*Draft — please do not cite or quote without permission*

**Developing Virtue: Some Conceptual Issues**

For Virtue and its Development Conference, Notre Dame May 19-22, 2014

**Christine Swanton.**

This paper addresses a relatively unexplored issue in virtue ethics: what is the relation between the virtues and desirable traits or sensitivities of those whose virtue is in the process of developing? Similar questions apply to other relatively unexplored issues: what is the relationship between the virtues and the excellences and duties appropriate to roles? What is the relationship between the virtues and narrative excellences pertaining to the structure of an individual life?

Clearly immature agents do not possess *mature* virtue but does it make sense to think that, as some do, children can nonetheless be virtuous? If there is a sense in which children can be virtuous, and I shall argue that there is such a sense, what is that sense? And what is the relationship between the way children are virtuous and mature virtue? These are the questions explored in this paper.

1. **Aristotelian Virtue.**

In order to discuss the relation between virtue and desirable traits in the young we need to discuss the notion of virtue in the mature. For virtue ethical orthodoxy virtue just is mature virtue. However there are many possible conceptions of mature virtue the most prominent of which is that of Aristotle. For him virtue proper is understood as *arête kuria* or “full virtue”. That notion has five features all of which might be disputed by theorists of mature virtue. These are

1. Genuine virtue just is full virtue. There is no such thing as virtue in the immature.

This claim is denied by those who believe that virtue is relative to stage of life including the immature stages: a view that is explored and defended below.

1. Full virtue for Aristotle requires practical wisdom. To possess practical wisdom in turn one needs to be mature; for practical wisdom demands both experience and emotional intelligence. Hence (1) above is true.

What is practical wisdom? Practical wisdom requires a sophisticated sensitivity as well as the knowledge of experience, but as Hursthouse points out,[[1]](#footnote-1) the knowledge of the virtuous agent need not be infallible or encyclopaedic. Agents of full virtue are after all human; they have limited perspective due to their age, gender and cultural and historical location, and the narrative particularities of their lives; furthermore they cannot be expert in all fields. As a result, an agent with full virtue requires the dialogic virtues to make up for the shortfall in her knowledge and her perspectival limitations. She also needs these to participate in collective decision making.

Not all virtue theorists agree that mature virtue requires practical wisdom. Dissenters are called “Soft” as opposed to “Hard” by Daniel Russell.[[2]](#footnote-2) A Soft virtue ethicist is Slote[[3]](#footnote-3) for whom virtue essentially consists of admirable motivation, but motivation may be admirable without being informed by practical wisdom according to Slote.

1. The notion of full virtue presupposes a human *telos* which defines ends proper to human beings. However one may have a theory of mature virtue such as that of Julia Driver[[4]](#footnote-4) which does not presuppose a teleological (as opposed to say consequentialist) framework.
2. The Aristotelian notion of full virtue not only presupposes a teleological framework of ethics but a conception of what it is to be good *qua* human being. More specifically full virtue is virtue possessed by an agent *qua* human being as opposed to agent *qua* artist or business executive. Furthermore it is fundamentally the realization of one’s *telos* *qua* human being to which human beings aspire, or should aspire.

What is it to be good *qua* human being? To answer this question, consider this quote from Alasdair MacIntyre:

Aristotle takes it as a starting-point for ethical enquiry that the relationship of 'man' to 'living well' is analogous to that of 'harpist' to 'playing the harp well' *(Nicomachean Ethics,* 1095a 16). But the use of 'man' as a functional concept is far older than Aristotle and it does not initially derive from Aristotle's metaphysical biology. It is rooted in the forms of social life to which the theorists of the classical tradition give expression. For according to that tradition to be a man is to fill a set of roles each of which has its own point and purpose: member of a family, citizen, soldier, philosopher, servant of God. It is only when man is thought of as an individual prior to and apart from all roles that 'man' ceases to be a functional concept.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Lurking here are three possible conceptions of goodness *qua* human being. These are:

1. Goodness *qua* human being where a human being is thought of as ‘an individual prior to and apart from all roles’, a conception wholly derived from ‘metaphysical biology.’
2. Goodness *qua* human being where a human being is thought of as an individual who is wholly defined by filling ‘a set of roles each of which has its own point and purpose.’ Goodness *qua* human is thus understood wholly in terms of how well he has integrated all the various roles in that set.

Here the norms of integration are governed by some conception of goodness *qua* individual human life, and these norms may be (i) relatively individualist (such as narrative virtue pertaining to how the life hangs together), or (ii) relatively collectivist such as degree of contribution to overall societal good).

1. Goodness *qua* human being where such goodness integrates (i) species wide conceptions of goodness *qua* human (what Philippa Foot calls natural goodness) and (ii) a more local conception of goodness that is relative to the roles filled by the individual in his local community.

The tensions between aspects of goodness within (c) are not merely the tensions inherent in multiple role occupation; they include also the tensions between excellence in (worthwhile) roles and a more role independent conception of goodness *qua* human. Such tension, claims MacIntyre, is inherent in Aristotle’s own conception of the *telos* of an individual human being. He says:

Hence Aristotle's ethics, expounded as he expounds it, presupposes his metaphysical biology. Aristotle thus sets himself the task of giving an account of the good which is at once local and particular - located in and partially defined by the characteristics of the *polis -* andyet also cosmic and universal. The tension between these poles is felt throughout the argument of the *Ethics.*[[6]](#footnote-6)

Full virtue on this view requires that ‘morality though rooted in the social and family life you have cannot be exhausted by it’ for you as a fully virtuous agent ‘cannot help but be aware that your community is imperfect…’[[7]](#footnote-7)

1. Full virtue presupposes that there is a state of perfection to which humans can aspire.

However one can believe that there are norms of development and maturity for human beings, norms which constrain correct conceptions of mature virtue, without believing in any notion of perfection. One can even believe in (some conception of) (4), that there is goodness *qua* human teleologically understood, without believing that there is a norm of perfection. How can this be?

Consider Daniel Russell’s view that virtue is both a *satis* and a model concept. He claims rightly that *‘it is a mistake to suppose that the idea that one need only be ‘virtuous enough’ to be virtuous is an* alternative *to thinking of the virtues in terms of ideal models.’* [[8]](#footnote-8)However it does not follow from this view that (as Russell thinks) ‘thinking of virtue in terms of ideals is *required* on account of the very sort of satisconcept that virtue is.’[[9]](#footnote-9) What is necessary for the notion that virtue is a *satis* concept is that there are norms of improvement and development in virtue. These norms need not suppose ‘a model of ideal virtuousness that both sets the top end of the scale and gives meaning to the idea that a particular agent occupies a certain level on that scale.’[[10]](#footnote-10) On interpretations (b) and (c) of being good *qua* human there are multiple possible sets of worthwhile roles that could be filled by individual human beings all of which would result in completely different life narratives. Any such narrative may constitute a life good enough to be virtuous, and any such life would contain its own obstacles and tensions. They would be incomparable on any scale terminating in perfection. Many quite different and incomparable lives may be regarded as good or even admirable, without there being any coherent notion of a ‘top end of a scale’ or an ideal. Of these good lives we could say:

1. Some lives are good enough to be called virtuous.
2. Some lives are better than the merely good enough.
3. Some lives are heroic, splendid, admirable, excellent. These are lives of exemplary virtue.

Standards embodied in these types of norm are all the standards we need in order to make claims of virtue.

In what follows I shall assume the truth of (4), but not (5). There can be norms of virtue and norms of development without any assumption that the *telos* of humans should be conceived in terms of perfection. Inherent tensions between aspects of human life it has been argued make perfection in a single life impossible,[[11]](#footnote-11) for standards of excellence within those aspects may not be co-realizable. However it does not follow that we cannot to some extent integrate those aspects within the narrative particularities of our life, in ways which are virtuous.

1. **Mature Virtue, Basic Virtue and Differentiated Virtue.**

If I am to defend the position that there is a reasonable sense in which children can be virtuous I first need the conceptual tools to make that claim. To make sense of that claim we must not only distinguish mature virtue from full virtue, which is a specific *conception* of mature virtue, but also from what I shall call basic virtue. For my claim is that there is good reason for thinking that children have basic virtue *differentiated* (as I shall put it) according to stage of life as a child. What then is basic virtue? Basic virtue is virtue described at a high level of generality in terms of general virtue terms such as generosity, patience, courage, and so forth. At this level of abstraction the virtue is described in a way that is undifferentiated: when speaking of patience *simpliciter* it is not determined whether we are talking about patience as an excellence in a child, or patience as a mature virtue; when speaking of generosity *simpliciter* it is not determined whether we are talking about generosity *qua* C.E.O. or generosity *qua* human being (whatever that may be). In short, it is possible for basic virtue to be differentiated in many ways: according to stage of life, according to cultural and historical location, according to role, and in a variety of other ways, including the narrative particularities of our lives.[[12]](#footnote-12) This way of conceptualizing virtue differs from the understanding of virtue as full (Aristotelian) virtue. For example, though we can speak of basic virtue in Nietzsche (his writings are replete with virtue and vice concepts) and indeed the virtues of the mature, strong agent free of resentment and other psychological afflictions, we cannot speak of full virtue as understood above. Rather basic virtue is wholly differentiated according to such features as an agent’s strength and roles that he occupies, and (within those parameters) the narrative creative structure of her life.

With the concept of basic and differentiated virtue in place, we are in a position to debate how we should conceive of virtue in relation to stage of life, roles, narrative particularity, gender, and so on.

Although basic virtue is understood at a high level of abstraction, we need to give a “thin” account of the nature of basic virtue. Call this thin account (BV)

(BV) Virtue, understood in a basic sense, is a disposition of excellent (or at least good enough) responsiveness to items in its field or sphere (such as friends, loved ones, dangerous situations, nature, frustrating or tiresome situations, the suffering of others), dispositions specified by the thick virtue concepts such as patience, loyalty, generosity, compassion.[[13]](#footnote-13)

(BV) differs from Dan Russell’s view that:

(BRV) ‘[E]very virtue is a form of responsiveness to practical reasons within its sphere of concern’[[14]](#footnote-14)

(BV) differs from (BRV) in a number of ways. First, responding well to items in the field of a virtue is not equivalent to responding to reasons. One may respond well in an expressive manner to loved ones for example (with affectionate gestures) without responding to reasons. Rather one is responding to a person (not a reason) in a manner which is fitting.[[15]](#footnote-15) (BV) allows such a response to be expressive of a virtue of affection, one of Hume’s virtues of love. More generally (BRV) excludes (or includes with great difficulty) some conceptions of mature virtue such as that of Iris Murdoch who claims that ‘instances of facts…which seem to have been forgotten or ‘theorized away’ are the fact that an unexamined life can be virtuous and the fact that love is a central concept of morals.’[[16]](#footnote-16) Second, young children may respond well to parental instruction without responding to reasons, and we may wish to praise such children as obedient, distinguishing them both from the chronically disobedient troubled with attachment problems, and from those whose obedience manifests a spirit that has been broken or damaged. In general (BV) allows for the possibility that what counts as excellent responsiveness in the field of patience, loyalty, obedience to authoritative instructions for example, will differ according to whether we are speaking of the patience, loyalty or obedience of a child or an adult.

To summarize: basic virtue is not conceptually equivalent to mature virtue whether or not conceived as full Aristotelian virtue. It may then be possible for one to have basic virtue (differentiated in some way) without having mature virtue. On the view developed below it makes sense to say that children can have basic virtue differentiated by stage of life (as a child): they can have dispositions of patience to an excellent and even exemplary degree, but of course, lacking practical wisdom, experience, sophistication, and maturity, they cannot have patience as manifested in mature virtue.

1. **Can Children Have Virtue?**

With the concept of basic and differentiated virtue in place, we are in a position to debate how we should conceive of virtue in relation to stage of life, and in particular whether children can be said to possess virtue.

The received wisdom that children cannot possess virtue is opposed by Jennifer Welchman, basically on the grounds that given continuous development even in mature adults it is arbitrary to deny virtue to developmental excellences possessed by those in the process of development, including children. A child has her own excellences *qua* child, and these excellences should not be seen merely as lacks to be endured on the way to the virtue of the mature agent, and thus not really excellences at all. Welchman’s view is derived from that of the educational theorist Dewey who claims that in educational theory:

Our tendency [is] to take immaturity as mere lack and growth as something which fills up the gap between the mature and the immature…We treat it simply as a privation because we are measuring it by adulthood as a fixed standard.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Not only is there skepticism here about a conception of mature virtue as supplying a *fixed* standard to which all children should be trained to aspire to and reach, excellences of immaturity should be seen as virtuous stages of being, in their own right. Indeed Dewey goes as far as to say that ‘with respect to sympathetic curiosity, unbiased responsiveness, and openness of mind, we may say that the adult should be growing in childlikeness.’[[18]](#footnote-18) Furthermore according to Welchman, an understanding of a virtue as a ‘stable realization of a mature human disposition’ threatens the process of growth. It is implicitly to deny that life is a continuous process of development and constructive change, for on that understanding of a mature virtue ‘traits fostering continual change threaten our virtues’ (p.150). An advantage of Welchman’s view is that it makes sense of a claim that there are excellences proper to development, and to stages of development, and that such excellences cannot simply be read off from the properties of a mature agent.

Welchman’s view that we should not confine the idea of virtue to mature agents flies against virtue ethical orthodoxy. A defence of her view must show how it is even possible to think of children having virtue. As a first step in showing this, we need to think of virtues as relative to stage of life. This is the view of Michael Slote for whom ‘various facts about human life and development make it plausible to regard certain personal traits as virtues or excellences only in relation to some particular period of life, rather than as virtues, or excellences, *tout court’*.[[19]](#footnote-19) However to show that virtue is relative to stage of life is not to show that children can be virtuous *qua* child. Is it not a necessary condition of a state being a virtue that one at least be mature? Perhaps we can speak of the virtues of youth (young adults), the virtues of those in their prime, or the virtues of the elderly, but it may be thought, states of development towards mature virtue cannot themselves constitute virtue. If we think that there are virtues *qua* child we need to show two things.

1. We need to reconceptualize virtue in general not as something essentially possessed only in the mature, but as differentiable basic virtue picked out by the thick virtue concepts in relation to dispositions.
2. We need to show how basic virtue can reasonably be differentiated according to stage of life *as a child*.

An obstacle to the reconceptualization canvassed in (i) has been the more or less conceptual identification of virtue in general with mature virtue, and that in turn with one conception of mature virtue, namely the conception that virtue requires practical wisdom (which children can’t have). This obstacle was removed in the previous section with the understanding of virtue in general as basic virtue differentiated in various ways, and the conceptualization of basic virtue in terms of (BV). We need now to move to (ii).

The way to show how basic virtue can reasonably be differentiated according to stage of life *as a child* is to understand basic virtue as a prototype concept. That understanding is provided in the next section.

1. **Virtue as a Prototype Concept.**

Once virtue is understood as a prototype concept we can see more clearly how it can be reasonable to extend the concept to include within its range dispositional excellences in children. What is a prototype concept? A core feature of prototype concepts is that prototype concepts ‘represent experientially basic types of situation’,[[20]](#footnote-20) not precisely defined, let alone in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. These basic types of situation are understood as ‘good examples’[[21]](#footnote-21) of the concept, and provide its stable core features. A good illustration of how virtue conforms to this model is Linda Zagzebski’s exemplarist virtue ethics[[22]](#footnote-22) according to which the paradigms of virtue are various exemplars of admirability. What is crucial about prototype concepts is that their range can be extended beyond the “good examples” to include relevantly similar types of objects. The prototype approach to categorizing items under a concept ‘involves categorizing objects…in terms of their similarity to a good example…’[[23]](#footnote-23)The concept of virtue seen as a prototype concept then is capable of being applied to cases other than paradigms through ‘imaginative extension,’[[24]](#footnote-24) which is not to say that such extension cannot be backed by good reasons. Since there are many dimensions of similarity, there are many possible ways of extending the range of the concept of virtue from its paradigms of mature admirable exemplars. Items falling under the concept of virtue may bear degrees and kinds of similarity to prototypes. For example the exemplars of admirability and excellence can extend to admirability *qua* role occupier such as an exemplar of business excellence especially when integrated with admirability *qua* philanthropic attitudes towards stake-holders. Similarly we may admire exemplars of courage exhibited in the face of serious illness by a child who has to endure multiple painful treatments or operations. Or we may admire particular helpfulness or compassion in a child. Assuming that such excellence or admirability is a dispositional trait we may be happy to extend the paradigms of mature virtue to virtue in a child. Good reasons for doing this were canvased above, but these reasons are not decisive, and are reasonably contestable.

If however Welchman is right and we can, indeed should, talk about virtue in children, we need an account of why we should see the traits of children as sufficiently similar to mature exemplars to warrant extension of the concept virtue understood as a prototype concept. One good reason for the likes of both Dewey and Nietzsche is that life is not only a continuing process of development, the notion of development itself should be seen in terms of various developing strengths rather than a blue-print for a specific way of flourishing. It is not as if there is some ideal terminus of development where we finally acquire virtue *simpliciter*. Adults, like children, are developing and ‘overcoming.’ Indeed life for Dewey *is* development[[25]](#footnote-25) and for Welchman ‘there is no particular condition or state of affairs that will constitute flourishing for any person throughout their lives.’[[26]](#footnote-26) This means for Dewey as for Nietzsche there is no ideal terminus of development: development must be understood in some other way, whether in terms of loving the world and others, adaptation to change, overcoming obstacles, and leading one’s life according to norms of productive creativity. This as Erik Erikson saw (see below) requires a variety of developmental strengths enabling us to love, be competent, industrious and productive, in the face of a variety of obstacles whether inner or outer. As Nietzsche says even the best of us must overcome, and for Kant the fight against the undermining power of mere inclination, and we should add, the influence of corrupting social and institutional forces, is ongoing and relentless; indeed a struggle. [[27]](#footnote-27)

1. **Virtues in Children.**

If ‘life is development’ and it is reasonable to relativize virtue to stages of life including that of a child, how do we understand virtues in children? Although life is a *continuing* process of development (and set-backs) it is useful to think of stages of life (child, adolescent, young mature adult, old age) with excellences relative to these stages as Slote argues. These excellences, in both adults and children, are specified through the thick virtue concepts. We can say that a child has patience proper to stage of life as a child. She has learned not to interrupt adult conversation. She has learned not to whine and throw tantrums if she cannot immediately get her own way; she has learned to wait. There are also vices of excess here: if she follows the old adage of being “seen and not heard” she has developed a form of patience that is insufficiently assertive. Notice however that not all virtue in a child is the same as virtue in adults except that it is differentiated according to stage of life as a child. Some virtues in adults may be vices in children. Says Slote:

Once one has reached a certain point of maturity, life-planfulness is a virtue of practical rationality; but the disposition to have and follow a life plan is the opposite of a virtue, an anti-virtue, (in relation to) childhood.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Life-planfulness and prudence according to Slote, then, are ‘relative virtues’. Some relative virtues, by contrast with life-planfulness, are virtues in children but not adults. One such on Slote’s view is trustingness. Innocence is another possibility.[[29]](#footnote-29) None of this implies that all virtues are capable of being virtues (appropriately differentiated) at all stages of life. Wisdom appears to fall in this category. Although we do sometimes speak of the wisdom of a child, wisdom proper cannot exist at early stages of life.[[30]](#footnote-30) A more clear-cut example is trustworthiness. We might claim that (proper) trustworthiness is a virtue in an adult[[31]](#footnote-31) but it does not really make sense to speak of trustworthiness in a young child.

Third, if virtue is not only admirable or excellent, but also often worthy of emulation, then as Dewey and Welchman emphasize, adults need to foster some paradigmatic child-virtues, but not completely in the way a child has them. (This would be impossible). These include basic compassion, wonder and curiosity, open-mindedness, enthusiasm, spontaneity, and even innocence for those who prize innocence in contrast to cynicism or even a hard-nosed realism. We should not think of the traits of children as lacks or imperfections; they can be admirable and emulable. We do not need to share Aristotle’s view that children, like women (on his view), are intrinsically imperfect insofar as they do not possess, or are not capable of possessing respectively full virtue. It does not follow from this of course that stage of life as a child is privileged or even equal in terms of time preference in the assessment of a life as a whole. As Slote argues, the goods and virtues of a child are less important in that assessment, both from the perspective of an agent and from a third person perspective, than the goods and virtues of one in his prime. Nonetheless we can learn from the admirable traits of children.

On my view then basic virtue differentiated according to stage of life as a child is genuine virtue, but *all* genuine virtue is virtue that is developing. In children that development is development towards mature virtue. In adults in their prime that development is marked by the transitioning of virtue into the virtues of old age. With the emphasis on virtues of those in their prime this can be missed. For example Wolff claims that doing cross-word puzzles as one’s dominant activity (apart from the basic tasks needed to keep one falling into total disrepair) is not an activity that makes one’s life meaningful for it does not attest to that aspect of meaning where worthwhile activity has to speak of something larger than oneself. But it may be the case that for a relatively immobile and blind old person this is just the activity that keeps him going and wards off a genetic predisposition to Alzheimer’s.[[32]](#footnote-32) Consider then a (nameless) virtue whose field is engaging in projects making one’s life meaningful. This virtue is certainly relative to stage of life.

A problem with speaking of virtues in children is that in the Aristotelian tradition at least, virtue is a character trait and character is something possessed in maturity. Children have personality, not character. However given that character is something that develops it seems arbitrary to deny that children have character that is developing just as adults have developing and indeed declining character. Just as we can speak of the mean in relation to dispositions of patience and anger qua young adult, so we can speak of the mean in relation to dispositions of anger and patience *qua* child. Throwing tantrums is in a three year old expressing frustration in the wrong way and to excess. When this is routinely done in the supermarket we have the additional embarrassment of wrong time and place. Modern parents say ‘Tell me what you want’, ‘Use words’; older generation parents said ‘Be Quiet’ and ‘Do what I say’: both agree that such behaviour is wrongly expressive of anger. When the disposition is entrenched parents have a problem on their hands – we here have an anti-virtue or vice in a child, which we hope ameliorates when the “terrible twos” (threes and even fours) phase is over.

Given that virtue *qua* child is a form of development towards mature virtue it must be a form of development that is integrated with mature virtue and is not disjoint from this. When bringing up a child we do not rest content with the particular highly tuned sensitivities of a child *qua* child saying, lost in admiration, nostalgia, or sentimentality, that this is a wonderful child-excellence. We may for example need to toughen the child up, so that she can live in the real world without constantly becoming distressed or unable to stand up to bullies. The virtue of a child is integrated with that of the mature agent – it is not as if the belief that virtues are relative to stages of life is incompatible with the view that the virtues of a child are a progression to mature virtue.

How is that progression psychologically expressed? Erik Erikson argues that mature virtue has psychological precursors which he calls ‘unifying strengths.’[[33]](#footnote-33) These strengths are both precursors of mature virtue and persist through time. They are necessary for the development of mature virtue, but not wholly constitutive of it. Each has ‘its time of ascendance and [developmental] crisis, yet each persists throughout life.’[[34]](#footnote-34) These strengths (in developmental sequence) are basic trust, hope, will, purpose, competence, fidelity, love, care and wisdom. Basic trust is necessary for hope as a strength, but notice that in a child, trustingness can be a virtue without trustingness being a virtue in an adult. There, the strength of a basic trust towards the world as a whole is informed by practical wisdom: we need to be able to tell who is worthy of trust. Industriousness, which requires purposiveness, can arise only where the individual is capable of producing things and of manifesting creativity. In a young child desire to help and manipulate tools, manifesting child-like perseverance and concentration is considered a virtue in that child even though he is incompetent and his very persistence can drive parents mad. It manifests the developmental excellence of being an ‘eager and absorbed unit of a productive situation’, and ‘teaches him the pleasure of work completion by steady attention and persevering diligence.’[[35]](#footnote-35) But if his life is already characterized by basic mistrust and lack of hope, this development towards industriousness, an important virtue, will be stymied. A sense of developing competence requires a strong sense of self not burdened with shame, and (self) doubt, ‘the brother of shame’[[36]](#footnote-36)

Notice finally that care and love for Erikson are forms of strength, reflecting his view that the basic strengths are integrated. As Nietzsche and Bernard Williams emphasise, purposive strength is developed through industriousness and competence in the pursuit of one’s own creative projects and purposes, so love and care need to be integrated with that form of strength. Thus love and care are also integrated with a strong sense of self not burdened with shame and self-doubt.

Finally we should note that development towards mature virtue is also development along other forms of differentiation, including role occupation, cultural location, the narrative unfolding of one’s life. There are dispositional excellences relating to all these forms of differentiation. In role differentiation, the autonomy that one possesses *qua* human must be tempered by a disposition to obey authority whether in the form of bosses instructions or following protocols or institutional rules. In cultural differentiation, sensitivity to our properties *qua* human must co-exist with a disposition to be inducted into a specific culture, one’s own. In narrative differentiation one’s life has narrative integrity, however that is understood as narratively differentiated virtue.

Conclusion.

The view proposed in this paper is that what Erikson calls the basic unifying strengths and indeed associated excellences are not merely precursors to mature virtue but in children are virtues relative to stage of life as a child. Reconceptualizing virtue in terms of basic and differentiated virtue, and seeing virtue as a prototype concept shows how this is possible. Virtues in children have a mean (understood in terms of such factors as right time, right object, right manner, right extent, and right affect) relative to a child. Not only is this so but some virtues in children should be emulated by adults, in a suitable form of course. However some virtues in mature adults cannot be differentiated according to stage of life as a child, and some other virtues which are virtues in children, cannot be differentiated according to stage of life as an adult. That is some virtues cannot even have a mature form.

1. In Rosalind Hursthouse ‘Practical Wisdom: A Mundane Account’, *Proceedings of The Aristotelian Society* 106 (2006): 285-309.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Daniel C. Russell *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Michael Slote *Morals from Motives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Julia Driver *Uneasy Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Alasdair MacIntyre *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (1981) 3rd ed. 2007 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. After Virtue, 148. See also Julia Annas ‘My Station and its Duties: Ideals and the Social Embeddedness of Virtue’ *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* Vol. 102, 1, (2002), 109-123. This is the conception of virtue Annas finds in the Stoics and F.H. Bradley. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Annas, 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Daniel Russell *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See for example Nietzsche for whom there are norms of development and improvement which is basically a continuous matter of ‘self-overcoming’: overcoming obstacles, becoming stronger, while dealing with the world and achieving (worthwhile) specific goals, Isaiah Berlin, and Michael Slote (*The Impossibility of Perfection: Aristotle, Feminism, and the Complexities of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. A fuller account of basic virtue (there called prototype virtue) and differentiated virtue occurs in my ‘Virtue Ethics, Role Ethics, and Business Ethics’ in *Working Virtue: Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems* eds. Rebecca L. Walker and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 2007), 207-224, especially in relation to role virtue. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See my *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Op cit*., 371. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This view of course assumes that not all fitting responses are responses to reasons. The relation between fittingness relationships and reason relationships is an issue beyond the scope of this paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Iris Murdoch *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge, 1970), 1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. John Dewey *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (1916:New York: The Free Press 1944), 42. (Cited In Welchman, 148) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Dewey, 50. (Cited in Welchman, 148). Compare Nietzsche’s claims about the innocence and receptivity of the child, orientations required to make a new beginning in creativity (Friedrich Nietzsche *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann in *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin, 1976) First Part, Zarathustra’s Speeches, On the Three Metamorphoses, 138-9). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. ‘Relative Virtues’ in *Goods and Virtues* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 39-59, 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Mark Johnson *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Jill N. Kearns and Frank D. Fincham ‘A Prototype Analysis of Forgiveness’ *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 30 (2004), 838-855, 838. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Linda Zagzebski ‘Exemplarist Virtue Theory’ in Heather Battaly ed. *Virtue and Vice: Moral and Epistemic* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 39-55*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Johnson, 190-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Dewey (1944), p.50; cited in Welchman, p.147. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Welchman, 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. In *Midddlemarch* for example George Elliot makes the following observation through her character Farebrother: ‘character is not something cut out in marble – it is not something solid and unalterable. It is something living and changing, and may become diseased as our bodies do.’ ( Elliot 1994 Ch 72 734-5, cited in Victoria McGeer ‘Trust, Hope and Empowerment’ *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 86, 2, (2008), 237-254, 239. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Michael Slote ‘Relative Virtues’ in *Goods and Virtues*, 39-59, 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See further ‘Relative Virtue’, 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. This is not to say that I subscribe to a conception of virtue understood wholly in terms of the quality of desire, even in the case of children. Some degree of competence or skill appropriate to stage of life is necessary. So analogues to practical wisdom are required, even though we would not describe such age-related skill/competence as practical wisdom or *phronesis*. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. But see Karen Jones ‘Trustworthiness’ *Ethics* 123, (2012), 61-85, for a dissenting voice. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. This was exactly the case with my father in law. See Susan Wolf *Meaning in Life and Why it Matters* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 9, 16. She softens her stance somewhat in her ‘Response’ (130). See also the very apt ‘Comment’ by Nomy Arpaly. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Erikson, Erik (1963), *Childhood and Society*. New York: W.W. Norton. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Insight and Responsibility, in Robert Coles ed., *The Erik Erikson Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 211. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Erikson, 1963,259 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Erikson, 1963,253 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)