

Moral perception  
and particularity

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## Virtue and community

The revival of a virtue approach to ethics has been accompanied by a renewed concern with the notion of community and, many assume, a close link between virtue and community. Yet most discussions of virtue proceed without ever mentioning community. The widespread assumption of a link between community and virtue may be due in part to the Aristotelian roots of virtue ethics, and to Alasdair MacIntyre's semi-Aristotelian *After Virtue*, probably the single most influential contemporary work in virtue ethics. Both Aristotle and MacIntyre emphasize the fundamentally social nature of virtue – the way that particular forms of social life are linked with particular virtues.

Another source of the assumption of a close link between community and virtue may be the moral theory or family of theories that proponents of both community and virtue *reject*. These theories emphasize the primacy of the rational, autonomous individual in moral agency and in the normative foundations of political structures. Communitarians depart from these theories both in placing value on communal entities – a value not reducible to the value of rational agency – and (sometimes) in according communal entities a more fundamental place in the formation or constitution of the moral self. Virtue theorists see the foundations of virtue as lying not, or not only, in rational agency but also in habit, emotion, sentiment, perception, and other psychic capacities.

I explore here some of the possible links between virtue and community, with two ends in mind. First, to indicate the multifariousness of such links, and thus to suggest that the ties between community and virtue may be more significant than moral theory has taken into account. Second, I believe that some forms of community can be crucial to the maintenance of a moral psychology of excellence, and that community has often

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been a missing desideratum in the discussion of the nature and development of admirable moral character.

In particular, I argue that communities can shape our sense of what we feel morally “pulled” to do and, integral to this, of what is and is not an “undue burden” or “too much to demand.” I sometimes use the language of “duty” as a convenient way to refer to this territory of being morally pulled, or feeling some sort of moral requirement to do something. The territory itself, however, includes other moral motives – such as compassion, or the holding of certain principles, that are not coextensive with duty as ordinarily construed.<sup>1</sup> (Thus I assume that a strong sense of “ought” may – though it does not always – accompany actions done from compassion.) I argue for a view I call “limited community relativism” according to which, given two communities A and B, where A has a more demanding notion of moral compulsion and undue burden, it cannot be said that either has a correct or a more correct view of the matter than the other. Yet, at the same time, one *can* say that the community with the more demanding standard of moral compulsion better realizes virtue (at least in some important respects) than does the other community. In making this argument I reject the notion of “supererogation” as helping to provide a general account of moral excellence.

The notion of community is by no means a univocal one, and I shall not attempt a formal definition. We shall see that different notions of community are sometimes employed in different alleged links to virtue. In general, however, by “community” I mean more than the mere possession of a shared characteristic (such as being left-handed, or hailing from Indiana). I require that status as a member of the community be recognized by others within the community (and generally outside as well), and that

1. One may roughly distinguish between two uses of “duty.” In one use, it is distinguished from other forms of moral requirement or moral “oughtness” by being its most stringent form. In the second use duty is simply one form of “oughtness” among others, with no implication that it is the most stringent. On the latter view, for example, I may have a duty to show up for my office hours and I may not have a duty to stop and help out in an accident in which people are hurt; there is a stronger oughtness attaching to the latter, however, than to the former action.

I take no stand on this controversy. (For an exchange, that I will refer to later in the chapter, which turns on this dispute, see Patricia Smith, “The Duty to Rescue and the Slippery Slope Problem,” *Social Theory and Practice*, vol. 16, no. 1, Spring 1990: 19–42, and the exchange between John Whelan, Jr., and Smith in the Fall 1991 issue (vol. 17, no. 3) of the same journal.) To the extent that I use the notion of “duty,” however, I mean it to encompass “oughts” of a fairly strong variety. In other contexts – and in other essays in this volume – I am concerned about the differences between duty and compassion as motives; but in this essay my interest is in a feature related to moral stringency that cuts across that distinction.

this status be significant (to a degree I cannot pin down more precisely) to the individual member's sense of identity. I generally have in mind communities bound together by either lineage or location or both, though this feature is not absolutely essential.

Let me suggest six possible or alleged links between virtue and community that one can find in the virtue literature, especially in MacIntyre's writings:

1. *Learning.* Virtues can be learned and nurtured only within particular forms of social life, including families. They are necessarily social products and could not be generated ab novo from individual reason or reflection.

2. *Sustaining.* A second, stronger, claim is that virtues can be sustained only in communities. MacIntyre says, "I need those around me to reinforce my moral strengths and assist in remedying my moral weaknesses. It is in general only within a community that individuals become capable of morality and are sustained in their morality."<sup>2</sup> This claim is stronger than the first, for it is consistent with (1) that even if their original source and formation lie in communities, virtues, once originally acquired, are able to be sustained solely through individual effort, and in the absence of the social support to which MacIntyre refers.

3. *Agency-constituting.* A somewhat more radical link is sometimes suggested by MacIntyre – that our very moral identity, hence our moral agency itself as that which realizes virtue, is at least in part constituted by the communities of which we are members. (A similar idea is suggested in Michael Sandel's *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*.) This point is distinct from the previous one, which takes the character of an individual's moral agency as a given and then claims that community is (part of) what supports it in realizing virtue. Here the character of an individual's moral agency is itself partly constituted by community. Hence the "virtue-sustaining" connection in (2) is consistent with a radically individualistic conception of moral agency; but the "agency-constituting" claim in (3) is not.

4. *Content-providing.* A different sort of link is that forms of communal life fill in the detailed prescriptions that turn abstract principles into a lived morality. That is, our communities tell us how to apply our general moral principles to the world; without them we would not know what our principles bid of us in the particular contexts of social life in which we operate. Alasdair MacIntyre says, "The moralities of different societies may agree in having a precept enjoining that a child should honor his or

2. MacIntyre, "Is Patriotism a Virtue?" (The Lindley Lecture, 1984), University of Kansas, p. 10.

her parents, but what it is to honor . . . will vary greatly between different social orders" ("Patriotism," p. 9).

Only by living within a complex form of communal life can we learn these particularities, not only cognitively as one can learn the rules of another culture or community from reading a book, but also in the lived ways that require forms of perception and consciousness, morally relevant situation-descriptions, habits of action, salience of certain considerations, and the like.<sup>3</sup> Note, however, that the content provided need not be monolithic; the community's morality may involve internal variation and conflict, and can leave some room as well for individual interpretation.

This connection is distinct from the "sustaining" connection. For the latter is consistent with our knowing fully what a virtue bids of us independently of the community, but the community provides psychological support for acting on it. The "content-conferring" connection denies the possibility of having genuine knowledge apart from one's community of what the virtue consists in in the first place.

5. *Worth-conferring.* Another link is that some qualities are constituted as virtues only within particular communities. One could not see the quality as virtuous – or even really understand what the quality was – except by being part of the community in question. This point is analogous to MacIntyre's idea that "practices" such as chess or portrait painting have standards of excellence internal to themselves which can be understood – and seen as excellences – only by someone initiated into the practice (*After Virtue*, pp. 175 ff.). MacIntyre does not make this claim about virtues themselves, even though he sees virtues as involving producing goods internal to those practices, and as involving living up to the internal standards of the practice. (Moreover, a practice is distinct from a community.) Nevertheless, an analogous idea can be gleaned from his earlier example (4) of communal forms of "honoring" (e.g., one's parents). One can imagine that a certain activity or quality of character within a given community would count as honoring only within that community, and would not be a virtue outside it.

It is not clear if this point is distinct from (4, "content-providing") or merely operates at a different level of description. The point about content-providing assumes that a given quality is named as a virtue but that it is only within a community that one knows what that virtue actually comes to in a lived context. The worth-conferring point seems also to presuppose that there is *some* level of description of the activity or quality on which it can be seen to be a virtue; this is not incompatible

3. On this point, see Robert Fullinwider, "Moral Conventions and Moral Lessons," *Social Theory and Practice*, vol. 15, no. 3, Fall 1989: 321–38.

with, and seems even to presuppose, the point of (5), that some qualities cannot be recognized to be virtues except within communities.

6. *Virtues sustaining community.* Some virtues – such as trust, civility, tolerance – are particularly well suited to sustaining communal life in general.<sup>4</sup> And other virtues may sustain the particular forms of particular communities. Such virtues may or may not be communally “worth-conferred” in sense (5). This point is entirely consistent with (2), that communities sustain individuals in the practice of (at least some) virtues (including, but not limited to) the same virtues that sustain community.

I mention these possible links between virtue and community without attempting to assess how extensive such links are, or are being claimed to be. The “learning” link (1) seems plausible for all virtue. But obviously not *all* virtues are internal to communities in sense (5), nor do all virtues sustain community in sense (6). MacIntyre acknowledges (“Patriotism,” p. 10) that some rare individuals can sustain their own individual virtue without the support of a community in sense (2). Still, without defending this proposition, I will proceed on the assumption that with the possible exception of (3, agency-constituting), *all* of these links hold in cases of *some* virtues, and that this fact is significant for understanding the moral psychology of virtue. Yet much writing on virtue proceeds as if these links did not hold, or were of no particular significance. One gets the impression in much virtue writing that the social dimension of virtue – expressed in a sustaining, content-providing, or worth-conferring role – is of little consequence.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps in this literature this social dimension is not actually denied; and there may be a bow in its direction. Yet – in strong contrast to MacIntyre’s work – the impression is given that the virtues and a life of virtue can be understood apart from particular forms of social life.

I want now to explore in some detail one particularly striking example of virtue tied to a community – in several of the senses above. Before doing so I must distinguish between two ways that virtue is understood in moral theory and everyday life. In one sense the word “virtue” refers to a

quality of character which is especially admirable. It is especially admirable because it issues in actions, and expresses itself in emotional reactions, that go beyond those normally expected of people and for which they are not thought to warrant special esteem. I will call this “noteworthy” virtue.

The second conception of virtue (more common in moral philosophy contexts, as the referent of “virtue theory”), however, is of *any* valuable trait of character – not only noteworthy ones but also ones issuing in actions and feelings that, though morally worthy, are simply what are to be expected of a normal moral agent. The latter are thus not regarded as meriting distinct praise or esteem. Many acts of honesty, compassion, temperance, and other virtues are of this sort. Virtue here is *good* but not (necessarily) especially, or noteworthyly, valuable; I will call this “ordinary” virtue (though this conception encompasses noteworthy virtues as well).

One sometimes finds the term “virtue” used in a way that restricts it to noteworthy virtues, but the distinction is best seen as a classification of acts of virtue, and perhaps of persons, rather than of entire specific virtues themselves; some virtuous acts are especially worthy and some are only ordinarily worthy. It may be that acts of some virtues – for example, courage – are generally, or even always, noteworthy. And perhaps others – such as honesty – are generally of the ordinary type. Nevertheless, there are certainly some noteworthy acts of honesty in very adverse circumstances, and perhaps even some minor acts of what is still appropriately called courage that are closer to the ordinary pole of moral worth. In general, I would suggest that every virtue has both noteworthy and ordinary manifestations, depending on circumstances.

Note that the distinction between “ordinary” and “noteworthy” cannot be identified with the distinction between “duty” and what is “beyond duty.”<sup>6</sup> Generous acts, for example, always go beyond what the agent owes to the recipient; they are always “beyond duty.” Yet many acts of generosity are so minor that they would fall under the “ordinary” rather than the “noteworthy” rubric.

The example linked to community that I shall explore is the oft cited case of the village of Le Chambon, a French Huguenot enclave in Vichy France, which during the Nazi occupation of France sheltered about five thousand refugees (mostly Jewish), a number roughly equal to the population of the village. The aspect of this inspiring and fascinating historical episode that I want to focus on here is the communal nature of the rescue

6. This point was made by Joel Feinberg in “Supererogation and Rules,” in Judith Thomson and Gerald Dworkin (eds.), *Ethics* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968).

4. Edmund Pincoffs refers to virtues that sustain associational life as “meliorative” virtues. *Quandaries and Virtues: Against Reductionism in Ethics* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1986), pp. 86 ff.

5. Examples of influential writing on the virtues that generally lack this explicitly social/community dimension are James Wallace, *Virtues and Vices* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); Philippa Foot, “Virtues and Vices,” in *Virtues and Vices* (Berkeley: University of California, 1978); and the collections *Midwest Studies in Philosophy XIII Ethical Theory: Character and Virtue* (1988), and R. Kruschwitz and R. Roberts, *The Virtues: Contemporary Essays on Moral Character* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1987).

enterprise – the way the community as a whole affected the decisions of its individual members to help with and contribute to the rescue activities.<sup>7</sup>

Scores of individuals made individual, or family, decisions to help the refugees. Such decisions carried great risks. To aid refugees, and especially Jews, was punishable, sometimes by death (although the punishments were not so severe nor so stringently enforced as in other areas in Europe, such as Poland). Three of the town's leaders were jailed for a time for engaging in these activities.

There were many different forms of participation in the rescue activities. Often a refugee would simply show up at someone's door, and that person would have to decide on the spot whether to help, either by taking the refugee into her own home or trying to find other shelter for her. Obtaining false identity and ration papers, moving refugees, getting food, sometimes smuggling persons out of the village toward Switzerland were also essential tasks. Simply contributing to keeping up the facade that nothing worthy of the Nazis' attention was going on was a task shared by all. The failure of anyone in the village to blow the whistle on the whole operation – by informing the appropriate Vichy or German officials – was a precondition of its remarkable success. Hallie says, "Le Chambon became a village of refuge not by fiat, not by virtue of the decision Trocmé [the town pastor, discussed below] or any other person made, but by virtue of the fact that . . . no Chambonnais ever turned away a refugee, and no Chambonnais ever denounced or betrayed a refugee" (p. 196).

Yet the rescue effort was not a collective enterprise of the town in any explicit sense. Both Hallie and Sauvage claim that people never talked about it openly (Hallie, p. 197). There was no clear and publicly visible form of sanction brought against those who did not participate. An individual could refuse to help without penalty or ostracism. Although help often took the form of responding to a request from another villager – not always directly from a refugee herself – whatever individual disapproval one might experience for declining to help was overwhelmingly outweighed by the risks involved in acceding to the request.

There was one significant public forum in which the rescue effort was referred to, if only obliquely – the sermons of the town's pastor and

7. My sources on Le Chambon are Philip Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed: The Story of the Village of Le Chambon and How Goodness Happened There* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979); and Pierre Sauvage's film *Weapons of the Spirit*. Sauvage, an American filmmaker, was born in Le Chambon of refugee parents during this period. His film involves interviews with several villagers who were involved in one way or another with the rescue activities, including the people who sheltered his parents and him. Le Chambon is discussed in two other essays in this volume: Chapter 4, "Moral Exemplars," and Chapter 6, "Altruism and the Moral Value of Rescue."

spiritual leader, André Trocmé. Trocmé was a central organizer of part of the rescue effort. In his sermons he called people to the true teachings of Christianity as he understood them – to love one's neighbor, to cherish human life, not to consort with evil, to be nonviolent. Though only indirectly, he made it clear that he took the providing of refuge as instantiating these teachings.

That Trocmé's moral leadership and organizational efforts (and those of his wife, Magda) were essential in the scope of the success of Le Chambon's rescue activities is undeniable.<sup>8</sup> Some see this fact as detracting from the individual virtue of the villagers. Perhaps in some cases people helped simply because they believed the pastor would want them to do so, or took it on his authority that engaging in rescuing activities was the right thing to do. But moral leadership in general, and that of the Trocmés in particular, need not be understood in this way. We can rather envision it as helping people to see for themselves that rescuing was the right thing to do, or as helping to elicit other moral motives (such as compassion) that would motivate rescue activities. It is plausible to see the authority of the French (collaborationist) government, as well as a reasonable fear for oneself and one's family, as a force that might naturally block the operation of a clear-eyed focus on the plight of the refugees and on the values and motives (concern for human life, a sense of Christian – or nonChristian – duty, a concern not to cooperate with evil, an eschewing of violence) that would lead to the villagers' helping to alleviate that plight. The Trocmés' moral leadership can be seen in part as helping the villagers to stay in tune with those values and to sustain a clear-eyed focus on that plight in the face of those contrary factors.

In fact, it is impossible to explain the widespread collective participation in rescue without attributing to most of the individual villagers compassion and a firm conviction as to the sanctity of human life. Hallie says that key decisions regarding rescue were made "in kitchens" (p. 8), and Sauvage also emphasizes (even more so than Hallie) the grass-roots nature of the rescue enterprise. One thing that moral leadership (in contrast to demagoguery, manipulation, mere charisma) does is precisely to help people find their better motives in the face of obscuring forces. Hallie's account makes it clear that this form of moral leadership was André Trocmé's particular gift. (Magda Trocmé's role in this moral leadership was much less prominent than her husband's in that she neither preached nor had an explicit role in the religious organizing of the community. Nevertheless, from Hallie's and Sauvage's accounts, her

8. Chapter 4, "Moral Exemplars," further explores the moral psychology of both André and Magda Trocmé as moral exemplars.

full participation in the rescue activities as the pastor's wife made her a figure who counted for moral leadership in the community.) This form of moral leadership is clearly entirely consistent with—and in fact requires—motives that were truly the villagers' own, not simply compliance with authority.

This is not to deny, however, the complexity of the motivation that led to *sustaining* the rescue efforts. It seems plausible to believe, for example, that for some, and perhaps many, of the villagers, participation was not initiated with a full commitment to the enterprise. Some were "put on the spot" and had to decide in a brief span of time whether to help. Perhaps they were moved by a moral motive at the moment, but that motive was not necessarily (yet) deeply rooted. (On the other hand, there were no doubt many for whom participation was wholehearted from the very beginning.) It may not have been until later, partly through getting to know the rescues as particular persons, that nobler motives became more fully integrated into their overall moral commitment.<sup>9</sup>

Le Chambon is thus a striking case of a "community of virtue." By "virtue" I refer here to virtuous conduct, with virtuous motive, carried out over a substantial enough period of time to ensure that that motive be a reasonably stable one—not just an impulse of compassion, or a momentary call to conscience. I thus do not include here a person who from a good impulse offers to help but soon after regrets her decision, and perhaps tries (successfully or not) to extricate herself from the rescue activity she has undertaken. The rescue efforts at Le Chambon required much more than an initial compassionate response. Sustained follow-through was necessary, and most individuals engaged in some form of direct participation for months or even years. The tremendous dangers involved plus the absence of mechanisms of direct social pressure toward virtue imply that the individual decisions to help the rescue effort can plausibly be inferred to be virtuous ones. Sauvage's and Hallie's interviews of the villagers confirm this impression.

Note, however, that to speak of the Chambonnais as exhibiting virtue is not (necessarily) to say that they possessed deeply rooted virtues, in the sense of traits of character that would exhibit themselves in almost any circumstances. There is a situational character to the virtue involved here (still distinct from fleeting and superficial motives). It is not that the

9. The point being made here is entirely consistent with ambivalence on the part of (some of) the villagers, even those fully committed to the rescue activities. That is, even the fully committed may have had worries and concerns about their activities. We need not think of each villager as "pure of heart" in the sense of lacking any contrary motivations; virtue requires only that the moral commitment consistently dominate those contrary motivations.

fleeing refugees had the good fortune to discover a town peopled by saints, or moral exemplars.<sup>10</sup>

Note that to attribute virtue to the Chambonnais is not to attribute every sort of virtue to them. In "Weapons of the Spirit," Sauvage reports an interview with a deeply religious fundamentalist Christian (most of the villagers were not fundamentalists) who brings this out. This woman's religion allowed her to see absolutely clearly the evil of the Nazi social order, and to recognize the Jew as a fellow creature, whose life was as valuable as her own. And yet in other contexts this woman may well have evinced rigid, narrow-minded, and even (what many would regard as) immoral sentiments and conduct. The great virtue of the Chambonnais in risking so much to save lives was still in many ways a quite specialized sort of virtue, one which would not directly or necessarily carry over into many other life situations requiring other sorts of virtues.

What relations between community and virtue do we see here? The community certainly played a crucial sustaining role in the villagers' virtue. On the most basic level, knowing that one's neighbors are doing something especially difficult but worthwhile makes it easier for oneself to do the same. This must be part of what MacIntyre means by saying "I need those around me to reinforce my moral strengths and assist in remedying my moral weaknesses" ("Patriotism," p. 10). Note, however, that this is not simply conformity—engaging in action only because one's neighbors are doing so, in order not to be left out. This assumes no, or very weak, independent motivation to engage in rescue, a motivation then supplied by the lure of doing what others are doing; MacIntyre's statement assumes that the villagers already and independently saw the worth in these activities of rescue. Knowing that their neighbors were engaging in them helped legitimize and strengthen their already present motivations.<sup>11</sup>

One reason, therefore, not to place much weight on moral conformity in the villagers' motivation is that there is too much evidence that they independently grasped the moral worth of the acts of rescue

10. Also, I do not, of course, mean to suggest that the behavior of the Chambonnais during the war had nothing to do with their characters. Their characters must have been such as to contain the capability for the relatively stable virtuous motives operative during the Occupation.

11. Neither were the villagers' actions simply a matter of emulation of those one respects and admires (though, like conformity, one can assume that this may have played some role in some villagers' motivation). For emulation is something like seeing the acts emulated as good in part because one regards the emulated person as good; although it may imply a striving to see the acts as in themselves good, it also implies that the agent is not yet convinced of the worth of the actions in their own right.

in a way denied by this form of motivation. A second reason is the aforementioned lack of visibility of the rescue effort, the fact that it was seldom publicly discussed or referred to, that one was not always entirely certain which of one's neighbors was currently doing what for the effort.

The sustaining relationship here has two components: (1) how the community helped the villagers individually to have a firm conviction of the value of the rescue effort in the first place, and (2) the knowledge that (some) others were taking part helped to reinforce the continual translation of that conviction into action.

One significant piece of this sustaining structure concerned the Chambonnais' intense awareness of themselves as a religious minority (Protestants in a Catholic country), with a history of religious persecution and of resistance to that persecution. Sauvage's film depicts a moving ritual – apparently regularly performed – of a large gathering of Chambonnais singing a song of historical resistance to religious persecution. This self-conception can be seen as part of the village's moral tradition.

How did this tradition and historical memory operate to sustain the rescue activities? It is important to understand this, partly because of the role of tradition in discussions of community, and partly because to some the appeal to tradition may, like the invocation of moral leadership and neighbor influence, seem to run counter to the secure attribution of morally good motives to individuals. There seem to be two dimensions here to the role of tradition in moral motivation. One was to make salient, familiar, and "owned" the motive of resisting an evil perpetrated by the state and state authorities. That form of motive directly linked resistance to their own persecution as Protestants in a Catholic-dominated society with the persecution of Jews by the collaborationist French state. The readiness to resist state-sponsored evil was made salient through historical tradition and memory, reinforced by ritual.

A second, more indirect, way that the self-conception and historical memory of the villagers as a religious minority may have helped the rescue effort was to remove one important obstacle in the way of fully experiencing the Jews and other refugees as fellow human beings. That obstacle was the view propounded by Pétain's national government of the Jews as an alien, essentially evil, force (Hallie, p. 39). In laws restricting the participation of Jews in French life, in national propaganda (chilling footage of which appears in Sauvage's film), and (ultimately) in cooperating with the Nazis' "final solution," the French government aimed to make it easy for ordinary citizens to see the Jew as "other," even as subhuman, to confuse and undermine natural human sympathy for the

persecuted, and to couch this immorality in terms of an ostensibly worthy larger, patriotic goal.

The Chambonnais were particularly well equipped to resist this state-sponsored moral obfuscation. Their tradition of resistance to persecution made them generally skeptical of the state. In this regard their moral traditions operated not so much to provide a direct motive to rescue but to remove an obstacle to a clear grasp of the shared humanity of all persons.<sup>12</sup>

This last point suggests a useful framing of the way the Chambon community helped sustain its inhabitants' virtue – by helping construct and shape their "moral reality." The community's moral traditions and the moral atmosphere there during the Occupation kept the reality of the plight of the refugees in the forefront of people's minds; they reinforced for the villagers the salience of their danger and suffering. Note that this is very different from claiming that because the villagers had a certain tradition, they thereby incurred an obligation to help refugees that was not incurred by villagers without this tradition. The present discussion still concerns the way the traditions sustain virtue, not how they create moral obligations not applicable to others. This issue will be discussed further later, but the position being taken here does not absolve from obligation those whose practices involve a more minimal level of moral behavior on the grounds that they are not part of a tradition that sustains a higher level of moral behavior.

Besides the "sustaining" relation, a second relation between community and virtue in the Chambonnais is "content-conferring." Let us say that prior to the Occupation, many of the villagers, like Christians elsewhere, professed belief in precepts such as loving one's neighbor, cherishing human life, and resisting evil. Let us further imagine that they not only professed these principles, but actually believed them. Such principles underdetermine action. They require the conferring of more determinate content, which can be provided by the actual practices of a community. Contemplated in abstraction from concrete life situations, one would be

12. The notion of an "obstacle" to moral perception and moral motivation is discussed in Chapter 3, "Moral Perception and Particularity." The notion is taken from Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970).

It should also be noted that the Chambonnais had taken in refugees from the Spanish Civil War, and in summers had taken children from the city (in a program partly funded by the French Government). These experiences no doubt helped accustom the Chambonnais to dealing with outsiders and thus contributed to withstanding further the racist and national chauvinist atmosphere of the Nazi era. And the villagers' willingness to take in these outsiders in the first place must have itself been a product of that moral tradition which led to the refugee rescue endeavors. (For these facts about the Chambonnais, I am indebted to Mr. Francis Rochat of Yverdon, Switzerland.)

unlikely to get universal agreement that adherence to these principles or values would require one to risk one's own freedom or even life in order to contribute to (but by no means guarantee) saving the lives of others also at risk. Yet living in Le Chambon in the period in question influenced large numbers of people to come to believe that engaging in activities involving such risks was precisely the practical content of the values of loving one's neighbor, cherishing life, and resisting evil.

This content-conferring function may not be sharply distinct from the virtue-sustaining one. In some situations coming to believe that act A is required by a commitment to value V may not be readily distinguishable from being given support for the motivation to perform act A, though these are theoretically distinct.

Note that the virtue of the villagers was internal to the community in regard to both the virtue-sustaining and the content-conferring connections, in that the virtue of the villagers existed and took the character it did only because of the community of which they were a part. But their virtue was not internal in the worth-conferring sense discussed earlier. The worth of the virtue displayed was not supplied or accounted for by, or only within, the community itself. The value of the virtues of compassion, courageous commitment to the value of human life, and the like is seen from outside the community. This is related to the good produced by those virtues – the saving of endangered people – being very much an external good, that is, a good for *non*members of the community. It is a universal good of which anyone (inside or outside the community) can see the value.<sup>13</sup>

13. When MacIntyre talks about "external goods" he generally means competitive goods such as money, power, and status. (See *After Virtue*, pp. 177, 181, and elsewhere.) This conception is part of what allows MacIntyre generally to portray goods internal to practices as somehow more worthy than goods external to them, though MacIntyre does not entirely devalue these competitive goods. That MacIntyre neglects "positive" external goods (like saving the lives of people not in the community), the virtues which produce them, and the communities in which they are promoted seems to me part of what underpins his pessimism, his sense of extreme moral fragmentation, and his notion that moral renewal can come only through relatively self-contained communities unconnected to a larger social order and to each other. (See, e.g., p. 245.) These views are not so pronounced in MacIntyre's later writings; and in a talk entitled "Problems of the Virtues: Friends and Strangers," delivered at Boston College in April 1992, MacIntyre argued that charity toward outsiders is a condition of adequate virtue inside a community.

Many entities with communal features can only be understood as, at least in part, serving ends that are external to them. Educational or medical communities are examples of this. Medical communities have in some sense their own internal standards, authorities, traditions, initiation rites, and the like. Yet one cannot understand the point of a medical community without seeing it as serving its clients and the society as a whole – as serving "health," a good external to the medical community as

Yet the MacIntyrian idea that a quality constituting virtue to members of a community is nevertheless not seen as a virtue by those outside the community contains an idea of insider/outsider moral asymmetry suggestive for the case of Le Chambon. When (separately) Philip Hallie and Pierre Sauvage went back to interview the Chambonnais several decades after the events in question took place, they found that the rescuers did not regard themselves as having done anything worthy of special attention or praise. They were uncomfortable with Hallie's and Sauvage's questions as to why they acted as they did, rightly taking it to imply something in special need of explanation, or of special noteworthiness. The Chambonnais did not see their actions and practices as virtuous in the noteworthy sense. When pressed to say why they helped the refugees, they said such things as "It was simply what one had to do" or "She [a refugee] was standing at my door; how could I fail to help?"<sup>14</sup>

From the outside, however, we *do* see the Chambonnais as having been virtuous in the noteworthy – and not only the ordinary – sense. There could hardly be a clearer example of collective virtue in the noteworthy sense. The Chambonnais did what few Europeans did or felt called upon to do. The fact that the Chambonnais themselves did not see it that way is significant, and perhaps is part of how we are to understand the potential virtue-sustaining function of community.<sup>15</sup> Part of the state of mind enabling the villagers to carry on these rescue activities day after day must have been precisely that they did come to regard these activities as something like normal, unremarkable acts – acts that could simply be expected. To see them as worthy of special praise is to emphasize them as something not expected of anyone. The psychology here seems to go something like this: Everything else being equal, we feel a stronger moral pull to do something we regard as "what can readily be expected" than to do what we regard as "beyond what can ordinarily be expected."

Community, then, can support noteworthy virtue by helping its mem-

defined solely by its practices. So standards for judging a medical community and what counts as its virtues must come at least partly from how well it does in fact produce this external good.

14. See, for example, Hallie, p. 154. This point is made more fully in Sauvage's film.  
15. I am not claiming that one must have a supporting community in order to engage in noteworthy virtue; the numerous examples of rescuers during the Holocaust who were relatively isolated from their communities, depending on the help only of their families and in some cases working independently even of them (or not having families) testifies to the contrary. It is fair to say, however, that such virtuous activities are much more likely in the context of supporting communities than in the absence of them. This echoes MacIntyre's point, "Of course lonely moral heroism is sometimes required and sometimes achieved. But we must not treat this exceptional type of case as if it were typical" ("Patriotism," p. 10).



bers experience as ordinary and "to be expected" behavior that for others goes beyond the expected.<sup>16</sup> A major factor making a course of action too much to expect or demand is that it is unduly burdensome. In one way or another, the notion of "undue burden" is typically built into accounts of duty. Acts that unduly burden people might be good but cannot be expected as duty. Thus Sidgwick: The duty of beneficence is "the positive duty to render, when occasion offers, such services as either require no sacrifice on our part or at least very much less in importance than the service rendered." Rawls: "Supererogatory acts are not required, though normally they would be were it not for the loss or risk involved for the agent himself."<sup>17</sup>

What people regard as an "undue burden," however, and hence as "what can reasonably be expected," is quite variable and can be deeply affected by their communities. Let us illustrate this with an example in which much less is at stake than in the Le Chambon case. A faculty member switches jobs from one college to another. At her former college, Professor Martinez's department made minimal demands on her. Departmental meetings were infrequent and responsibilities few, beyond teaching one's classes. In her new department, however, the demands are substantially greater. Meetings are more frequent; there are more departmental responsibilities on top of teaching – discussions of pedagogy, reval-

16. The potentially powerful effect of community can be seen as much with regard to vice as virtue. There can be communities of vice as well as virtue, where the community helps to shape a sense of moral reality toward, say, corruption, rather than compassion. The narcotics squad of the New York City Police department as portrayed in the film and book *Prince of the City* illustrates this. (Robert Daley, *Prince of the City* [Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1978]; *Prince of the City*, Orion Pictures [1981].) Being a member of those units helped to shape a sense that corruption was an everyday, expected thing – not that it was morally right or distinctly morally permissible, but just that it was an appropriate mode of operation.
17. Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 253. John Rawls, *The Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1971), p. 117. Compare p. 439, where "reasonable self-interest" is the operative excusing condition from what would otherwise be a duty. Note a not insignificant difference between two construals of both these formulations. The first is that one should offer aid to others when the cost to oneself is negligible or minimal. The second, more demanding view (that is, demanding more in the way of duty), is that the cost to oneself be minimal, in proportion to the good being rendered to the other person. The latter construal would require more sacrifice as a matter of duty than the former, in cases where the good to be promoted (or evil to be prevented) is very great. Both Sidgwick's and Rawls's formulations are somewhat ambiguous on this issue. Even with the more demanding construal, however, the Chambonnais' actions might well not fall under the rubric of duty, since (as will be discussed) many individuals in their rescue efforts risked imprisonment and perhaps death for the sake of the likelihood (but not certainty) of saving life. It is not clear that this could be construed as minimal even on the proportionality view.

uations of programs, expectations of being informed regarding various campus concerns that impinge on students' lives, greater involvement in advising, and the like.

At first Professor Martinez experiences this increased load as unduly burdensome, and more than it is reasonable to expect of a faculty member. It certainly would have been so regarded in her previous department. In time, however, several factors change her outlook and her experience of burdensomeness. She comes to believe that matters not insignificant slipped through the cracks in her former position, and that in her new department the program is improved and the students are better served because of the increased amount of work she and her colleagues do. Her teaching is improved because of improvements in the program and her greater understanding of issues affecting the students. Professor Martinez not only comes to perceive this superiority in her current department but to care about and positively value it as well. She comes to care that students in her department are better served, that tasks are responsibly carried out, that difficult issues are faced and dealt with in a collegial manner.<sup>18</sup>

In time, Professor Martinez comes to experience the departmental work load at her current institution as no longer unduly burdensome. It is not that she resignedly accepts the load as part of her new job responsibilities, hence something she sees herself as obliged to bear. That would be one possible reaction to the new situation, but is not the one I am envisioning. She actually *experiences* the activities once felt as burdensome as no longer so (or as distinctly less so).

An important part of what enables Professor Martinez *not* to see her work load as unduly burdensome is that her colleagues appear not to regard it so. (To say this is not, however, to say that they, and she, never resent the demands of their department, but only that, overall, they do not experience them as undue.) Their already existing sense of the naturalness and to-be-expectedness of the work load, their belief in the values of the program and sense of responsibility toward it, helps to construct a collective reality for Professor Martinez (and for themselves) within which the value of the program is made salient – with the attendant impact on the experience of the work load as perhaps demanding (and

18. Note that this description does not require saying that overall, or in all respects, Professor Martinez's second institution is superior to the first. They may be different kinds of institutions, in which the first makes more minimal teaching and programmatic demands on its faculty in the service of support for scholarship. (I owe this point to David Wong.) The point is only that Professor Martinez's perception of a superiority in some significant respect is tied to her changed sense of "undue burden."

certainly more demanding than in her previous department) but not “unduly burdensome,” not “beyond what can reasonably be expected.”

Both this and the Le Chambon case illustrate how communities can powerfully shape members’ sense of undue burden, and hence of what they regard as “reasonable to expect.” Communities thus shape members’ ability to sustain a level of virtuous conduct beyond what in some other contexts would be regarded as (though perhaps good and admirable) too much to be demanded. In doing so they illustrate both the “content-determining” and the “virtue-supporting” functions of community. This “insider-outsider” asymmetry is an important element in understanding the person whose noteworthy virtue is grounded in community.

I want to argue now that insider-outsider asymmetry in the context of the communal nature of some virtue poses a challenge to standard accounts of moral excellence. My claim is that although we can stand outside two communities and say that one exhibits (in some important regard) a higher degree of virtue than another, and although this virtue is tied to what each takes to be something like a moral requirement, nevertheless we cannot necessarily say that one community has a more valid notion of what constitutes duty than the other. In particular, we cannot say of one community with a less demanding standard of “undue burden” that its view is inferior to, or less correct than, that of another with a more demanding standard, even though a result of this difference is that the latter community exemplifies greater virtue than the former. These claims imply that there is an irreducible relativism in assessments of duty and dutifulness absent in the case of virtue.

One can see a minor version of this in the case of Professor Martinez. Her former department had a less demanding conception of “undue burden” and a related less demanding schedule of duties than her current one. Yet I do not think we are in a position to say that one of these departments is “right” about what is an undue burden, or about what is an appropriate level of institutional duty. We are confined to saying that the members of the two departments experience the burdens and duties differently. That is, were department number one to impose the kinds of duties department number two has, members of the former would experience them as unduly burdensome.

On the other hand, this “relativism” between the two departments is essential to a comparative judgment that we are in a position to make, namely, that in some important respects the program of department number two is superior to that of department number one and is so in part

because of the shared sense of the appropriateness of the greater burdens in the latter. One might also make the point by saying that the professional virtue of members of the current department is superior to that of members of the former department, at least with regard to the important professional respects involved in the example as described.

To make the case for this limited communal relativism, I must show that three alternative accounts of noteworthy virtue are incorrect: (1) The “maximalist” duty view, (2) the “supererogationist” or “minimalist duty” view, and (3) the “personal calling” view.

The first says that those with noteworthy virtue, and the more demanding sense of undue burden, are correct about what is their duty and what is and is not an undue burden, whereas those with lesser, ordinary virtue and the less demanding sense of undue burden are incorrect. Hence this maximalist view rejects a relativity that abjures saying that one view of duty and undue burden is more correct or valid than the other. Applied to the Professor Martinez example, the “maximalist” claim would be that members of department number one are mistaken to think that they are satisfying their professional duties by adhering to the expected standards of their institution. But since the duties have a coherent professional rationale, and are accepted as such by the members and the institution, it seems incorrect or at best highly misleading to say that they are mistaken about their duties. What seems a more accurate expression of the moral sentiment behind that claim is that it would be better if department number one accepted as duties ones grounded in a more demanding sense of “undue burden” than are their current duties.

In the case of Le Chambon, the maximalist claim would be that the Chambonnais are entirely correct to regard themselves as having the degree of moral compulsion they do – which entails risking their freedom and possibly their lives to try to save the refugees – and that others who might admire these actions but not feel a moral compulsion to perform them (or not so strong a moral compulsion) would be incorrect in their view that there was no such moral quasi requirement.

Such a position would make it close to a general moral requirement to engage in extremely risky activities when doing so would greatly contribute to – but by no means guarantee – the saving of lives. It is striking that no theories of duty with which I am familiar entail such a stringent conception of moral requirement. As mentioned earlier, most contemporary theories build in some notion of undue burden that is a good deal weaker than the maximalist view. The burden or risk is either small or else small in proportion to the good achieved; as argued earlier, at least

for many of the villagers it was not clear that the risk was not substantially greater than in either of these formulations.<sup>19</sup>

What is true is that it was a good thing that the Chambonnais experienced the degree and form of moral compulsion they did; as a result they instantiated noteworthy virtue. And we may be able to generalize this result to the idea that, *ceteris paribus*, communities adhering to higher standards of moral compulsion are to be preferred to those that do not; and it would be better if many of those who adhere to a more minimal standard changed their sense of moral compulsion so that they regarded it as appropriate that more be demanded of them. But none of this is equivalent to saying that those with the lower standard are mistaken about what is their duty.

This line of argument does not deny that there may be strands in our notion of "duty" or "moral compulsion" that push toward the more maximalist account I am rejecting here. Moreover, even if the maximalist account were accepted, there would still be an important lesson about the connection between community and virtue. For since the maximalist account is so far from the ordinary notion of what is our duty, one will still want to inquire what it is that allows a person to have as his or her sense of duty (or moral compulsion) this maximalist sense. How do people come to have that sense of moral compulsion as part of their moral psychology? The support and content-conferring that community can give to this sense of moral compulsion will be an important part of the answer to that question of moral psychology.

This brings us to the second – minimalist or supererogationist – account of noteworthy virtue. Various somewhat distinct analyses have been offered of supererogatory acts, but I will first consider David Heyd's in his comprehensive work, *Supererogation*.<sup>20</sup> For our purposes, Heyd's analysis is that supererogatory acts are good to do but not bad or blameworthy

19. An instructive view is that of Patricia Smith in "The Duty to Rescue and the Slippery Slope Problem." Smith argues that there is a duty to "render minimal aid in an emergency." She does this against the background of the contrary assumption that there is no such duty; thus this is as strong a duty as Smith feels she can provide a case for. She says that "No one is obligated to incur great cost or risk to himself in order to help a random stranger" (p. 25). But this obligation (or something like an obligation) is precisely what the Chambonnais regarded themselves as having. Yet I think Smith is correct to think that her viewpoint would be widely shared, and disagreement would come primarily from those who saw even her minimal duty as questionable.

20. David Heyd, *Supererogation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). A more recent, usefully comprehensive treatment is Gregory Mellema, *Beyond the Call of Duty: Supererogation, Obligation, and Offense* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

not to do; in not being wrong not to do, they are "totally optional and voluntary" (Heyd, p. 9). Heyd argues further that thus being optional is part of what gives them their distinct kind of value different from the value of dutiful acts (Heyd, pp. 173 ff).<sup>21</sup> This view is minimalist in that it sets the standard of moral requirement at a moderate level, accepting the maximalist level as distinctly not encompassed by it, yet also as distinctly morally admirable in going beyond it.

Describing noteworthy virtue as "supererogation" in this sense does not capture the way that the (noteworthy) virtuous agent sees her own action. She does not regard her act as morally optional; rather, she feels some sense of moral compulsion to perform it. One sees this in both the duty and the nonduty forms of virtuous action found in the Chambonnais' reasons for action. For some the presence of a refugee, of someone in need, aroused a compassion in which the refugee's plight constituted a direct reason for them to act – a reason possibly involving an "ought" but not a duty. For others, a sense of duty was evoked. But in neither case did the villager see the action as optional in the sense of Heyd's analysis.

It is true, perhaps, that the villagers saw their actions as voluntary, in the sense that no organized social or legal pressure or threat was involved. But that does not distinguish such actions from many compliances with ordinary duties, in which the agent feels a moral compulsion to perform the action, but in which there is no other sort of pressure brought to bear, or even implicit. Thus from the point of view of the agent, voluntariness does not distinguish supererogatory action from ordinary duty. This leaves "morally optional" as the crucial characteristic distinguishing supererogatory from dutiful action in Heyd's analysis; but from the noteworthy virtuous agent's point of view, her choices are not more morally optional than are ordinary duties.

A slightly different formulation is that the supererogatory act is one that is "morally recommended" or "encouraged" – in contrast to what is required by morality as a duty, or as obedience to certain moral rules or principles.<sup>22</sup> Yet it would be misleading to see the noteworthy virtuous person under this rubric. For although the idea of "morally recommended" may go a bit beyond the idea of a purely voluntary or morally optional act (toward some degree of moral pull or compulsion), it does not incorporate the strong moral pull experienced by the noteworthy

21. James Fishkin, *The Limits of Obligation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982) uses a similar concept of "morally discretionary" to define supererogation (p. 5).

22. Heyd uses the concept of "morally encouraged" and Bernard Gert, *Morality: A New Justification of the Moral Rules* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), uses that (p. 162) as well as the notion of "morally recommended."

virtuous agent. In the idea of a moral recommendation there is still too much implication that the agent can choose to reject the recommendation without a sense of having morally failed in any substantial sense. But the Chambonnais – and noteworthy virtuous agents more generally – would regard themselves as substantially failing were they not to perform the action.

Another variation on this general approach, developed by Bernard Gert in *Morality* (see footnote 22), is the idea of noteworthy virtue as a *personal moral ideal* – that is, a moral project taken up by an individual and seen as having a moral claim on her only because she has chosen it as her ideal. The agent sees ordinary morality as not making the claim on her that the ideal does, but she chooses to adopt it anyway, and personally commits herself to it. Gert gives as examples devotion to the good of a particular group, such as Blacks or Jews (pp. 163ff.).<sup>23</sup>

The noteworthy virtuous agent's moral psychology is not accurately captured in the notion of personal moral ideals in this sense. For she sees herself not so much as adopting an ideal as feeling compelled to engage in an endeavor. The Chambonnais villager saw herself as responding to a given moral reality – the refugee's need for shelter – not as acting out of a sense of personal value or ideal. As mentioned earlier, the villagers did not in general regard their actions as coming under the rubric of an ideal, if that is taken (as it is normally) as a set of principles higher than the ordinary that one strives consciously to live up to.<sup>24</sup>

In addition, the villagers' virtuous endeavors had a collective character not captured by Gert's idea of an individual moral ideal. The difference is not merely a matter of an enterprise shared with others rather than performed alone. It is also, as we have seen, that the community was essential in shaping the agent's (thus shared) sense of moral reality, and in sustaining her virtue and giving it content, partly through the knowledge that the virtuous activities were also being carried out by others.

I have criticized the "supererogationist" or "minimalist" accounts of

23. Gert ties the distinction between personal ideal and moral requirement to that between positive action to relieve suffering (or other evil) and avoiding the infliction of suffering (or other evil). The point being discussed here does not depend on this link but could allow for a more expansive notion of moral requirement or, correspondingly, a more expansive notion of personal ideal (e.g., including the promoting of the happiness of others).
24. This generalization about the Chambonnais does not, however, hold for André Trocmé, whose involvement (and leadership) in the Chambonnais rescue effort can be thought of as stemming from his personal ideals. Trocmé's moral psychology is discussed in Chapter 4, "Moral Exemplars." Yet his self-understanding of his own ideals does not appear to have involved a personal set of values that he saw as going beyond what ordinary morality requires.

noteworthy virtue on the grounds that the notions of "moral optionality," "moral encouragement," and "personal ideal" fail to capture what the noteworthy virtuous person regards herself as doing. These accounts distort her moral psychology. This is not, however, an attack on the notion of supererogation itself. It might be taken as such, for anti-supererogationists sometimes use the argument that no firm line can be drawn between duty and supererogation, and also (somewhat following upon this point) that what people may think of as the higher flights of morality are nevertheless no less actual moral requirements than the more ordinary duties to reject the notion of supererogation entirely. (See Mellema, *Beyond the Call of Duty*, Chapters 3 and 4, for a discussion of various forms of rejection of the concept of supererogation.)

I agree, however, that there are some actions that go beyond what can be reasonably expected, and that these are deserving of special praise. Thus I accord a place to the notion of "supererogation." But limited community relativism implies that no general account can be provided that allows us to sort all actions into these two categories ("duty" and "supererogation") independent of the particular moral communities within which people function (although there might be some actions that are supererogatory on any account and in any community). Even in Le Chambon during the period of rescue, there might well have been actions generally regarded by the villagers as above and beyond what could reasonably be expected, and thus as deserving particular praise, even if their standard of "reasonable expectation" was itself so much more demanding than that of other communities.

Can it be replied that noteworthy virtuous persons are simply mistaken about what there is morally compelling reason to do? Although holding such a view about moral quasi-requirements may contribute to their virtue, their view is incorrect.

There are two versions of this reply. One says that because the noteworthy virtuous person is mistaken about what is morally compulsory, her view of morality is defective and it would be better if she were to come to hold the view that the activities she currently thinks herself quasi-compelled to perform are actually morally optional. Yet it seems plausible to suppose that giving up a sense of moral pull or quasi-compulsion would have the effect in many cases of reducing the motivation of agents to engage in the activities in question. And so this view would have the effect of supporting what it acknowledges to be lesser virtue.

A second version of the reply would be that, even if the noteworthy virtuous person were wrong in her moral views, it is still better that she believe them, since they lead her to perform more noteworthy virtuous

actions and, more generally, to be a more virtuous person. Accepting the latter empirical claim for a moment, one would then want to explore the moral psychology of this noteworthy virtuous person. And one part of this, accepting the argument up to this point, is that the agent's communities can have a substantial impact – both virtue-supporting and content-determining – in that psychology. This result is the flip side of the maximalist view – that the noteworthy virtuous person is right about what is her duty and those holding the more ordinary view are wrong. In both cases one wants to know how noteworthy virtuous people come to hold the view that they do, as it is admitted to be part of what allows them to be noteworthy virtuous.

Yet the minimalist position simply presupposes – without giving any argument for it – a view that is precisely the one challenged by the limited community relativist. The view is that a purely universal account of duty or moral pull – that is, an account that can specify in a formula applicable to all individuals the conditions under which they have duties, and the conditions under which they are absolved from duty because of undue burden – can be given. Such a presumption is present in most contemporary accounts of duty. It is assumed by Rawls, Heyd, Sidgwick, Gert, and others that the proper form of an account of duty is to be purely universalistic. But this is precisely what the limited community relativist position questions. Why not think that the territory of duty (or moral pull) is much more diverse? Perhaps some of it is universal, but other parts are irreducibly relative to various communities or contexts.

Some such diversity is already acknowledged by widely, though not universally, accepted views of professional ethics, namely, that such duties cannot be derived from, nor are they merely applications of, universal principles of duty. The limited community relativist position extends in two directions that depart from pure universalism. One is to include communities in entities regarding which there is relativity in the kinds of duties that exist. The other is to include not only the kinds of duties, but the boundaries of duties (as expressed by the “undue burden” standard) as a dimension regarding which some relativity exists.

Once the assumption of universality is questioned, the limited community relativist position gains another advantage over the minimalist-supererogationist position (and the maximalist one as well). That is that it does not cast as illusory the moral self-understanding of either the noteworthy virtuous person or the ordinarily virtuous person. The maximalist position sees the ordinarily virtuous person as mistaken about morality; the minimalist position sees the noteworthy virtuous person as mistaken. The limited community relativist sees each as having a valid

view of their moral (quasi)requirements. It provides a way in which to see each group's self-understanding as nonillusory. At the same time, it enables us to make the well-supported assessment that one group exhibits greater virtue than the other.

A third – “personal calling” – approach to the psychology of the (noteworthy) virtuous agent is taken by A. I. Melden in his “Saints and Supererogation.”<sup>25</sup> Melden shares with Gert and Heyd the notion of a distinct division between actions required by ordinary morality and morally good actions that go beyond it. He differs from them, however, in seeing what he calls “saints” as actually acting from a sense of duty, but one not construed universalistically, as applicable to all. Melden explains this nonuniversalistic sense of duty by saying that the saint sees herself as morally different from others, and thus as being bound to a different set of standards from other persons. She does not follow what she sees as a “personal ideal” in Gert's sense of a project she recognizes as morally optional rather than required.

This account has one advantage over the others, that of validating the noteworthy virtuous person's own view of the matter – her sense of moral compulsion and nonoptionalness – that Gert's, Heyd's, Rawls's, and other standard supererogationist accounts see as in some way mistaken. Moreover, Melden's account of the nature of this sense of moral compulsion may be correct for some noteworthy virtuous persons. His account does not appear to hold, however, for at least most of the Chambonnais portrayed in Hallie's and Sauvage's accounts. The Chambonnais did not see themselves as having a distinct moral calling, as morally distinct from ordinary persons. They did not see themselves as bound to a morality for themselves alone. Although nothing in their lives appears to have compelled them to face up to this question, it seems clear that they would never have positively denied that the ethic that guided their actions was applicable to others in comparable situations. They would not have thought of themselves as much different from other people. They did not think, These rescue activities are the right thing for us, but not the right thing for others. On the contrary, as interviews in Hallie's book and Sauvage's movie make clear, the villagers thought of these activities as obviously the right or unavoidable things to do.<sup>26</sup>

25. A. I. Melden, “Saints and Supererogation,” in Ilham Dilman (ed.), *Philosophy and Life: Essays on John Wisdom* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984).
26. Again, Andre Trocmé may be an exception to this. There is some suggestion in Hallie's account that Trocmé may have seen himself as having a personal calling in something like Melden's sense.

Note that it does not follow that the Chambonnais themselves held the first, maximalist, view. They gave no evidence of affirmatively holding the view that the ethic that guided their own actions was an appropriate standard for all persons, everywhere, with the corollary that any failure to live up to that standard would be wrong or blameworthy. It is perfectly consistent to say – and seems in accordance with the portrayal of the Chambonnais in Hallie’s and Sauvage’s treatments – that the Chambonnais affirmed neither the universality nor the exclusivity (to themselves, as in Melden’s view) of their ethic.

It might be thought, however, since most of the Chambonnais avowed a specifically Christian morality, that their morality was a universal one. This is true, insofar as their Christian morality prescribed that the set of persons toward whom a Christian was to act dutifully was all persons, not only members of their community or other Christians. But this is not the sense of universality embodied in the philosophic tradition (which Melden is contrasting with his own view of duties for specific persons or groups) that sees duties as applicable to all agents. This latter notion of duty involves the idea that when one conceives of oneself as having a duty, one sees oneself as doing so because one necessarily accepts such duties as binding on all other agents (relevantly similarly situated). There is no evidence that the Chambonnais looked at their own behavior in this way. In fact, the notion of a specifically Christian morality is precisely that of a morality incumbent on Christians only – with no necessary claim to validity for non-Christians – though toward all persons, Christian or not. In any case, there is no evidence that the Chambonnais subscribed to the view that the morality to which they adhered was distinctly incumbent on all persons (and incumbent on themselves for that reason).

By drawing the sharp line that he does between the ordinarily virtuous person and the saint, Melden blocks recognition of two related points about moral excellence. One is that virtue is affected by community. It can be internal to community in the virtue-sustaining and content-determining senses. Communities can shape agents’ sense of what is their duty and what is an undue burden. It is not, or not only, what Melden implies – that some individuals just are saints and everyone else is pretty ordinary and not capable of exceptional virtue.

The second point is that noteworthily virtuous persons set an example of virtue for everyone. What is striking about the Chambonnais is precisely that they are not saints. They are more like ordinary people who acted according to a potentiality for excellence that must exist in more of us than we seem to realize. Like Melden’s, the limited community

relativist position relativizes duty and undue burden. But unlike his, it allows the thought that if ordinarily virtuous people had been (or could be) part of a community with a sense of moral reality suited to noteworthy virtue, they too might have been (or might become) closer to being noteworthily virtuous.

Limited community relativism provides a better framework than its rivals – maximalism, minimalism (supererogationism), personal ideal – in which to express the philosophically significant and deep connections that can exist between virtue and community. In addition, I suggest, it provides a framework for addressing Iris Murdoch’s strictures that have so influenced my own exploration of moral excellence: “Ethics should not be merely an analysis of ordinary mediocre conduct, it should be a hypothesis about good conduct and about how this can be achieved. How can we make ourselves better? is a question moral philosophers should attempt to answer” (*Sovereignty of Good*, p. 78). Yet limited community relativism contributes to an understanding of moral excellence that avoids the excessive individualism of Murdoch’s conception, and recognizes the insight that MacIntyre has brought so pointedly to our attention – that virtue is not simply generated by pure unconnected autonomous individuals but in communities of various sorts.<sup>27</sup>

Although limited community relativism brings this inquiry into relation with familiar views of moral requirement, suggesting why those analyses have rendered theoretically invisible the connections between community and virtue, my discussion has addressed Murdoch’s concerns even if limited community relativism is rejected. For the virtue-supporting and content-conferring connections between community and virtue that I have highlighted in this essay address the question of what (noteworthily) good conduct is like, and how we can make ourselves better. Perhaps these are the matters ultimately most worthy of the attention of moral philosophers.

27. MacIntyre reemphasizes this point in his review of Murdoch’s new book, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1993) in *The New York Times Book Review*, January 3, 1993. I regret that Murdoch’s book emerged too late for me to take account of it in this essay, or in the other essays in this book.