorbed the history of a myriad appearances in advertisements for employment and acquired all the connotations of a quality suggesting a performance pleasing to others? Is it best parsed as a call for *whole-heartedness*, taken as the capacity to be accepting of and present to my tasks? If this word seems too broad, might I, like Aristotle, reach for words lying a little outside my roster of familiar terms, and perhaps settle with a term of more recent vintage like *mindfulness*, assuming I was happy with the

tissue of cultural associations which *that* trails? Might my vice simply be a propensity to *laziness*? I would need to probe my conscience to decide whether my initial reluctance to accept this term – it seems too brute and blunt an explanation of my heavy-heartedness, unworthy of my sense of the *depth* of the difficulty – stems from pride rather than an absence of truth in this name-calling name-needing moral diagnosis. Or I might distrust this description for similar reasons that might lead me to reject a call for *self-discipline* – namely that it seems too uninformative a specification of my failing.

The choice of word is clearly a complex judgement that is the result of a fine-grained negotiation between my understanding of my own activity and the interpretations invited by the different virtue terms I propose for describing my 'temptations' or 'deficiencies of motivation' and thus the quality of mind I am called upon to display in addressing them. And if, at the end of this negotiation, I felt that the search for the right word had brought into the open a deeper difficulty in giving a coherent account of the purposes of my effort – because no invited interpretation seemed satisfying – this might be an important indication that I ought to decide, instead of educating my recalcitrant will and giving it the right language for overcoming to its temptations, to walk away from the activity which constitutes the ground of my difficulty and my temptation – and then I might call on myself to show fortitude or patience or constancy or fidelity in soldiering on with good cheer until the end of my present commitments.

The above example should go some way toward dispelling the suspicion of an excessive artificiality and a dully bookish, list-like way of relating to moral experience that this understanding of moral learning might provoke. At the same time, one should acknowledge in this suspicion a useful reminder of the importance of examples and exemplars in moral education, a point that has often been stressed in writings on the virtues.¹⁵ But examples can only take one so far, and could not relieve one of the need for judgement when it comes to bringing the virtues to bear on particular, novel realities – a

¹⁵ Yet this is a view that has admitted different interpretations, each of which would bear a different relationship to the present line of argument. On one view, the specification of the virtues would require reference to an exemplar or, in Alderman's words, a 'paradigmatic individual', whom Alderman understands as an actual, historical individual; drawing on Jaspers, his list includes the Buddha, Christ, Socrates and Confucius. What *counts* as imitation or emulation is a problem such a theory will naturally have to confront in bridging the distance between a historical exemplar and particular situations requiring response in the here-and-now, and part of Alderman's answer would seem to designate *stories* as the principal medium through which this distance is bridged. The decision procedure through which a moral decision would be taken, on these terms, would involve what he refers to as a 'Gedanken experiment' in which one would try to imagine what the paradigmatic individual would do, having saturated oneself with knowledge of his character through stories (see Alderman 1997, last reference to p. 160; the focus on stories and narrative is of course also a major component of MacIntyre's account of the virtues, though it is articulated at a rather different level.) In his introduction to the same volume, Statman seems happier to speak of an imaginary ideal – thus, "to find out what is required by friendship, for example, in some specific situation, would be to imagine an ideal friend and try to figure out how this friend would behave" (Statman 1997: 10). This formulation now looks much closer to a rather different specification of moral exemplarity which I take Hursthouse to have formulated. Responding to the criticism that the virtue ethicist has no practical guidance to give – save refer the teenager who is contemplating an abortion to the thought of how Socrates may have acted in her place – she states that "every virtue generates a positive instruction (act justly, kindly, courageously, honestly, etc) and every vice a prohibition (do not act unjustly, cruelly...)". The agent contemplating an action would thus ask themselves: would such an action be unkind or dishonest, courageous or unfair? Thus, while Hursthouse uses the notion of the virtuous agent to define right action (right action is the action that would be chosen by the virtuous agent), virtue terms confront actions directly rather than via imagining how a hypothetical exemplar would act (see Hursthouse 1997, esp. pp. 220-1). It is this view that I take myself to be closest to.

point that is presumably embodied in the Aristotelian claim that the virtues require practical wisdom for their proper exercise. This claim, of course, has often been spelled out in a way that makes reference to something more akin to perceptions rather than explicit, exact and codifiable conceptions, and this would seem very far from an understanding of moral learning as an effort, at least in part, to order moral reality by the use of explicitly conceptual, categorial tools.

But all that reveals is the position from which these reflections are undertaken, and the kind of person to whom they are addressed. What it simply goes to show is that we are not children, and these reflections are being undertaken from the perspective, not of the toddler enjoying every bit of the luck that Aristotle would have wished upon him – the fortune of an unimpeachable upbringing – but of an adult seeking to re-craft his or her world at new joints, who is therefore inevitably engaged in an unnatural task. A task, one might say, that demands of him that he put himself in the position of a rather un-childlike child – a child in learning a new language, un-childlike in learning it through its grammar.¹⁶ Aristotle's felicitously educated child would not start from definitions, and, though master of the use of words having learnt them through example and practice, he might even have difficulty giving them. The language he would speak might only be of the kind that Rosalind Hursthouse describes using the rather unloveable term 'X reasons', which are free from any explicit use of the vocabulary of the virtues ('V' reasons). The truly kind person need not say "I must do this because it would be *kind*" or "it would be the *kind* thing to do" in explaining why a person needs their help. They might say "She's been feeling down and she'd be so pleased to receive this," "She's probably lonely." The truly just person need not say "that would be *just*" or "that's the fair thing to do" in explaining why a certain thing should be done, but "It's his," "I owe it to her" or "I promised." (Hursthouse 1999: 128; cf. Annas 2008.)

But from the perspective of the moral learner, moral (self-)education would seem hard to separate from mastering the language of the virtues.¹⁷ It may be a language that is too rigid or too grand, and which few people truly speak, unless they have grown up with dictionaries or philosophy. But it may be hoped that, just as a successful graft ceases to be alien and the body extends new nerves to give it feeling or just as an object landing on the seabed is gradually assimilated into the life of the sea, the grafted moral vocabulary would gradually lose its rigidity and would transform itself into the subtler and more natural language which Aristotle's toddlers would have grown up speaking.¹⁸

¹⁶ Talk of grammar, and of learning virtue as a mastery of words, is indebted to the kind of attention we have acquired from Wittgenstein, but the analogy between virtuous action and grammatical speech is not a new one. Aristotle had already struck it in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.4. Compare Russell 2009: 84: "In this respect, the notion of 'just action' is like the notion of 'grammatical utterance': in each case, what one does conforms to standards of appropriateness relevant to the state or ability, and one can do things conforming to those standards – do something just or say something grammatical – without having the full-fledged state or ability already." As may be obvious, this account of moral learning bears a connection to a prominent analysis of virtue as a practical know-how or skill, which transposes to moral learning the idea that skills are often first acquired with the mediation of rules that become redundant with practice. See Jacobson 2005, esp. 390-1, and compare also Annas 2008. Although Annas stresses the importance of exemplars in the acquisition of skills and thus also of virtues, her account suggests that this process must also include the learning of rules or the presence of occurrent thoughts about one's praxis ("grammar") which fall away or become "self-effacing" with experience (see esp. 22-24).

¹⁷ I say 'hard', but I do not mean 'impossible'. The view I have been formulating should not be understood as a dogmatic account of how the learning of virtue must go. It is simple *one* way it may have to.

¹⁸ It is instructive, in this context, to consider the 'virtues project' pursued by Linda K. Popov over the last few years, of which an important expression is found in her book *The Family Virtues Guide* (Popov 1997). This is a

This account might now also allow me to dispel a paradox implicit in my earlier remarks: for how can the learner be described both as *mastering* a new language and yet also as using language in an *extraordinary* or *ungrammatical* way? The resolution of this lies in saying that this language has the extraordinariness of grammar, and may become obsolete once we have mastered how to speak, the way a grammar book does when we become fluent in a new language, even though we may never lose the habit or the need of referring to it.

To resume the suspicion that formed my starting point, then, the criticism of this approach as unduly intellectualist did not quite put its finger on the right place or go far enough: what it picked up was not (merely) the bookishness of philosophers, but of (one type of) grown-up learners of virtue, who cannot avoid the burden and labour of bookishness. In this labour, the role of tradition would be to provide one with grammar books with which to go out and confront moral realities in all their richness, using its extraordinary locutions to relate oneself to the larger human community that has shared one's quest.

Conclusion

Departing from the humdrum beginnings of a couple of ordinary occasions, the main point I have sought to articulate is the thought that the task of learning, or recovering, the language

project with a predominantly practical aim: to provide parents with practical tools and strategies for educating children in the virtues. What is interesting is that the practice of naming the virtues occupies a central place among these tools – a key educational strategy consists of learning to recognise what Popov calls 'teachable moments', occasions which 'invite' the use of virtue terms – and the project as a whole is pervaded by a belief in the transformative power of the language of virtue. It is interesting to ask in this context: how does the language that results from such efforts ring to the ear? (How truly *'inviting'* are these occasions?) And here, too, I think that the charge of artificiality could hardly fail to arise: (1) To a young child holding a rock in its hand to throw at a sibling: "Stop! This is dangerous. You are not being peaceful." And later: "How can you make up to your friend for forgetting to be peaceful?" (p. 17; peacefulness is a virtue term in Popov's scheme.) (2) Addressing a young child, presumably on its way to school: "I honour you for your courage to go to the bus by yourself." (p. 24) (3) Seeking to correct a child's behaviour: "What virtue do you need to call on right now?" (p. 23). Talk about bookishness! The second example in particular is a perfect case of a big virtue word crashing down on a mundane occasion; the third, an unabashed reference to lists. (Of course, one might say apropos the second example that much of language has to be extraordinary falling on children – the point made above about 'creative' or 'anticipatory' language. And then we would be resuming the point that the adult learner must become an un-childlike child.) In this educational project, then, one finds embodied both aspects of the view I have outlined – the view of moral (specifically virtue) learning as a process of linguistic mastery, and the view of this linguistic mastery as one that involves the use of 'extraordinary' language. Encountered in such a context, though, the extraordinariness or 'bookishness' of this language also points to something larger: it is also a reflection of the fact, which here appears as one, that the language of the virtues is not one that we are habituated to use and hear. Popov points out that the vague and unhelpful terms 'bad' and 'good' do service for us all too often in labelling children's actions ('bad girl', 'good boy'). The language of the virtues is one that will need to be learnt as much by parents as by children. In fact, learning to recognise what Popov calls 'teachable moments' (moments in which the language of the virtues can be used) seems very similar in nature to the task I have described as forming part of the moral self-education of adults, and involves the same deliberate and reflective effort at confronting each unfolding situation with the repertory of one's new language. On Popov's project, see also Hursthouse's brief remarks in Hursthouse 2006: 112-14. The project's premise that educating children to the virtues is at least in part a matter of linguistic learning is one which, as I indicated above in n15, is at home with Hursthouse's larger view of the direct confrontation of actions with virtue terms.

of the virtues is one that each individual may need to undertake in their efforts of moral (self-)education. The language one learns may at times need to endure the burden of its extraordinariness until one's practice has given it a home and more natural idiom free from the bookishness of an un-childlike child. My hope has been to make small contribution to this effort, helping to bridge the passage from the exciting bookishness of philosophy to everyday practice, from grammar to fluency, and from doing to being, where grammar is not needed. Though for 'prisoners like us' struggling in doorways and on podiums with our temper and our nerves, this is no doubt a pipe dream.

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