

# Defending the Good Dog Picture of Virtues

Andrei Ionuț Mărășoiu\*

Received: 28 October 2019 / Accepted: 3 August 2020

*Abstract:* I consider and reject a specific criticism advanced by Korsgaard against virtue ethics and epistemology when these are conceived with the help of what she calls the image of the “Good Dog.” I consider what virtue ethics and epistemology would look like if the Good Dog picture of virtues were largely correct. I argue that attention to the features that make Korsgaard undermine the usefulness of virtues when conceived along the lines of the Good Dog picture reveals the opposite of what she claims. On the Good Dog picture, virtue ethics and epistemology are seen as more promising approaches to rationality than Korsgaard’s own advocacy of reflection.

*Keywords:* experience; expertise; fluency; intellectual virtue; moral virtue; necessitation; normativity; rationality; reflection.


## 1. Introduction


Christine Korsgaard writes:

Some virtue theorists have offered us the (to my mind) equally rebarbative picture of the virtuous human being as a sort of Good Dog, whose desires and inclinations have been so perfectly trained that he always does what he ought to do spontaneously and with tail-wagging cheerfulness and enthusiasm. [On this picture,] the

---

\* Institutul de Cercetare al Universității din București (ICUB)

 Str. Dr. Dimitrie Brândză nr. 1, București, România 060102

 andrei.marasoiu@icub.unibuc.ro



experience of necessitation is a sign that there is something wrong with the person who undergoes it.

The trouble with those two images of virtue—the Reformed Miserable Sinner and the Good Dog—and with the philosophical theories behind them, is not merely that they denigrate the experience of necessitation. It is also (and relatedly) that they do not give an adequate explanation of how we are necessitated. (Korsgaard 2011, 3–4)

Oddly enough, she doesn't return to the Good Dog picture. It mainly seems to serve as a brief foil for introducing her own views of the role and nature of rational necessitation to act. By “necessitation,” Korsgaard means the rational connections constitutive of our agency to the extent that values we guide ourselves by serve as norms for us in action, norms we not only comply with, but which we *follow*—and which *guide* us so we may follow.

In this text, I only incidentally explore Korsgaard's own positive views of rational necessitation and self-constitution. Rather, I focus on the step that seems to go by too quickly: the criticism of virtue theories implicit in the passages just quoted.<sup>1</sup> I argue that this criticism, once fully articulated, can be successfully rejected, revealing how virtues may be grasped using precisely the Good Dog picture that Korsgaard decries.

## 2. The target

What is the target of Korsgaard's criticism? Surely it cannot be virtue theories generally, for these conceive of virtues—intellectual or moral alike—in starkly different ways. In this section, I argue that Korsgaard's target is best construed along the lines of Railton (2011).

First note that two prominent contemporary approaches to virtues cannot be Korsgaard's target. For Foot (2001), just as growing is the plant's

---

<sup>1</sup> Korsgaard doesn't mention anyone explicitly by name. But talk of cheerfulness and of the naturalness of the dog, as well as of its well-tailored behavior seems to suggest she is primarily targeting views like Hursthouse (1999), Foot (2001) and Railton (2011). It is with them in mind that I proceed.

good, it is the rational exercise of free will that is a person's good. Foot tries to accommodate this within virtue ethics, writing:

I believe that evaluations of human will and action share a conceptual structure with evaluations of characteristics and operations of other living things, and can only be understood in these terms. (Foot 2001, 8)

It follows that the cultivation of virtues should aim at enhancing one's rational exercises of free will. The view fits well with Korsgaard's talk of agency and self-constitution. For, on this view, it is by our rational and free acts that we become ourselves more by becoming better people. Foot's distinction between what is good in the natural world and what is good for a person makes it clear that Korsgaard's complaint that a Good Dog picture of virtues misconstrues them cannot target Foot's virtue theory.

Nor is Hursthouse's (1999) virtue theory a target of Korsgaard's objection. For Hursthouse starts her discussion of virtues by considering a bridge principle between rule-based and virtue-based approaches to morality. On that principle: "An action is right iff it is in accordance with a correct moral rule or principle" (Hursthouse 1999, 26). Hursthouse argues that one's virtue theory should be devised such that this principle *could*—in principle—be satisfied. And this constraint on what gets to count as a (moral or intellectual) virtue doesn't fit a Good Dog picture of virtues. This is because people and animals alike may be subject to habitudes, whereas only persons can *follow* rules. The possibility of re-describing virtue-based behavior as rule-based behavior seems to be at odds with a Good Dog picture of virtues.

I believe Railton's (2011) view best fits the Good Dog picture of virtues. For Railton, virtues are situationally flexible habitudes, open-textured enough to afford changes on the fly as we meet with slightly atypical situations, in a way that cannot—except partly and misleadingly—be captured by the formulation of a rule to govern our behavior. Consider a few examples:

Like a skilled athlete, artisan, or artist, the virtuous agent possesses an acquired mastery and self-control that explain her remarkable ability to rise to the occasion. As with any mastery, its intuitive exercise can be intuitive and 'non-deliberative,' yet at the same time mindful, self-governed—even, perhaps, the highest

form of creativity and self-expression. The skilled individual can know what she is doing, and why, ‘in the moment,’ without need for self-conscious reflection. (Railton 2011, 298)

The examples illustrate the continuity between virtues—moral and intellectual alike—and everyday habitudes manifested by the athlete, skilled orator, or seasoned worker. This is one reason to endorse Railton’s view, and a reason that fits well with the Good Dog picture, for it proposes a natural account of virtues, one on which these are continuous with flexibly adaptive yet rational animal behavior.

### 3. A reason to consider the Good Dog picture

There is a second reason to endorse Railton’s view, and, more generally, views which seem to ply to the Good Dog picture of virtues. Namely, that such views offer *prima facie* credible replies to situationist objections to virtue ethics and epistemology.

According to those objections, in a nutshell, virtues are dispositions, so they span situation-types which include several distinct situations, each with their own peculiarities. A fully rational behavior should consider these peculiarities and flexibly adapt to them. Whereas virtues as dispositions cannot fully do so while still retaining their identity across distinct situations. In any given situation, to the extent that our response is rationally sensible to the circumstances, it will always be an open question whether our behavior is due to a virtue or to our awareness of the specifics of that situation. It will always be an open question exactly how virtues should be individuated so that their specification does not include situation-relative factors.<sup>2</sup>

To the situationist objections, Railton’s reply is to distinguish run-of-the-mill dispositions from habitudes, and argue that virtues are habitudes:

As Aristotle emphasized, acquiring a skill or mastery is not simply internalizing a set of rules or procedures. No set of rules or procedures could be sufficient; nor could it apply itself. One

---

<sup>2</sup> For careful expositions of these objections, see Harman (1999) and Alfano (2012).

must instead have proper *habitudes*, which include dispositions to notice certain features of situations, to feel their force or urgency, to appreciate the values at stake, and to be moved appropriately in thought and action. Put in terms introduced earlier, such *habitudes* thus involve both evaluative perception and practical attunement. As a result of a fortunate nature, exposure to good examples and proper training in youth, and from her own growing experience, the virtuous person acquires such *habitudes*, enabling her to act in the right way and for the right reasons—to respond spontaneously and aptly to relevant reasons for acting as such. (Railton 2011, 316)

*Habitudes* can be manifested and changed contemporaneously in response to new situations, mirroring both a history of learning and the sage's rational sensibility to her current circumstances. The notion of virtues as *habitudes* seems to be a good fit for what Korsgaard calls the Good Dog picture of virtues.

The reason I mention this is not to offer additional insight into how situationist challenges could be met by a virtue theory. Rather, I only note that, to the extent that Korsgaard decries the Good Dog picture of virtues that Railton seems to endorse, she incurs the burden of showing how one could conceive of virtues in a way that is situation-flexible and yet would be mischaracterized by the Good Dog picture. As far as I can tell, Korsgaard doesn't offer a positive virtue theory along those lines. This is at least an initial motivation to take the Good Dog picture of virtues, and Railton's attendant explicit theory, seriously and to inquire into the rationality of virtuous behavior conceived that way.

In what follows, I will argue that a Good Dog picture fares better than Korsgaard's own reflection-based view of virtues and rationality. As the Good Dog picture of virtues is more open-textured than Railton's own specific virtue theory, I will consider that picture in full generality, and still argue that Korsgaard's specific appeal to the nature and role of reflection fails to undermine the role which Good-Dog virtues ought to play in rational behavior.

#### 4. Virtues

Traditionally,<sup>3</sup> virtues have been deemed *virtuous* for one of two reasons. Either because they are reliable, or because we can properly be said to exercise them as their due authors. The distinction is controversial, however.

First, everyone agrees virtues are *reliable*. Though, perhaps, assent is hasty. Presumably, part of the naturalness of a genuine virtue is its occasional failure to be triggered in circumstances that naturally trigger it. To the extent that we are considering theories of rationality—and virtues—for human beings like us, this fact should be given prominence instead of being ignored. It can, of course, be accommodated, given a flexible enough notion of reliability. But the traditional notions of reliability on offer—ratio of good performance (truth) over good plus bad performance (truth or falsity), or counterfactual conditions like safety and sensitivity—fail to fully codify this fact.

Second, the criteria advanced for what makes us the *authors* of our acts of virtue often fail to be criterial. To illustrate, I'll briefly mention two criteria of authorship, or responsibility for virtues, proposed by Zagzebski (1996).

First, to think something counts as an act of virtue to the extent it helps us flourish—in our daily lives or our lives of knowledge irrespective—is to put the cart before the horses. What if our lives simply turn out well by sheer luck? We get all the goods—moral and intellectual—for no effort of ours. And we don't get any of the bads—moral or intellectual—again, without merit. The possibility cannot be ignored. For we *might* flourish given all these benefits. But we wouldn't, in an important sense, author or be responsible for how our lives proceed.

Second, to think something counts as an act of virtue to the extent we're motivated by the right things in doing it is to ignore much of our current moral phenomenology. Consider the possibility of fulgurations, brute or unexplainable motivations, whims that lead to transformations in our practical or intellectual lives, moments of grace or love, deference to practices

---

<sup>3</sup> E.g., cf. Zagzebski (1996, ch. 2).

whose motivations stay opaque to us, fluent participation in mystical traditions, etc.

So it's unclear both what the reliability of, or authorship for, acts of virtues comes down to. Clearly, the distinction about what makes virtues virtuous needs revisiting. Still, I believe we can make headway in beginning to address the question.

The reliability that matters for virtues is that exhibited in producing rational goods: acts or inferences. And this amounts to satisfying the norms of rationality, whatever those norms may be: logical or probabilistic consistency, explanatory power, simplicity relative to our cognitive make-up, etc. The satisfaction of the norms in question is, presumably, also up for grabs: whether we merely pass some test or examination, whether we faultlessly excel, or whether occasional failings may be passed over in an otherwise good work, far above mediocre satisfactoriness. Notice that, here, considerations of authorship drop out: our minds merely host our reliable dispositions.

What, now, makes us the authors of our acts of virtue? Here we begin to scratch the surface of Korsgaard's complaint and what might be wrong with it. Two options seem, again, available for authorship. One is to say we satisfy some formal criterion—say possible endorsement of our thought or deed were we to reflect on the matter. This is Korsgaard's earlier view (1996) of rationality as acting by the lights of norms whose authority is bestowed upon them by our own reflective endorsement.<sup>4</sup> Another view is to say we are good-natured: "Good dog!" We do what becomes us, what is in our character, what makes most sense given our circumstances and setting. To see what might be wrong with Korsgaard's complaint against this Good Dog picture of the virtues, let's briefly detour to consider the chances of reflection.

---

<sup>4</sup> Which seems to also be how Korsgaard construes Kant's criterion that we should be able to legislate for ourselves, and are free when we abide (only) by this body of self-legislation.

## 5. Reflection

Reflection<sup>5</sup> concerns thoughts, feelings and perceptions we have. It's not a mere feeling or presentment, but is conceptually articulate. This doesn't mean that it needs to be put into words; we can reflect without talking to ourselves. Typically, we reflect for one (or both) of two reasons. Either to *search* for a solution to a problem, or to *evaluate* something that's already been done by the light of some canons.

What role may reflection play in reason? Of course: we may consciously, deliberately, articulately, evaluate performances relative to norms in reflection. But it is far from clear that reflection, in such a procedure, does anything but to take note of a *fait accompli*, viz. whether the performance is good or rational enough or not.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, suppose, with Korsgaard, that reflection does play a constitutive role, endowing rational norms with their authority. Who invested reflection with that authority? To wit: *why* should our good-natured, tail-wagging character—moral and intellectual alike—not enjoy the same or better position in the rational authority-bestowing game? An argument to that effect seems to be missing in Korsgaard's criticism.

Bracket now the specific rational role reflection plays; how does reflection play any rational role at all? We could construe reflection along reliabilist lines.<sup>7</sup> If so, however, reflection would be scarcely recognizable from old-trodden first-order thought. It would make nonsense of reflection's supposed rational advantage to think it's the same kind of push-you-pull-me of everyday thought, only one floor up.

---

<sup>5</sup> On my use of the word, which is, I believe, shared by many, Korsgaard included.

<sup>6</sup> It matters little how "realistic" a stance one takes with respect to norms or values here. Even if they were nothing but the products of our minds, they need not be reflective—they could be emotive. Or even if they were the products of intellect (or reflection writ large), it still doesn't follow that we should be able to have an *occurrent* reflective thought involving the normative content in question in order for evaluation to be feasible.

<sup>7</sup> Kornblith's (2010) "What Reflective Endorsement Cannot Do" is telling here in showing reflective processes are no better than other thought processes in their exposure to biases and all kinds of errors, mishaps and misconstruals.



The reliability of reflection would only have a rational afterglow if it objectified one (or both) of two things. One possibility is that reflection should be more than brute by realizing some formal procedure of rational choice operating over one's thoughts. Another possibility is that reflection should be more than brute by being ours—by being, somehow, a closer intimation of our agency than first-order thought. Why should reflection (construed either way), get the better of virtues (construed either way)? To this I now turn.

## 6. Virtues and reflection taken jointly

One line of thought might be this. We pick sides between competing views of rationality, and the superiority of reflection flows from that.

If we thought rational choice principles are *best* realized in conscious deliberate reflective thought, then reflection should trump virtues on that score. In point of fact, however, we need a separate argument for why rational choice principles should be better codified under the supervision of reflection, rather than letting our epistemic character do its job and seamlessly—*virtuously*—produce the right conclusions and recommend the right deeds.

If an act or thought couldn't be rational unless it were ours—unless we were its authors—perhaps that very claim involves reflection. Whatever benefit we might draw from virtues, reflection would necessarily partake in authorship. However, consider the *fait accompli*. Reflection may, perhaps even always, rubber stamp our thoughts and deeds as ours. But this editorial task isn't tantamount to the creative process authors go through prior to publication. Analogously, reflection may brand a deed or thought as ours (editorially dubbing them as ours) even though what is so branded is the toil of our epistemic character and its formation (the authors in the analogy). The connection between reflection, on the one hand, and rationality and authorship, on the other hand, is questionable.

Instead of cherry-picking views of rationality so that reflection may one-up virtues and character, we should, perhaps, readily acknowledge these aren't opposed at all. Reflectiveness is a virtue, and, if the word doesn't stand for a unique phenomenon, there may well be a constellation of reflective

abilities which we may exercise in equilibrium with other cognitive abilities. Along these lines, Peter Goldie writes:

[T]here is a normative requirement to be motivated to have, and to have, the right habits and dispositions of thought, such that doubts will arise when and only when they should. On particular occasions, much of our thinking will be unreflective, and not part of conscious deliberation, so we will need to rely on our habits and dispositions, at work in the background of our minds, so to speak. (Goldie 2004, 251)

Goldie references what he calls a virtue of reflectiveness, exercised all and only when called for.

Suppose we recognize the fact that reflection and virtue often partner in reflectiveness. The question left outstanding, however, is why this particular virtue should be insulated from one's overall epistemic character and given place of pride in what endows our epistemic or practical norms with their authority (if one finds that thought congenial in the first place). Here is an analogy: It is as though one thought that open-mindedness alone among all intellectual virtues is responsible for all the notable progress in science. Such a view would be both initially implausible and hard to defend. Unless, that is, one waters down the meaning of "open-mindedness"—or, analogously, of "reflectiveness"—so that it simply becomes another label for most of one's relevant virtues or overall character. It is unclear whether reflectiveness as a virtue holds any special status over and above other virtues.

## 7. Virtues and humanity

It is worth considering another reason why one may resist the Good Dog picture of the virtues, even if this reason doesn't provide direct support for Korsgaard's own view. Thus, Gary Watson writes:

[T]he notions of self-disclosure or deep appraisal are richer than the notion of a skill. For beings without self-reflective capacities can be more or less skillful, as dogs can be good at catching Frisbees. The appraisal of skills or talents is importantly different from aretaic evaluation in a way identified by Aristotle.

Knowledge of an agent's ends, intentions, and efforts has a different [e]ffect on aretaic appraisals than on the others. Indifference in a performance doesn't count against one's skill, whereas a less than wholehearted effort to save someone's life does impugn my moral character. Talent and skill are fully displayed only in wholehearted performances, whereas the aretaic perspective is also concerned with the "will," that is, with one's purposes, ends, choices, concerns, cares, attachments, and commitments. Not trying can be a failure of virtue but not of skill. (Watson 1996, 244)

Watson is here arguing against the generalization of the notion of aretaic responsibility from virtues to skills. In this text, I remain neutral about that generalization, though, to reply, it is worth pointing out that although virtues do differ from skills in important respects, that falls short of showing that the notion of responsibility applicable to acts of virtue *doesn't* apply to acts of skill as well.

As a part of explaining why aretaic appraisals fit virtues and not skills, Watson remarks in passing that "beings without self-reflective capacities can be more or less skillful, as dogs can be good at catching Frisbees. The appraisal of skills or talents is importantly different from aretaic evaluation in a way identified by Aristotle." Now whether Aristotle might have agreed that the Good Dog picture of virtues is mistaken is also beside the point here. The question I'm pursuing is why think that a dog catching a Frisbee is such an ill-suited model for excellent production of virtuous acts. (Surely it may sometimes be inappropriate, depending on context; but the question here is why that suggestion is dismissed offhand, as *in-principle* inadequate.)

We should distinguish two suggestions in interpreting Watson here. The first is that we may only exercise virtues if we possess reflective—and, in particular, self-reflective—capacities. Or, in other words, that acts of virtue are necessarily such that we may, on reflection, endorse them. The second suggestion Watson may make is that only people—not dogs or other beings unable to self-reflect—may be virtuous. It's important to see Watson's first suggestion isn't supported by his second suggestion.

It seems to me that loyalty, generosity, mercy and many other virtues may properly be illustrated by, say, dogs. Indeed, this seems to me to be such a commonplace as to barely be worth pointing out, were it not met

with reluctance by authors like Korsgaard or Watson.<sup>8</sup> However, just to stay close to the dialectic, let us grant to the two that only humans may be virtuous, and do acts of virtue. Let us also grant, for the sake of argument, that only humans are able to reflect, and, in particular, to reflect upon themselves.

Still, *nothing* follows about how, if at all, virtues and self-reflection relate to each other. In particular, simply because only humans may perform acts of virtue (an assumption granted for dialectic purposes alone) and only humans may self-reflect (also granted for dialectic purposes alone), it doesn't follow that self-reflection—the activity itself, or our ability to undergo it—has anything special to do with carrying out acts of virtue, or with virtuous character dispositions (whether intellectual or moral).

As for wider implications concerning humanity—how it may necessarily involve either the ability to perform acts of virtue, or the ability to reflect upon oneself, or both, nothing has been settled. *A priori*, we have no good reason for presupposing that only in virtue of humanity may we be virtuous or reflective, nor that only in virtue of virtue or reflectiveness may we be genuinely human. Indeed, what more precisely we mean by “humanity”—humaneness and conscience, on the one hand, or just a form of speciesism, on the other hand—hasn't been determined here, and need not be determined in order to ascertain how virtues and reflection relate to each other. In all, it is hard to see how Watson's occasional reference to Frisbees helps Korsgaard's criticism of the Good Dog picture of virtues.

---

<sup>8</sup> One might think that humans enjoy rationality, virtues, and reflection—and that these things go together such that dogs can't enjoy any, however cuddly or well-behaved. Put bluntly, this begs the question against a Good Dog picture of virtues and rationality. But more sophisticated forms of the view exist. For instance, one might think that thoughts produced well need some kind of reflective validation (dispositional, and in-principle) in order to count as genuinely rational. This is a more roundabout way of begging the question, but the diagnosis stays the same still. The question remains why we should want the reflective add-on in the first place. This dialectic is on display in Grimm's (2001) objections to Sosa (1991).

## 8. Moral virtues, intellectual virtues, and the experience of necessitation

So far, I left one part of Korsgaard's criticism of the Good Dog picture of virtues unaddressed. It concerns the experience of necessitation. It was left unaddressed because I first needed to argue that there is no contradiction between being able to reflect upon the task at hand—if and when the task calls for it—and, respectively, manifesting virtues and skills, be they intellectual or moral, or both. Korsgaard writes:

The trouble with those two images of virtue—the Reformed Miserable Sinner and the Good Dog—and with the philosophical theories behind them, is not merely that they *denigrate* the experience of necessitation. It is also (and relatedly) that they do not give an adequate *explanation* of how we are necessitated. (Korsgaard 2011, 3–4, my italics)

I have, throughout, bracketed Korsgaard's talk of the "Reformed Miserable Sinner," and my defense of the Good Dog picture of virtues should be construed as neither defense nor criticism of what she says about reformation or sin. However, several points need to be made about how virtues connect with what Korsgaard calls "the experience of necessitation."

We should concede that it is at least sometimes true that a logician, expert at proving theorems, will both produce impeccable proofs, and do so without incredible strain on her mental powers. Her expertise might manifest itself, in part, in seemingly effortless proof-building. This fluency might suggest, at first blush, that she experiences no *push* or *felt need* to abide by logical rules—it simply comes naturally. On a naïve and literal interpretation of what "experience of necessitation" might mean, it might be urged that such a logician experiences no necessitation to abide by the rules of logic in thinking about, and building, the proofs in question.

This way of looking at things is mistaken without a doubt. First of all, it's quite natural for experts to experience fluency in competently solving tasks in their area of expertise. It's precisely because our logician is so apt at proofs that she took on the problem of proving even the more difficult theorems. This fluency doesn't in any way preclude the possibility of experiencing necessitation. For, were our logician to discover a blatant violation

of logical rules she overlooked, the strain felt and the need to proceed with care and apply relevant rules with *extra* caution will perhaps be *more* significant than what a logical *ignoramus* might experience.

Fluency in problem-solving isn't in conflict with intellectual virtues like conscientiousness. Although she may come up with a proof in a heartbeat, the logician might—precisely because of her expertise—then go back and carefully double-check each step in the proof. This is evidence of conscientiousness, of intellectual modesty in implicitly admitting she might have made a mistake, and (perhaps) of intellectual courage in exploring all the ways the proof might have gone wrong. Notice, here, that when and how she pays extra attention to what she is doing is *shaped* by her intellectual virtues and epistemic character. Far from possible experiences of necessitation and expert fluency excluding each other, precisely when the expert feels the former might be *called for and made possible*—as experienced—only by the latter.

In order to become an expert and for rules to become second nature, our logician first had to undergo training. Feeling the pull of laws, abiding by the rulebook, retracing our steps—all these are customary during training, and enable us to later perform more fluently, and often without recourse to any explicit recap of known rules in reflection.

So far in this section, I discussed intellectual virtues and epistemic character. But the points stand if we switch to an example concerning moral virtues. Consider courage on the battlefield, a prime moral virtue for Aristotle if there ever was one. The brave are attuned to their environment, and can readily spot an opportunity when they see one. Sometimes there may be no time to reflect at all. And yet it's important that the brave, while they don't overthink things, aren't rash or hasty either. Both these extremes would be vicious rather than virtuous.

Now ask yourself: in the heat of the moment, as they make the virtuously right decision (to defend their positions, or counter-attack, or retreat, or do a side-maneuver, etc.) with accuracy, skill, and getting the expected result out of it—*must* brave soldiers “experience necessitation”? Must they feel they do it from “the motive of duty”? Or that moral laws wouldn't “determine” them otherwise?<sup>9</sup> I submit, as a point of view that might, of

---

<sup>9</sup> I am grateful to Nora Grigore for bringing instances of heroism to my attention. For the thorny issue of whether such cases are best construed as cases of acting from

course, be mistaken, that—in so far as these case descriptions are correct and not overly under-specified—it is hard to imagine them *having to* undergo conscious experiences where they feel “necessitated” to act as they do. This is so even if and when they are so necessitated. It is so even when soldiers abide by rules of engagement with the utmost precision *and* fluency.

Brave soldiers help another way too. It’s important to see that the points I make against Korsgaard aren’t disjoint. Thought and deed go hand in hand.<sup>10</sup> Courage requires moderation and is virtuous in that the brave soldier doesn’t rush in the line of fire, but jumps in only when the odds are best to secure victory, or an honorable retreat. In other words, moral virtues are best exemplified when co-instantiated with intellectual virtues. For instance, the soldier is bravest when she knows when the right time is to act. She knows this both by being *intellectually* brave (taking the objectively best chance she can when she gets it) and by being prudent and keeping an open mind (she might err in judgement, or a different tactic might work better).

In this section, I appealed to two examples—the crafty logician and the brave soldier—to suggest that *experiences* of necessitation are neither “denigrated” nor “in trouble” if we adopt a virtue-theoretic standpoint with respect to rationality, be it theoretical rationality, practical rationality, or overall agent-rationality. Moreover, the joys and pains of training presupposed in acquiring expertise go a long way toward explaining how “necessitation” actually gets realized in natural beings like us. All this is to support—fallibly, but ostensibly—the Good Dog picture of virtues, both intellectual and moral, that Korsgaard seems to target.

---

duty or of supererogation, and what might be at stake in the debate, see Grigore (2019).

<sup>10</sup> For a principled reason why thought and deed must harmonize if *full* rationality is presumed, see Mărășoiu (2018). In response to Korsgaard, however, it matters that degrees of coherence between thought and deed—and, correspondingly, between intellectual and moral virtues—seem to tally with our overall assessments of rationality. I only submit this as a possibility here, for I have proposed no decisive positive argument in its favor. But the bare possibility is enough, *prima facie*, to raise questions about Korsgaard’s preferred appeal to reflection.

## 9. Conclusion

Korsgaard criticizes theorists who sketch a Good Dog picture of virtues. In fact, I have argued, virtue theorists who harbor that picture are not to be criticized but praised for holding the view they do—in epistemology and ethics alike. When properly construed, the work of reflection isn't inimical to a Good Dog picture of virtue.

Instead, exploring how virtues and reflection interact may offer us better insight into the rationality of agents who expertly perform tasks requiring sufficiently high degrees of both theoretical and practical rationality of them, and who achieve these ends virtuously: correctly, often seamlessly, reflectively when needed, and achieving enough harmony between thought and deed in their endeavors.

## Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Nora Grigore, Tal Brewer, Mark Sainsbury, Dominick Cooper, and three anonymous reviewers for their questions and suggestions for improving the manuscript.

## Funding

Financial support for the first draft of the text was provided by the Jefferson Scholars Foundation through a John S. Lillard fellowship. Writing this version of the text was supported through an ICUB Fellowship for Young Researchers I received from the University of Bucharest. Final editing of this text was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.1-PD-2019-0535, within PNCDI III.

## References

- Alfano, Mark. 2012. "Expanding the Situationist Challenge to Responsibilist Virtue Epistemology." *Philosophical Quarterly* 62 (247): 223–49.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9213.2011.00016.x>
- Foot, Philippa. 2001. *Natural Goodness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/0198235089.001.0001>
- Goldie, Peter. 2004. "Emotion, Reason, and Virtue." In: *Emotion, Evolution, and Rationality*, edited by Dylan Evans and Pierre Cruse, 249–68. Oxford:



- Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198528975.003.0013>
- Grigore, Nora. 2019. "On Why There is a Problem of Supererogation." *Philosophia* 47 (4): 1141–63. <https://doi.org/10.1007%2Fs11406-018-0045-z>
- Grimm, St. R. 2001. "Ernest Sosa, Knowledge, and Understanding." *Philosophical Studies* 106 (3): 171–91. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1013354326246>
- Harman, Gilbert. 1999. "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 99 (1): 315–31. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9264.00062>
- Hursthouse, Rosalind. 1999. "Right Action." In *On Virtue Ethics*, 25–42. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199247994.003.0002>
- Kornblith, Hilary. 2010. "What Reflective Endorsement Cannot Do." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 80 (1): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2009.00307.x>
- Korsgaard, Christine M. 2009. "Agency and Identity." In *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity*, 1–26. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199552795.003.0001>
- Korsgaard, Christine M. 1996. "Reflective Endorsement." In *The Sources of Normativity*, 49–89. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511554476.004>
- Mărășoiu, Andrei Ionuț. 2018. "Wisdom and Reason." *Croatian Journal of Philosophy* 18 (2): 367–74.
- Railton, Peter. 2011. "Two Cheers for Virtue: or, Might Virtue Be Habit Forming?" In *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics* 1, edited by Mark Timmons, 295–330. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199693269.003.0012>
- Sosa, Ernest. 1991. "Intellectual Virtue in Perspective." In *Knowledge in Perspective*, 270–94. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511625299>
- Watson, Gary. 1996. "Two Faces of Responsibility." *Philosophical Topics* 24 (2): 227–48. <https://doi.org/10.5840/philtopics199624222>
- Zagzebski, Linda. 1996. *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139174763>