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## “Teaching Character: Why, How, and By Whom?”

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*In our morally pluralistic world, there is distressingly little agreement on what it means to be a good person.* – Edmund D. Pellegrino and David C. Thomasma<sup>1</sup>

I thank you for this opportunity, honor, and privilege—humbling especially in view of the reputations of previous Calhoun lecturers such as that of your most recent in-state speaker, President Raymond Greenberg of the Medical University of South Carolina.

My purpose is to examine three classic questions traceable to Greek antiquity. (1) What do we mean by “character”? (2) Can character be taught? (3) Does character suffice for happiness? To this audacious task I bring few if any formal qualifications. I come before you merely as an autodidact wishing to exchange ideas about how our universities might help improve the prognosis of an uncertain world.

Derek Bok, former president and current interim president of Harvard University, has just published a book entitled *Our Underachieving Colleges*. (Obviously, he was not speaking about Clemson University; I congratulate you on being recently ranked among our top public universities.) Urging educators to address the issue of building character after “so many years of ambivalence and neglect,” Bok asks:

Should moral development be merely an option for students who are interested (and for college authorities when it is not too costly or controversial)? Or should it be an integral part of undergraduate education for all students and a goal

demanding attention, effort, and, on occasion, even a bit of courage and sacrifice from every level of the college administration?<sup>2</sup>

I shall attempt to outline ways whereby psychology, one of the youngest liberal arts, might inform philosophy, one of the oldest. I take my cue from what as an outside observer I perceive to be a convergence of two late-twentieth century movements within academe: (1) a renaissance in virtue ethics especially within British philosophy that began in 1954; and (2) on this side of the Atlantic, a new “psychology of human strengths” that began in 1998. By developing and teaching widely what amounts to a *psychology of philosophy*, we might just possibly help make our troubled world a better and safer place.

### What do we mean by “character”?

Definitions of “character” and “virtue” reciprocate. For example, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines virtue as “conformity of life and conduct with the principles of morality” and character as “moral qualities strongly developed or strikingly displayed.” Virtues are the components of character; character consists of being virtuous and/or consistently acting virtuously.

Before proceeding further, allow me to share with you a few bits of autobiography. As an undergraduate I (and I assume most of you) learned that various pre-Socratic philosophers spoke of virtue as *aretê*, one meaning of which was “excellence in function.” As a medical student I purchased the fourth edition of *The Principles of Internal Medicine*, edited by Tinsley R. Harrison of the University of Alabama and his colleagues at other universities, which contained the preface to the first edition, published in 1950. The opening paragraph reads as follows:

No greater opportunity, responsibility, or obligation can fall to the lot of a human being than to become a physician. In the care of the suffering he needs technical skill, scientific knowledge, and human understanding. He who uses these with courage, with humility, and with wisdom will provide a unique service for his fellow man, and will build *an enduring edifice of character* within himself. The physician should ask of his destiny no more than this; he should be content with no less (*emphasis added*).<sup>3</sup>

I read this paragraph again and again over the next decade. It seemed to hold at least three implications. First building an enduring edifice of character is, or should be, one’s major life project, ostensibly with the goal of achieving happiness. Second, building an enduring edifice of character requires engagement in one or another line of work. Third, building an enduring edifice of character is an individual project for which there is no cookie-cutter formula for success. This paragraph, in retrospect, helped propel me toward internal medicine as a career choice. I kept up an interest in philosophy, perhaps encouraged by Aristotle’s warning that “Even medical men do not seem to be made by a study of text-books,”<sup>4</sup> and I’m glad I did, for, as a contemporary philosopher puts it, “The philosopher’s specialty is internal medicine for the soul.”<sup>5</sup>

In 1977 I became editor of *The Journal of the South Carolina Medical Association*. Among the positive dividends was a friendship with Dr. William Hunter, whom I understand to be the driving force behind this lectureship series. The major downside was a monthly editorial

deadline, which has for the past 30 years denied me the luxury of having many of my private thoughts go unpublished. Thinking and writing about medical professionalism prompted an interest in virtue theory. I wrote about such things as “the C’s of medicine,” and “which matters more—competence or ‘compassion’?”

One evening in 1989 I was playing the game Trivial Pursuit with my wife when she read the following question from a card: “What are the three cardinal virtues?” I knew the cardinal virtues cold. Indeed, I’d just read a monograph on them by the German philosopher Josef Pieper.<sup>6</sup> But I suspected that the answer on the reverse side of the card might be wrong, since there are four cardinal virtues, not three. It was. The card gave: “Faith, hope, charity.” Those, my friends, are not the cardinal virtues. Faith, hope, and charity (or love) are the theological (or transcendent) virtues, traceable to St. Paul (1 Corinthians 13:13). The cardinal virtues, from Plato’s *Republic*, are wisdom (prudence), justice, temperance, and courage (fortitude). In the thirteenth century St. Thomas Aquinas famously summarized Plato’s four virtues as mental habits that can be acquired (as Aristotle had suggested) through practice, or *habitus acquisitus*. He likewise summarized St. Paul’s three virtues as traits acquired through grace, or *habitus infusus*. Thomas Aquinas ranked wisdom (prudence) the highest of the cardinal virtues, and love the highest of the transcendent virtues. I went on to discover that in their ignorance about the cardinal virtues the authors of Trivial Pursuit were by no means unique. Few people in the United States today can name the cardinal virtues. Teaching the cardinal virtues and their relationships to the transcendent virtues became a personal crusade.

Since 1950, when Tinsley Harrison and his colleagues wrote those words about “building an enduring edifice of character” a great many things have affected the way we Americans think about ourselves. The Korean Conflict of the early 1950s took away our naiveté that our nation’s wars constitute morality plays in which Americans are invariably the good guys who triumph over evil. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s presaged similar movements in which concepts of “rights” and “duties” took away most if not all pretenses of the old paternalism with

its *noblesse oblige*. And we'd all agree that the world has become a much more dangerous place, and that there is less margin for error in the major decisions made by our national leaders. Yet there now seems to be little agreement about what it means to be a good person. In *The New Golden Rule*, the communitarian Amatai Etzioni states: "The modern world, obsessed with liberty, has slain virtue, leaving us morally bereft, in a world of darkness."<sup>7</sup> Scandals in high places remind us on a weekly basis that "virtue" and "character" often seem forgotten constructs.

All is not lost. In 1954 the British philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe, perhaps the greatest woman philosopher to write in English, called attention to the limitations of our two dominant types of ethical theories—those based on rules (deontology, or Kantianism) and those based on consequences (as in utilitarianism). She called for a return to such classic concepts as virtue and character. She also emphasized a role for the emotions in moral reasoning.<sup>8</sup> In 1981 the American philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre published *After Virtue*, in which he distinguished between internal goods (of the sort implied by the mot that "virtue is its own reward") and external goods (such as money, fame, and power).<sup>9</sup> Today, numerous philosophers debate the substance and meaning of virtue theory, often from the perspective of Aristotle, Nietzsche, or other major philosophers.<sup>10-13</sup> An emerging perspective is that virtue ethics complements ethical theories based on duty or consequences in the sense that we should also take into account the character of the agent. Some go so far as to say that the renaissance in virtue ethics constitutes the most important development in late twentieth century philosophy.

Let's pause briefly to clarify two matters. First, what is the difference between "virtues" and "values"? There is much talk today about the need to recapture "family values," "religious values," and/or "spiritual values." There is much less talk about "virtues." For our purposes, we'll define "virtues" as "excellences in the pursuit of what is good for society and for oneself." We'll then define "values" as "determinations of what constitutes the good, informed by virtues." We should note parenthetically that there exists in philosophy a Thesis of Non-Aretaic Value, which holds that virtues and vices are "good"

or "bad" only within the context of specified values that must be understood outside of virtue.<sup>13</sup>, pp. 34-35 I would contend that with rare exception all values must be informed by justice and love, both of which are classic virtues. (We would then further define "morals" as "determinations of what constitutes right and wrong, informed by values." And we would define "ethics" as "determinations of how best to act, informed by morals, values, and virtues.")

The second matter to clarify is the question whether the virtues are few or many—a debate traceable to Plato's *The Meno* in which a character by that name asks Socrates that very question. Those who write about virtues nowadays seldom insist on a restricted list. I am unaware of *any* major contemporary philosopher who insists on the seven classic virtues formulated by Plato and St. Paul and enshrined as such by Thomas Aquinas. William J. Bennett, in his best-selling compendium of stories entitled *The Book of Virtues*, lists ten virtues starting with self-discipline.<sup>14</sup> The French philosopher André Comte-Sponville, in *A Small Treatise on the Great Virtues: The Uses of Philosophy in Everyday Life*, lists 18 virtues starting with politeness.<sup>15</sup> A provocative recent article on "moral conflicts involving the possibility of self-sacrifice" conjures up such virtues as "the virtue of antiperfectionism," "the virtue of love of life," and "the virtue of making the most of one's situation and life in general."<sup>16</sup> Is our list of candidate virtues limited only by the number of nouns in our dictionaries? Can we invent virtues *du jour* as we go along? I've contended for many years that the seven classic virtues—wisdom, justice, temperance, courage, faith, hope, and love—constitute a manageable list that should be memorized by everybody and that they suffice for capturing the essence of what it means to be "a good person."

Before addressing our second question—Can character be taught?—let me add one more autobiographical note. Several weeks ago, in preparation for this lecture, I consulted the reference shelves of the Thomas Cooper Library at the University of South Carolina. There I discovered that neither a ten-volume encyclopedia of philosophy nor an eight-volume encyclopedia of psychology contains a chapter on "character."<sup>17,18</sup> (I also found that dictionaries

of these respective disciplines reversed roles: a dictionary of philosophy defines “character” as “... the personality traits of an individual,”<sup>19</sup> whereas a dictionary of psychology suggests that “character can be said to what a person actually is and personality what the person appears to be.”<sup>20</sup> Also within the past month, I bought two books on the philosophy of psychology.<sup>21,22</sup> Neither contains “character” or “virtue” in the index. These minor discoveries strengthened my opinion—based on general reading as opposed to expertise in either discipline—that we should be paying more attention to what amounts to a *psychology of philosophy* (rather than the other way around).

In summary, I’ve staked out two positions: (1) Character can be defined as acting virtuously on a day-in, day-out basis; and (2) The seven classic virtues of antiquity—Plato’s four cardinal virtues and St. Paul’s three transcendent virtues—suffice for the individual project of “building an enduring edifice of character.” I freely acknowledge that there are many other ways of looking at this issue. (In another context, I’ve taken the complementary position that we can define “a person of character” as someone who acts consistently on the basis of his or her benevolent principles, even if we happen to disagree with that person’s judgment about what constitutes “benevolence” on, say, a liberal-to-conservative scale.<sup>23</sup>) I’ve chosen not to become embroiled in whether Aristotle was correct in his doctrine of “the unity of the virtues”—that is, if a person possesses one virtue indicative of goodness, he or she has them all.<sup>24</sup> A life lived in accordance with the seven classic virtues is by no means devoid of tensions, conflicts, and difficult choices. These seven virtues are, as we shall see (and with reference to Table 1), multifaceted and highly nuanced. Also, the project of building character is a lifelong endeavor, and the determination of whether or not we are “persons of character” is perhaps best left to observers other than ourselves. We have now set the stage for our second question: Can character (read: “virtue,” if you like) be taught?

## Can character be taught?

“Character” comes from a Greek verb meaning “to make sharp, cut furrows in” or “to engrave.”

Although character may have hereditary components, as is brought out in certain mental illnesses and personality disorders, most of us would, I think, endorse three propositions:

1. Character is largely acquired. Parents, peers, role models, mentors, and teachers affect its development for better or worse.
2. Character reflects the cumulative effects of choices. (As Albus Dumbledore teaches the young wizard Harry Potter, “It is our choices, Harry, that show us what we truly are, far more than our abilities.”<sup>25</sup>)
3. Character is at least to some extent observable—we can say whether or not someone appears to be a “person of character”—and is therefore subject to empirical observation.

The philosophers among you will recognize these propositions to be essentially straight from Aristotle. To quote from the *Nicomachean Ethics*: “Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean ... this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it.”<sup>4</sup> p. 39 Aristotle taught that practical wisdom (*phronesis*) enables its possessor to make wise choices in circumstances fraught with ambiguity. Aristotle also argued that the pleasure derived from making wise choices prompts us to make additional wise choices, thereby promoting the “enduring edifice of character” that concerns us. Mention of Aristotle’s position on the ultimately pleasurable nature of wise choices usually prompts mention of Immanuel Kant and his position that virtue ultimately derives from an unchanging sense of moral duty or “fortitude.”<sup>26</sup> We’ll come back to this disagreement and to what in philosophy is called “the eudaimonist restraint.” Let us focus now on the extent to which virtues and character traits can be observed and even measured more or less scientifically—the domain of psychology.

Within the virtue theory tradition, as one observer puts it, “the importance of psychology has been both underestimated and overestimated.”<sup>26</sup> On the one hand, some debates about virtue turn out to be debates about psychology. On the other hand, it is a mistake to define virtue as a type of psychological state. Surely, Kant is correct that virtue has at least

something to do with “goodness.” The cutting edge of psychological investigation now includes the analysis of brain activity in moral reasoning. I shall attempt to summarize what seems to me to be a remarkable attempt to formulate “the social science equivalent of virtue ethics, using the scientific method to inform philosophical pronouncements about the traits of a good person.”<sup>27</sup>

In 1998 a group of American psychologists met informally and decided to classify virtues and character strengths. They were struck by the observation that, with a few exceptions such as Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, academic psychology during the twentieth century focused mainly on what was *wrong* with people rather than what was right with them. In 2000, with funding from the Manuel D. and Rhoda Mayerson Foundation, they launched the Values in Action Classification Project. After formulating criteria for what constitutes a human strength, the investigators concluded that six basic clusters of character strengths can be identified throughout recorded history across all cultures and political leanings. These six clusters correspond precisely to the seven classical virtues as enumerated by Plato and St. Paul with the exception that faith and hope are combined as “strengths of transcendence.” These researchers intend to complete a diagnostic manual for human strengths analogous to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* of the American Psychiatric Association. Along these lines, they ask some probing questions concerning character:

Is character a singular characteristic of an individual, or is it composed of different aspects? Is character socially constructed and laden with idiosyncratic values, or are there universals suggesting a more enduring basis? Does character—however we define it—exist in degrees, or is it just something that an individual happens to have or not have? How does character develop? Can it be learned? Can it be taught, and who might be the most effective teacher? What roles are played by families, schools, peers, youth development programs, the media, religious institutions, and the larger culture?<sup>28</sup>

To date, they have devised a list of 24 specific character strengths, each falling under one or more of the six cluster headings (wisdom and knowledge, justice, temperance, courage, transcendence, and humanity). In Table 1, I’ve modified their list by splitting out “faith” and “hope,” by equating “humanity” with “love,” by making additions here and there, and by noting that there is of course some overlap between and among the various cluster headings. In Table 1, I’ve also included (in the far right-hand column) some terms, concepts, and theories from the education and psychology literature that are germane to the issue, Can character be taught?

Over the past 18 months, I’ve mined five technical books summarizing findings from the positive psychology movement<sup>27, 29-32</sup> and have consulted a great many single-subject books and journal articles. Obviously, we cannot legislate “goodness” for, as Kant argued, to be good must ultimately be a moral choice. What impresses me are the methods, results, and conclusions from numerous investigations and along different lines, all of them leading up to a body of practical insights that I certainly wish I’d had available at various times in my life. I shall attempt to indicate what I mean through some highly-selected examples.

Prudence or practical wisdom—Aristotle’s *phronesis*—ranks first among the cardinal virtues because it informs the others as to the right course of action. Recent studies indicate a steep learning curve between ages 15 and 25 for the development of wisdom-related knowledge. A group of psychologists in Berlin define wisdom as expertise in “the fundamental pragmatics of life” involving “good judgment and advice about important but uncertain areas.” They suggest that we can evaluate the soundness of a decision-making process by examining five types of knowledge criteria: (1) rich factual knowledge bearing on the issue at hand; (2) rich procedural knowledge bearing on how to go about finding advice and making judgments; (3) rich knowledge about the contexts of the decision to be made; (4) rich knowledge about the competing values, goals, and priorities that come into play; and (5) knowledge about the relative unpredictability of various courses of action. Uncommonly wise persons have the ability to

process this information almost instantaneously, but most of us are well advised to think on paper.

Justice, which alone among Plato's cardinal virtues is a good thing by itself as opposed to a means toward something else, involves two types of moral reasoning—justice reasoning and care reasoning—and can be examined by the Golden Rule and its newer variants. One of these, the Platinum Rule, holds that we should treat others as they themselves would like to be treated. Another, called the New Golden Rule, takes the communitarian position that we should seek a middle course between extreme respect for individual rights (libertarianism) and extreme distributive justice (communism). And there is of course a rich new literature on social contract theory dating to John Rawls's 1971 work on "justice as fairness."

Temperance, the most observable among the cardinal virtues and unique in that its frame of reference consists only of the person in question, has a wider meaning if we understand it as a virtue that helps us steer between behavioral extremes, for example between cowardice and foolhardiness. A large literature deals with ways to enhance temperance through self-control. Maslow concluded that less than five percent of us achieves self-actualization, the highest rung on his needs hierarchy, because most of us most of the time are preoccupied with lower-order deficit needs. We should encourage and model setting limits on our deficit needs, thereby opposing what outside observers characterize as Americans' "addiction to addiction."

Courage, the most universally admired of the cardinal virtues, is problematic in many ways although some would argue that courage rivals wisdom for first place among Plato's quartet. C.S. Lewis called courage "the form of every virtue at the testing point, which means, at the point of highest reality."<sup>33</sup> The most useful definition of courage I've found is that of the Canadian philosopher Douglas Walton, who proposes that courage represents the use of both moral and practical reasoning to overcome obstacles toward the realization of a socially-desirable goal.<sup>34</sup> Physical courage has sometimes been called "the steroid virtue of professional wrestlers," but moral courage certainly knows no sex discrimination. Certainly, we should hold up stellar examples of moral courage as beacons

to our young people before peer pressure, groupthink, and similar phenomena demagnetize their moral compasses.

Whether the transcendent virtues—faith, hope, and love—should be taught in secular settings is perhaps open to debate, but I believe that certain components can be taught and in ways that should threaten nobody. If I had my way, everyone would memorize a definition of "faith" formulated by a theologian named Kirsopp Lake: "Faith is not belief in spite of evidence, but life in scorn of consequence—a courageous trust in the great purpose of all things and pressing forward to finish the work which is in sight, whatever the price may be."<sup>35</sup> Hope has recently been defined in a secular sense as goal-directed thinking in settings where the probability of reaching a goal is intermediate—that is, approaching neither 100% nor zero. The psychologist C.R. Snyder defines hope as the use of both willpower and "waypower"—the ability to formulate goals and strategies to overcome barriers toward goal achievement.<sup>36,37</sup> It would be foolish to suggest that love, which most of us agree reigns supreme among all of the virtues, can be taught in the classroom setting, yet some aspects of love can be understood at the cognitive level. These include (1) a hierarchy of terms for "caring," these being in ascending order of difficulty beneficence, empathy, sympathy, and compassion; (2) the distinction between what C.S. Lewis called "need love" versus "gift-love" and Maslow called "deficit-love" versus "being love"; and (3) recent insights from neuroscience that amply confirm why the infatuation of initial attraction often forms a poor basis for a life-long partnership.<sup>38,39</sup>

The thrust of my remarks to this point has been to hint that certain cognitive aspects of character and its component virtues can and should be taught more widely and more effectively at the undergraduate level. Most people would of course agree that, for teaching character, adequate role models and mentors are of primary importance, and to this end we should insist on good character for our faculty especially in promotion and tenure decisions. We should also recognize that virtues need fertile soil in the larger society. Alasdair MacIntyre makes the central claim that social and political conditions typical of modernity are hostile to the virtues.

Table 1.  
Virtues and Some Associated Character Strengths and Educational Concepts\*

Virtues	Character Strengths	Educational Concepts
Prudence (Practical wisdom)	Caution, creativity, critical thinking, curiosity, foresight, ingenuity, interest, judgment, love of learning, open-mindedness, originality, perspective, practical intelligence, prudence, self-transcendence	Balance theory of wisdom (Sternberg), Berlin wisdom criteria (Baltes), ego resilience, multiple intelligences (Gardner), open-mindedness versus myside bias (groupthink), risk management, time management
Justice	Citizenship, conscience, duty, ethical sophistication, equity, fairness, goodness, honesty, leadership, loyalty, mercy, respect for others, social responsibility, teamwork	Care reasoning theory, justice reasoning theory, equity theory, moral reasoning and its development (Kohlberg), political theory, social contract theory
Temperance	Caution, contentment, discretion, emotional control, forgiveness, humility, mercy, moderation, modesty, purity, prudence, self-control, self-regulation, simplicity	Cybernetic theory (Carver and Scheier), self-regulation theory (Bandura), hierarchy of needs (Maslow), stages of change theory (Prochaska et al.)
Fortitude (Courage)	Altruism, bravery, energy, enthusiasm, honesty, idealism, industriousness, integrity, perseverance, sainthood, self-invention, valor, vitality, zest	Authenticity (Rogers), learned industriousness theory (Eisenberger), monomyth of the universal hero (Campbell), self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan), self-efficacy (Bandura), task persistence (Jaynes)
Faith	Awe, faith, gratitude, humor (philosophical), playfulness, purpose, religiousness, reverence, spirituality, trust, wonder	Aesthetic appreciation, comparative religions, introductory philosophy (notably, epistemology and metaphysics), philosophy of religion
Hope	Future-mindedness, goal setting, hope, optimism, planning ability, prayer, sense of meaning and purpose	Defense mechanisms (Vaillant), learned optimism (Seligman), resilience, will-power and "waypower" (Snyder)
Love	Benevolence, compassion, connectedness, empathy, friendship, generosity, kindness, nurturance, politeness	Attachment theory (Bowlby), care reasoning theory, "hot" intelligences (emotional, personal, and social intelligence), deficit love versus being love (Maslow), interdependence theory (Thibaut and Kelley)

\*Information in the left-hand and center columns is modified from Bryan,<sup>58</sup> which is in turn modified from Peterson and Seligman<sup>27</sup> and Peterson and Park<sup>28</sup> (see text). Information in the right-hand column is taken from many sources but mainly from recent treatises on positive psychology.<sup>27-32</sup>

Put simply, social and political conditions encourage organizations and individuals to pursue external goods—money, possessions, fame, and power—to the detriment of internal goods, the warm glow of satisfaction brought about by doing the right thing, by acting virtuously. We have today a widening gap between the rich and the poor and, many maintain, a parallel loss in civic responsibility. MacIntyre and others likewise lament that our institutions marginalize most people’s autonomy. Autonomy, in metaphysical terms, is “freedom (of the will); the Kantian doctrine of the will giving itself its own law”—in short, the freedom requisite to making choices that promote the development of character. It is to this end that various political philosophers address the need for social, political, and economic arrangements that allow the virtues to flourish. Thus, the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah argues that government policy is essential for what he calls “soul making”: “the project of intervening in the process of interpretation through which each citizen develops an identity—and doing so with the aim of increasing her chances of living an ethically successful life.”<sup>40</sup> Should our universities, in their expanding roles, attempt to influence social, economic, and political conditions and, if so, how? Let’s leave that question for another day and focus on our last issue, “Does character suffice for happiness?”

## Does character suffice for happiness?

In his recent book *Character is Destiny*, Senator John McCain asserts:

It is your character, and your character alone, that will make your life happy or unhappy. That is all that really passes for destiny. And you can choose it. No one else can give it to you or deny it to you. No rival can steal it from you. And no friend can give it to you. Others can encourage you to make the right choices or discourage you, but you choose.<sup>41</sup>

The position that character (read: virtue) suffices for happiness is for most of us synonymous with Stoicism, a philosophy that obviously served McCain well during his years as a prisoner-of-war. The Stoics took their lead from Socrates. Plato, Aristotle, and others in ancient Greece

made the more modest claim that the virtuous person is happier than the non-virtuous person, other things being equal. We should note that even such early Stoics as Zeno and Chrysippus believed that such advantages as health and wealth are naturally preferable to their opposites.<sup>42</sup> We should also note that Aristotle and others concurred that good luck promotes happiness and that misfortune adversely affects not only our happiness but also, if we let it, our character.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the word *eudaimonia* means having a good *daimôn* (guardian spirit).

Today’s psychology literature has much to say about happiness and there is even a *Journal of Happiness Studies*. Researchers associated with the Minnesota Study of Twins Reared Apart concluded that each of us has a “set-point” around which our happiness fluctuates and that this set-point is about 98% genetically determined!<sup>44</sup> Alive and well in contemporary psychology are two general approaches to happiness and the good life: (1) the eudaemonist approach, which involves virtue, character, and morality; and (2) the hedonic approach, which involves finding pleasure and avoiding pain.<sup>45,46</sup> According to a “list theory” of individual welfare, character (again, read; virtue) is only one category of goods on our list of desiderata. Indeed, it can reasonably be asked whether moral virtue—MacIntyre’s “inner goods”—stands shoulder to shoulder with other goods such as knowledge, friendship, pleasure, and achievement.<sup>47</sup> Also, it can reasonably be asked whether the road to the good life as understood in the United States is generally paved with ambition and greed, not character and virtue. Political advisers from Machiavelli to our own times often favor the expedient over the virtuous.<sup>48</sup> Libertarians such as Ayn Rand in *The Virtue of Selfishness* argue that in some instances virtue is positively dangerous. Why should we *not* act selfishly, trusting that something akin to Adam Smith’s “invisible hand” inexorably steers our self-interests toward promotion of the greater good?

Martin Seligman and his colleagues suggest that happiness is “a scientifically unwieldy term” that should be divided into at least three compartments: positive emotion and pleasure (the pleasant life); engagement (the engaged life); and meaning (the meaningful life). They conclude that the most satisfied people are those

Table 2.  
Basic (Generic) and Higher Professionalism\*

	Basic Professionalism	Higher Professionalism
Brief definition	Doing the right thing well; beneficent, competent, timely service	Service that clearly transcends self-interest; exceptional service
Samaritan contract	The minimally-decent Samaritan	The good Samaritan and the splendid Samaritan
Needs met for the provider (Based on Maslow <sup>60</sup> )	Deficit needs (including basic security needs, ego needs, and esteem needs)	Being needs (toward the attainment of self-actualization; higher esteem needs also come into play)
Nature of work	Occupation	Calling
Purpose of work	Often well defined and circumscribed	Often poorly defined and open-ended
Applicability	All situations in which one is reimbursed for providing services	Situations calling for action "above and beyond the call of duty"
Financial compensation	Usually well defined (quid pro quo), hence meeting the provider's deficit needs	Often absent or insufficient, offering the provider mainly being needs or the higher esteem needs
Power relationships	Power between provider and client is usually equal or nearly equal	The provider often holds significant power over the client's welfare.
Usual ethical framework	Rights- and duty-based	Virtue-based (in addition to being rights- and duty-based)
Level of caring	Beneficence (doing good), combined with empathy and sympathy when appropriate	Compassion in the strict sense of becoming a fellow sufferer
Requisite virtues	Cardinal virtues, to assure excellence in function	Transcendent virtues in addition to the cardinal virtues, for service at a higher level
Personal risks to provider	Few, if any	Can be substantial

\*Modified from Bryan,<sup>54,59</sup> with concepts of the "minimally-decent" and "splendid" Samaritan from Stuart.<sup>16</sup>

who oriented their pursuits toward all three of these compartments, with the greatest weight being carried by engagement and meaning.<sup>49,50</sup> Let's conclude by examining briefly what we mean by engagement and meaning.

Engagement includes such psychological concepts as self-actualization (Maslow), ego-resiliency (Block and Block), positive emotionality (Diener), personality integration (Seeman), autonomy (Ryan and Deci), learned optimism (Seligman), and flow. "Flow" was defined by Mihali Czikzentmihalyi as "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it."<sup>51</sup> He studied "flow" by supplying volunteers with pagers, and asking them to write down what they were doing and how they felt about it whenever they were paged. As I interpret his studies, we should strive to create work conditions that allow people to become fully immersed in their tasks without interruptions which, as Czikzentmihalyi observed and as all of us who carry beepers or cell phones know only too well, totally disrupt the flow experience. One way to achieve flow is to learn your signature strengths by using the self-administered test instrument at the website [www.authenichappiness.org](http://www.authenichappiness.org), and then use your top five strengths as often as you can, ideally on a daily basis.

Meaning, like character, is an individual project. The psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Victor Frankl wrote: "Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather he must recognize that it is *he* who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by *answering* for his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible."<sup>52</sup> Czensentmihalyi identifies four steps to achieving meaning: defining one's overall purpose; striving to fulfill such a purpose; achieving harmony between goals and actions; and identifying with universal values. He recognizes that the best way to achieve this is "through the idealistic mode."<sup>51, pp. 209ff</sup> Most us would agree that the surest way to find meaning is to submerge personal identity in the service of a higher cause, a cause that promotes the well-being of fellow humans. Julia Kasdorf, in a poem entitled "What I Learned from My Mother,"

states: "Like a doctor, I learned to create from another's suffering my own usefulness, and once you know how to do this, you can never refuse. To every house you enter, you must offer healing."<sup>53</sup> Lasting happiness, it would seem to me, is best achieved by giving meaning priority over positive emotions and pleasure, by rendering service to our fellow humans that clearly transcends our own immediate self-interests, or what I've called "higher professionalism" as opposed to the "basic professionalism" of everyday *quid pro quo* transactions (Table 2).<sup>54</sup> In his book *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*, the veteran war correspondent Chris Hedges observes soberly that we wage war in order to find meaning, having failed to find it in our everyday lives.<sup>55</sup> Can we not do better?

## Conclusion

The late philosopher Mortimer Adler wrote: "The idea of virtue and the conjoined idea of happiness are exclusively the concern of philosophy."<sup>56</sup> If by "philosophy" we mean the academic discipline of philosophy, I roundly disagree! We are all stakeholders. Character and happiness are no more the exclusive turf of philosophers than cancer and heart disease are the exclusive turf of physicians. Philosophers (and also psychologists) bring special expertise, but promotion of character should be multidisciplinary. We should encourage throughout our universities the ideal of being a good person, a person who in the Jewish tradition would be called a *mensch*,<sup>57</sup> and to promote the notion that lasting happiness is best achieved by focusing on the engaged and meaningful life, not the pleasurable life. As an outside observer, I believe that we stand poised to develop a useful *psychology of philosophy*, defining in scientific terms and on the basis of empirical observation how best to go about attaining the classic virtues. Also as an outside observer, and with no experience whatsoever at tinkering with the undergraduate curriculum, I proffer the inchoate suggestion that we develop and require for freshman students a year-long course based in part on the educational concepts summarized in Table 1. Let's answer in the

affirmative Derek Bok's question. Yes, moral development should indeed be an integral part of undergraduate education for all students and a goal demanding attention, effort, and, on occasion, even a bit of courage and sacrifice. This is a worthy project for, as John Palms, the immediate past president of The University of South Carolina, was fond of quoting a loose translation of the university's Latin motto (from Ovid): "Learning humanizes character and does not permit it to be cruel."

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