



Considerateness Differentiated: Three Types of Virtuousness

ABSTRACT: *Despite the prevalence of the virtue of considerateness in everyday moral discourse and the proliferation of philosophical studies of virtue language, considerateness hardly ever appears on philosophical agendas. When discussed in academia, its meaning seems fuzzy and unclear. This article makes amends for this gap by subjecting considerateness to conceptual scrutiny. The author argues that considerateness designates a cluster concept, encompassing three types of virtuousness that share a family resemblance only. One is a hybrid civic-moral social-gluer virtue, extensionally equivalent to Aristotle's virtue of agreeableness. The second is an intellectual virtue of phronetic consideration (moral sensitivity and integration). The third is a full-fledged discrete moral virtue with standard Aristotelian features of a golden-mean structure and an emotional component as a motivator. The advantages of identifying these three types of virtuousness are elicited, as are some of the educational ramifications of analyzing the differentia of considerateness in this way.*

KEYWORDS: Virtue ethics, Aristotle, considerateness, agreeableness, *phronesis*. moral virtue

Introduction: A Neglected Virtue?

How often do parents exhort their children to be ‘more considerate’ toward their siblings, playmates, classmates, and others? Indeed, if a word count were made of the actual use of virtue terms in ordinary language, it would not be surprising to see considerateness appear somewhere near the top. However, despite the prevalence of this virtue in everyday moral discourse and the recent proliferation of philosophical studies of virtue language—coinciding with the resurgence of broadly Aristotelian virtue ethics as an ethical theory—considerateness hardly ever appears on philosophical agendas.

A Google Scholar search identified only two philosophical articles that had considerateness as their key topic, and the author of one of them expressed, unsurprisingly, the nagging intuition that this virtue may be ‘quite marginal and of little philosophical interest’ (Heyd 1995: 218). David Heyd's article is ostensibly about tact; however, he understands tact in much the same way as I understand considerateness. (The other article is ‘Considerateness’ (Ullmann-Margalit 2011)). There are various publications about considerateness

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understood as civility or agreeableness in non-intimate human encounters or even as mere politeness (see, for example, Calhoun 2000; Stohr 2012; Peterson 2020; Snow 2021), but I do not count them here, as those deal with considerateness in only one of its three incarnations identified presently.

To be sure, there is often a mismatch between a virtue's popularity and its appearance on academic agendas. Perhaps considerateness has simply been considered too unproblematic (conceptually and morally) to deserve any sustained philosophical treatment. Nonetheless, it is worth considering some possible explanations for the philosophical elision of considerateness.

First, the social scientific literature on considerateness—insofar as it charts the popularity of virtues across cultures—is scant also; indeed, considerateness hardly ever registers on those radars. One needs to be cautious here, however, for most social scientific studies employ predetermined self-report options (names of standard virtues or virtue-content descriptors) that participants are then asked to rate or grade themselves on using a Likert scale. What appears in the results is, therefore, in part a self-fulfilling prophecy because people cannot choose a virtue that is not on offer. Most psychological studies use Peterson and Seligman's (2004) values-in-action taxonomy of six overarching virtues and twenty-four underlying character strengths; but considerateness does not appear there. Even if a philosophical taxonomy is used, such as Aristotle's (nonexhaustive) list of moral virtues from the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1985), considerateness will fall by the wayside, as it is not on Aristotle's list—although the underlying virtue of agreeableness is. Interestingly, however, when considerateness does feature as an option, it suddenly emerges as the 'most important virtue for a better society', at least in a South Korean study of more than 2,500 adults, 55.4 percent of whom chose it as number one, followed by 'responsibility' at 17 percent and honesty at 7.6 percent (Shim 2013). Yet we cannot exclude the possibility that there is something unique about South Korean society in this regard.

Second, to return to Heyd's enduring intuition about the marginality of considerateness, ordinary language may seem to create the impression that considerateness is but a transitory lower-level placeholder for—or, perhaps more accurately, a rudimentary developmental precursor of—more mature virtues such as love, friendship, and compassion. We would hardly say 'Be more considerate of your wife by giving her regular hugs' or 'Be considerate of your best friend by comforting her after her father died'. Love and friendship count as the true virtues expected, whereas considerateness appears as just a pale shadow; at best it is a disposition that befits children but that, ideally, they then grow out of as they mature, or one that remains appropriate only in fleeting social encounters rather than encounters with significant others. Feeding this intuition is the fact that most of the psychological sources that I found on considerateness deal with its developmental trajectory and emergence in childhood. The consensus there seems to be that the capacity to understand and exhibit considerateness appears, across cultures, between the ages of four and six—significantly later than the more general capacity to form a theory of mind and experience empathy (see, for example, Zhao et al. 2021).

All these considerations and research notwithstanding, it is not difficult to come up with standard examples of considerateness as a virtue in adult encounters—even ones that are fairly significant and that seem to complement, rather than just anticipate or precede, more profound virtues. Below, I offer a taxonomy of three types of considerateness, beginning with a scenario that describes a morally charged (or at least a morally salient) situation characteristic of adult life, in which lack of considerateness arguably constitutes a moral failure.

The third possible reason for the scant attention paid to considerateness is suggested by Heyd (1995: 218): its use in natural language, despite its preponderance, is ‘typically fuzzy’: neither ‘clear nor agreed’. If that is the case, considerateness may be a victim of its own success: it means too many things to too many people and lacks the conceptual economy and robustness that tends to attract philosophers. If *considerateness* means too many things, two hypotheses suggest themselves. Perhaps *considerateness* is an umbrella term for a number of characteristics, just as *sympathy* is an umbrella term for the two distinct emotions of compassion and pity (Kristjánsson 2018: chap. 4). Alternatively, perhaps it refers to a cluster concept, such as *game*, where the items falling under the concept are connected through Wittgensteinian family resemblances only (like chess, tennis, and football *qua games*), but where they may not share a single common feature, in contrast to items falling under an *umbrella concept*. Indeed, the reason for the somewhat off-putting complexity and fuzziness of considerateness may be that it is a cluster concept, encompassing three main types of virtuousness that do not fall under the single umbrella of one broad moral virtue but are nevertheless connected through family resemblances—relatives in the extended family of Aristotelian virtue ethics.

More specifically, I argue that one type is a hybrid civic-moral social-glué virtue, extensionally equivalent to Aristotle’s virtue of agreeableness. The second is an intellectual virtue of *phronetic* consideration (moral sensitivity and integration), instantiating some of the retrospectively attributed success criteria of enacted *phronesis*. The third type is arguably a full-fledged, discrete moral virtue with standard Aristotelian features of a clear golden-mean structure and an emotional component as a motivator. There are advantages to identifying these three types of virtuousness, and there are educational ramifications of analyzing the *differentia* of considerateness in this way. Indeed, it is worthwhile to rehabilitate the virtuousness of considerateness via its three *differentia* and accommodate it within a broadly Aristotelian system of virtue ethics, in which it is no longer seen as an outlier, anomaly, or gate-crasher.

Philosophers are often accused of remaining mute about their methodology. The method that I use is to propose a hypothesis about what considerateness is or, more precisely, what role it plays in moral language; try out the hypothesis; and argue that it is confirmed by accounting plausibly for various practical cases and fitting reasonably well with ordinary language. I am fully aware of the possibility of *alternative hypotheses*. One hypothesis could be, for example, that *considerateness* does not denote a virtue at all, let alone three cluster-concept virtues as I argue, but rather—like kindness or niceness—a general altruistic motivation underlying various (or perhaps all) moral and civic virtues (see

Wilson's 2017 account of kindness as a broad motivation to protect and promote [others'] well-being).

Exploring this and various other possible hypotheses is a task for a book-length study of considerateness, not a single article. For example, I would need to circumvent various thorny conceptual issues, such as what distinguishes virtues from other ethical dispositions, and, even if there is conceptual space for the concept of a virtue, how discrete virtues are to be individuated and distinguished from other virtues. Thus, for my purposes, I simply assume a basic Aristotelian answer to those questions, as to many others. These limitations notwithstanding, my hope is that this article paves the way for further research work on considerateness involving other hypotheses and methods by initially testing one way of making sense of this complex construct.

1. Considerateness as Agreeableness

I am standing in a long queue at the airport, waiting to get through the security gate. A rushed, panting passenger taps on my shoulder and asks whether I would allow her to jump the queue because she is about to miss her plane. As I am not in a rush, I nod my head. The passenger moves along the queue and asks the next person the same question.

On what I think would be a mostly uncontroversial understanding, I have exhibited considerateness in this situation. Presumably, most people would also agree that it is virtuous (as long as they feel comfortable with the language of virtue in the first place). If all considerateness were of this type, it could be explained as extensionally equivalent to a virtue that is already part of Aristotle's system: the virtue of 'friendliness in social intercourse' (1985: 107–9 [1126b11–1127a13]). I find the designator *agreeableness* more felicitous for this virtue than *friendliness* and use that in what follows. Notably, elsewhere (Kristjánsson 2007: chap. 10), I use the term *agreeableness* in a slightly broader sense, to refer collectively to three social-gluе virtues that Aristotle describes, including wit and truthfulness about oneself in casual social encounters (1985: 107–14 [1126b11–28b9]). (I would be tempted to argue that considerateness, as I explain it here, corresponds substantially to agreeableness on this broader understanding, but an argument to this effect is beyond the scope of this article.) Whether agreeableness is understood in a narrower or broader sense is tangential; what matters is Martha Nussbaum's point (1993: 246) that the three virtues in question belong to essentially the same domain of human experience.

If one were to take Aristotle's texts as the last word on virtue ethics, we could simply move on. However, the virtuousness of Aristotelian agreeableness has been questioned on many fronts, and characterizing (one type of) considerateness as agreeableness may thus seem to import as many problems as it removes. The problems include that fact that agreeableness appears anomalous as a moral virtue in Aristotle's system, straddling uncomfortably the distinction between moral and civic virtues (see Nussbaum 1993; Kristjánsson 2007; Gottlieb 2009; Stohr 2012, for examples of the background literature). Moreover, some see agreeableness merely as a non-virtuous exhibition of socially conditioned *manners* that have

nothing to do with *morals*. Finally, doubts have been raised about the standalone virtuous features of agreeableness and a need has been suggested of reducing them to those of more profound moral virtues (see Calhoun 2010), which would then also threaten to marginalize considerateness, in line with worries expressed at the outset. In order to motivate the virtuousness of considerateness as agreeableness, on an Aristotelian understanding, attention must be paid to those problematic areas.

I begin by considering the significant distinctions that Aristotle draws between moral virtues (discussed in the *Nicomachean Ethics*), including agreeableness, and civic virtues (discussed in the *Politics*). Apart from the obvious *quantitative* difference that the civic virtues typically affect more people, there are also salient *qualitative* differences between them. The first is that the moral virtues are mostly universal, based on a common human nature (as we evidence ‘in our travels’, Aristotle 1985: 208 [1155a20–22]). In contrast, because there are various forms of constitution, ‘it is clear that there cannot be one single goodness [virtue] which is the perfect goodness of the good citizen’ (Aristotle 1944: 187 [1276a32–36]). Hence, civic virtues are, to a large extent, relative to constitutions/cultures. Second, whereas nothing counts as a true moral virtue for adults unless it is *phronesis*-infused (that is, revised, overseen, and adjudicated upon by the intellectual meta-virtue of *phronesis*), and hence only a small number of people ever become fully virtuous, every citizen in a state can learn to exhibit civic virtue—for ‘all ought to possess the goodness [virtue] of a good citizen’ (Aristotle 1944: 189 [1277a2–4])—albeit at a fairly low level. *Phronesis* is therefore required only for the higher levels of civic virtues, possessed by rulers of states. Third, emotions enter into moral virtues at two levels of engagement. They provide the motivation for acting upon them (hence moral virtues have a unique emotional component each), and they attach themselves, as a flow-type pleasure of satisfaction (‘like the bloom on youths’, Aristotle 1985: 276 [1174b30–35]), upon successfully completed virtue enactments. Civic virtues have no virtue-specific emotional components, however, although presumably they are motivated by a general emotion-driven background concern for concord in the state. In the case of civic virtues, Aristotle also relinquishes the crucial demand made upon moral virtues that the agent enjoys their actualization; it suffices that the agent forces herself to act civically; hence, civic virtues (at least for ordinary citizens, as distinct from rulers) are more akin to ‘continence’ (self-control) in the sphere of moral virtues. Finally, whereas moral virtues are amenable to the famous architectonic of the golden mean (with excess and deficiency forms), civic virtues do not share those features (see further in Kristjánsson 2022).

Now, the problem with Aristotle’s account of agreeableness as an account of a presumed moral virtue (and analogously, then, with considerateness in its presumed incarnation as agreeableness) is that it seems to straddle perilously the distinctions between moral and civic virtues, and indeed lie considerably closer to the latter. This is why it is often referred to as a social-glue virtue. Edna Ullmann-Margalit, who for the most part understands considerateness as the equivalent of agreeableness as explicated in this section, sees it as the ‘core’ of ‘civilized society’ (2011: 209). Agreeableness manifests itself in casual human encounters—when ‘meeting people, living together and associating in

conversations and actions’ (Aristotle 1985: 107 [1126b11–1126b12])—but it does not seem to possess any unique emotional component, or perhaps no emotional corollary at all. As W. W. Fortenbaugh notes (2002: 87–92), this is a unique feature of agreeableness, which distinguishes it from other moral virtues listed in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Simply consider the security queue example above to understand why. I do not need to harbor any specific emotion toward the rushed passenger to be motivated to give way—it just seems to be the natural and decent thing to do—nor can I expect any unique pleasure of satisfaction to create a stimulating adrenaline-rush or to redden my cheeks afterward ‘like the bloom on youths’. The gesture of allowing the hurrying woman to pass by may rather (*ceteris paribus*) be an entirely unemotional and forgettable one, without detracting from the agreeableness shown *qua* virtue. More specifically, although feeling good about what you have done is not alien to the nature of agreeableness, it is not a necessary feature. While this means that agreeableness is not a standard moral virtue, it is not tantamount to claiming, as Heyd does (1995: 227), that agreeableness is a mere ‘behavioral virtue’. Heyd offers a false dichotomy. Agreeableness still includes necessary beliefs, for example. Analogously, civic virtues, while lacking the emotional component, are not mere behavioral virtues. Indeed, Aristotle is rarely interested in mere behavioral prosociality as such.

An appeal to universal human nature seems out of place also; the gesture in question is relative to social norms regarding behavior in long queues at airports and does not have any application in cultures without airports or security gates. Ian Kidd (2023) gives a good example of this extreme sensitivity of considerateness-as-agreeableness to contextual circumstances by arguing that strict workload models and other new managerial orthodoxies have undermined mutual considerateness in academia in some Western countries. Finally, although Aristotle tries to fit agreeableness into the architectonic of the golden mean, with cantankerousness as the deficiency and ingratiating flattery as the excess, the second of these specifications appears strained. I am not sure what would count as my possible excess reaction to the fellow passenger’s request to jump the queue, but it is surely not ingratiating flattery, as it would be completely out of sync with the situation: unreasonable and weird rather than morally amiss. This point may indicate that considerateness, on the current understanding, is (contra Heyd 1995) not fully tantamount to tact: it seems intuitively easier to envisage cases of too little or too much (phony) tact as moral failures *qua* opposite extremes of an ideal medial state.

The only area of comparison where agreeableness seems to lie closer to the moral than the civic virtues regards the possession of *phronesis*. It will help in the adjudication of agreeable actions to be able to reflect upon them through the prism of *phronesis*. Ullmann-Margalit’s illuminating example of British people’s complex (*phronetic*) reflections on whether to offer a pregnant woman a seat on a bus, and thus to trump the respect for another person’s privacy (by explicitly drawing attention to their pregnancy), offers a case in point (2011: 216). Agreeableness is thus closer here to a moral virtue like compassion than a civic virtue like law-abidingness, at least if we accept Aristotle’s assumption that ordinary citizens—as distinct from rulers and judges—do not need to interpret

written laws but just follow them. Contrast here, however, Calhoun's analysis of civility as being closer to law-abidingness than a moral virtue like justice (2000: 252).

The tentative conclusion reached about considerateness, understood as agreeableness, is that while its virtuousness remains intact, considerateness on this understanding is not a pure paradigmatic moral virtue with a unique emotional corollary. Rather, it is some sort of a hybrid of a civic and moral virtue that contributes to a flourishing life in society by providing a glue of decent responses, cementing social life. Moreover, rather than having two flanking vices/extremes (of excess and deficiency), as Aristotelian moral virtues are meant to have, the natural antithesis of considerateness on this understanding is solely its deficiency form.

Not everyone will be happy even with this tentative conclusion, however, as it still retains the idea of agreeableness as virtuous. There has been a strong tendency in contemporary moral philosophy to make a clear distinction between morals and manners and to downgrade so-called virtues that have mostly to do with adherence to social norms and etiquette to the latter category, hence removing their presumed virtuousness altogether. In our cynical and fractured times, the very words *manners* or *etiquette* typically conjure up an air of the sanctimonious, the bigoted, the hidebound, the myopic: of morally irrelevant rules that have congealed into banal formalities. Whenever there is a conflict between such rules and the directives of morality proper, etiquette rightly loses. Moral theorists often go further than considering manners a quaint, dispensable frill. Many regard them as a noxious historical residue from an era of class-based customs in which people from the higher echelons of society used complicated courtesy codes as instruments of marginalization and oppression which assign women, the poor, the young, and other under-privileged groups to lower social stations (Kristjánsson 2007: chap. 10; see Stohr 2012, for a more extended and nuanced discussion).

Both the previously cited philosophers writing about considerateness are sensitive to this worry. Ullmann-Margalit acknowledges that considerateness overlaps with mere manners but that the overlap is only 'partial' (2011: 215). Heyd fleshes out an account according to which considerateness (or what he calls 'tact') lies between 'ethics and etiquette' (1995: 217) but also extends 'beyond the two' (1995: 231), although he does not explain the difference between 'between' and 'beyond' in detail. Heyd clearly worries that because etiquette is culture-relative whereas morality is cross-cultural (1995: 229), too strong an admission of considerateness' relatedness to manners will rob it of its moral point. While I have focused in this discussion on considerateness *qua* agreeableness as a hybrid of the moral and civic, rather than the morals and manners, I would be less concerned than Heyd and many other philosophers are even if a credible argument were mounted about considerateness being mainly manner-driven. I think the distinction between morals and manners is commonly out of its depth. As Hegel (1991) pointed out a long time ago, it is a folly to think that *Moralität* can be fully separated from *Sittlichkeit*. Purely culturally relative social norms can create *prima facie* moral reasons for abiding by them. For example, there is nothing essentially moral or virtuous about stopping on a red light; however, once a norm has been formed to that effect, then it becomes one's moral duty—and the

virtuous thing to do—to stop at a red light, irrespective of the fact that there may be societies where the norm is to stop at a purple light. In this way, most fortuitous norms, even of pure etiquette (such as burping or not burping at a dinner table), can acquire moral force.

This moral point is completely independent of the question whether the content of the social norms that enter into the virtue of considerateness do in fact differ significantly between cultures, and also whether these is a systematic difference between cultures with respect to the strength of moral norms for abiding by merely culturally fortuitous norms. Those are *empirical* questions that call for social scientific studies. It suffices to say here that the common intuition that societies with interdependent self-conceptions value social norms more than those with independent ones (Markus and Kitayama 1991) was not borne out in a recent comparative study of US and Chinese children age six, who more or less understood and valued considerateness equally (Zhao et al. 2021). If this difference really exists, it enters people's psycho-moral make-up later in the moral development-cum-socialization trajectory.

One more misgiving about the potential virtuousness of considerateness *qua* agreeableness needs to be mentioned here (see Kristjánsson 2007: chap. 10, on the triviality objection). When understood as agreeableness, considerateness seems to satisfy the following conceptual condition, suggested by Ullmann-Margalit (2011: 207): 'a considerate act is designed to decrease someone else's discomfort at near-zero cost to oneself'. Consider again the example of the airport security queue. Allowing the person to jump the line required a minimal change only in the pace, timing, and flow of what I was already aiming to do. Ullmann-Margalit worries, however, that this condition removes considerateness from the category of the true altruistic virtues that all involve significant self-sacrifice (2011: 210).

Now there is no denying the fact that considerateness understood as agreeableness is not one of the most powerfully motivating virtues. It will often be trumped by other virtues and values. Agreeableness is, after all, not the virtue of being agreeable under all circumstances, for the virtuous person 'will be guided by consequences—i.e. by what is fine and what is expedient—if they are greater [than the benefits of agreeableness in sharing pleasure and avoiding causing pain]' (Aristotle 1985: 109 [1114b2–7]). However, what needs to be kept in mind here is that there is no strict proportionality between the amount of self-sacrifice involved and the virtuousness of a given response. Aristotle's virtue of magnificence (grand-scale generosity) is a case in point. Its virtuousness is of even greater magnitude than that of ordinary generosity; yet because, *ex hypothesi*, only those endowed with great riches can exhibit it, the apparent grandeur of their acts will incur near-zero costs to themselves. It will not make a great dent in Bill Gates's wallet to throw a magnificently lavish street party.

Another way of countering this misgiving is to point out that whereas agreeableness may possess less moral depth than many other virtues, it has greater breadth or scope than most of them, for a greater number of actual circumstances exist which require its application. Although our virtues of bravery and magnificence may incur few opportunities to be truly tested, for instance,

agreeableness is tested in almost every casual encounter at school, in the office, or at the local grocery store.

A final comment is in order about the hybrid moral-civic virtue of agreeableness that I have identified in this section as the first type of considerateness. Insofar as agreeableness bears a strong resemblance to the civic virtue of civility, it is worth mentioning a couple of points that Cheshire Calhoun raises about civility in an important article (2000). The first point is that civility is a distinct virtue—which tallies with the Aristotelian view of agreeableness and the view that I have spelled out of considerateness in this section. The other point Calhoun makes, however, is that the moral value of this virtue is parasitic on the value of other, more pronounced, moral virtues such as respect and tolerance. This axiological reductionism stems from Calhoun's specification of civility as a virtue whose essential role is to *communicate* the message of other virtues. Elsewhere I tried to rebut this thesis by giving counterexamples: for instance, a boorish teacher who is fully respectful of her students but is simply lacking in the kind of agreeableness required to be a good teacher (Kristjánsson 2007: chap. 10). However, for my purposes here, I may have been barking up the wrong tree, for among the true moral virtues Calhoun says civility is there to communicate is precisely *considerateness* (2000: 255). So rather than equating all considerateness with agreeableness or civility, as seems to be the tendency in the literature, Calhoun opens up the possibility of there being a more paradigmatic and powerful moral virtue called considerateness—a point that anticipates the considerations I offer in Section 3.

2. Considerateness as Successful *Phronetic* Consideration

My best female friend visits me and asks what I think about the dress she has just bought for a party. I think the dress looks awful, but I know that my friend suffers from low self-esteem and has been undergoing therapy of late. I take pride in being both an honest and a compassionate person. After a very quick (few seconds) but intense period of reflection, I decide to be more honestly compassionate than compassionately honest: namely, prioritize compassion over honesty while avoiding a direct lie: 'This is a very unusual dress; you will really stand out in the party'. My friend seems satisfied with the answer as the conversation ends.

I am aware of the possible objection that I am misdescribing the virtue conflict here as one between compassion and honesty when it is actually between considerateness and honesty. How can considerateness then be used to mediate a conflict involving itself? However, even if we redescribe the conflict in this way, it does not subvert my main point in this article, for the conflict would then be between the kind of considerateness that I describe in the following section as a moral virtue, and honesty; and there is nothing logically odd with considerateness of the kind that I describe in this section, adjudicating upon such a conflict. We could also consider some other virtue conflict where one of the virtues is further removed from considerateness itself. Think of an agent who knows herself to be the one who can and should defend a colleague in the workplace, but she is also

modest, and she does not want to show off in front of her boss at work. Would we still be content to refer to the capacity to adjudicate between these virtues as considerateness? Would any ordinary language user do so? I am not sure every language user would. However, it is not difficult to construct a plausible argument along the lines that it is considerate of the agent to reflect on the potential conflict between these virtues and try to reach a considered decision. Conceptual analysis is, after all, more than just recording the most frequent use of words in ordinary language.

As for the situation with my friend's dress, I take it that most people will agree that I showed, or at least made an effort to show, considerateness in formulating my answer. However, it is clearly not the same type of near-zero-cost considerateness *qua* agreeableness that was under discussion in the previous section. The two philosophical writers on considerateness, Heyd (1995) and Ullmann-Margalit (2011), for the most part confine themselves to the type of considerateness explained in the previous section, although both hint at possible extensions beyond it. Here and in the following section I venture into much less-trodden territory—some not previously trodden at all—and while what I propose to say here is more novel than my critical review of the standard view, it is also shorter (as I have fewer critical friends from the literature to engage with) and more speculative.

In his article, Heyd is aware of some sort of possible conceptual connection between considerateness and Aristotle's metacognitive virtue of *phronesis* (practical wisdom) as excellence in the discernment and deliberation leading to good moral decision making, especially in tricky situations where two virtues (such as honesty and compassion) collide. Heyd argues that considerateness, like *phronesis*, requires sensitivity to particular contexts, that it resembles tactile experiences (a discerning sense of touch), involves fitting but uncodifiable responses to unique situations, and can be likened to 'diplomatic skills' (1995: 221–24). It is not easy to bring cohesion to all these remarks, but in 1995, the academic discourse on Aristotelian *phronesis* was still very much under-developed. Since then, it has moved on considerably (see, for example, Russell 2009; Kristjánsson et al. 2021) and become a major growth industry in philosophy and psychology, but even more so in professional ethics. It may thus be possible to turn some of Heyd's cursory, if suggestive, remarks into a more coherent account. I do so by drawing on a recent multi-componential model of Aristotelian *phronesis*. According to this model, *phronesis* contains four distinct but inter-related components that perform four functions (see further in Kristjánsson et al. 2021):

- (1) Constitutive function. *Phronesis* involves the cognitive ability to perceive the ethically salient aspects of a situation and to appreciate these as calling for specific kinds of responses. This ability can be cultivated and amounts to the capacity to read a situation by seeing what is most important or central. We can also refer to this function as *moral sensitivity*. There is a huge literature on moral sensitivity and moral perception in both philosophy and

- psychology, and much of it indicates that being considerate is (partly) about noticing certain morally salient things that may escape others' attention (see Hursthouse 2011).
- (2) Blueprint function. The integrative work of *phronesis* operates in conjunction with the agent's overall understanding of the kinds of things that matter for a flourishing life: the agent's own ethical identity, aims, and aspirations; her understanding of what it takes to live and act well; and her need to live up to the standards that shape and are shaped by her understanding and experience of what matters in life. This amounts to a blueprint of flourishing.
 - (3) Emotional regulative function. Individuals foster their emotional wellbeing through *phronesis* by bringing their emotional responses into line with their understandings of the ethically salient aspects of their situation, their judgement, and their recognition of what is at stake in the moment.
 - (4) Integrative function. Through *phronesis*, an individual integrates different components of a good life, via a process of checks and balances, especially in circumstances where different ethically salient considerations, or different kinds of virtues, appear to be in conflict and agents need to negotiate dilemmatic space.

To sum up, then, *phronesis* involves being sensitive to and noticing certain situations, infusing one's emotions with reason so that they do not skew the deliberation process, relating the details of the situation to one's overall blueprint of the good life, and finally adjudicating what to do through a process of synthesizing potentially conflicting motivations stemming from the individual virtues that are being integrated.

The first and fourth of those functions correspond well to Heyd's original suggestions about a link between considerateness (via its tactile and integrative elements) and *phronesis*. Indeed, I think there are fairly common uses of *considerateness* in ordinary language in which it signifies an intellectual capacity, rather than a moral one. The reason why my decision with respect to my friend with the dress exhibited considerateness is that I *considered* the options and came up with a *reasonable* response, sensitive to the friend's interests. The response could have been different morally (such as more compassionately honest than honestly compassionate) but equally good; after all, Aristotle argues that moral virtue is partly relative to individual constitution and that a plurality of moral responses may be equally valid in a situation. This is, for example, the point of Aristotle's observation that temperance in eating is not the same for Milo the athlete as for the novice athlete, because what is intermediate in virtue is relative to the individual, 'not in the object' (1985: 43 [1106b1–7]). However, to pass muster as potentially virtuous in the first place, it must have been considered and arbitrated via the intellectual virtue of *phronesis*.

My intuition is that this sense of considerateness is more commonly attributed retrospectively to a successfully enacted decision than before the event. There is something artificial about the locution 'I hope you will act considerately today

when your friend asks you about her new dress'. However, the locution 'You acted with commendable considerateness when you formulated your answer to your friend' seems perfectly natural. The reason for this difference may be that, prior to an event, the *primary motivations* for making a moral decision stem from the individual moral virtues (in the present case: compassion and honesty). When we are faced with a conundrum, however, the *secondary motivation* of wanting to make decisions that tally with one's overall view of the good life (one's *moral identity*, if you like) kicks in. However, there seems to be something too calculating about invoking that secondary motivation before the dilemmatic event occurs; in most simple cases, where only one particular virtue is called for, we do not need the secondary motivation except as a background concern.

What I have been arguing in the foregoing is that there is a second type of considerateness whereby the term does not refer to a hybrid moral-civic virtue of agreeableness, as spelled out in the previous section, but rather to an intellectual capacity of *considering* moral options and reaching a *considered* decision sensitive to all relevant concerns—a capacity captured by two of the standard functions of Aristotelian *phronesis*. On this second understanding, the antithesis of considerateness is making decisions that are *ill-considered* rather than inconsiderate as on the first understanding. Here, however, there is nothing odd about the virtue having only one corresponding vice. Intellectual virtues do not have two flanking vices in the Aristotelian system; only moral virtues do.

3. Considerateness as a Standalone Moral Virtue

I am invited to the seventieth birthday party of business mogul A because I am a close friend of his son, B, who has a BSc degree in psychology and works as a research assistant in my lab. In the party speeches, one guest after another stands up and extols the virtues not only of A but also of his son C, who has just completed a successful MBA degree and is taking over his father's company. They never mention B, however. I find this more and more cringeworthy and inconsiderate toward B. I therefore stand up and make sure to include a lengthy section in my speech where I talk about B's virtues, his important work in my lab, and his contributions to his family, including his father.

Once again, I hypothesize that readers will agree with me that what I did was considerate toward B. However, I also hope they agree that this type of considerateness is neither the agreeableness-type one, nor the intellectual one of due consideration. Here, considerateness appears much more like a standard, discrete moral virtue in its own right—albeit not one specifically identified by Aristotle—with a typical golden-mean structure. In contrast to intellectually understood considerateness, the value of considerateness in the present scenario lies in the *moral content* of the decision taken, to speak up for the neglected son, rather than the *intellectual procedure* by which it was arrived at. There is a clear primary motivation here to rectify a certain moral imbalance in the speeches already given. This case obviously distinguishes itself from the other two in that I am here responding to moral failings on the part of others: aiming to rectify those. Other virtue terms that possibly come to mind here would be *fairness* or *justice*.

However, there is no assumption in Aristotelian virtue ethics that the same situation can be characterized only in a single virtue-relevant way. The fact that I acted fairly does not exclude my reaction being (also) felicitously described as a display of a virtue of considerateness.

The contrasts to considerateness as agreeableness are, arguably, significant. First, the considerate act here is premeditated and directly aimed at via a clear intention. It does not happen more or less fortuitously like the decision to allow the person to jump the queue. Second, there are emotional antecedents and consequents involved. I am motivated by an emotion of pain at the inconsiderateness toward B shown by the previous speakers. Moreover, given that my speech goes well, it will be ‘completed’, as Aristotle put it (1985: 276 [1174b30–35]), by a pleasurable emotion signaling a job well done. Third, there is no lack here of a clear golden-mean architectonic. Just as a failure to speak would have indicated a deficiency of the relevant virtue (that is, inconsiderateness), it is easy to envisage what an over-the-top speech would have sounded like, in which B’s virtues would have been eulogized in an exaggerated way at the expense of A and C. In other words, there is clearly a type of act here that we could designate as one of excessive considerateness: at least, excessive in the comparative sense of being insufficiently considerate toward A and C. Hence, the Aristotelian sense of a golden mean emerges: a virtue with two flanking vices. Moreover, the worry that Heyd has about considerateness (as agreeableness) not counting as a moral virtue, because it does aim at psycho-moral equilibrium (1995: 225), is alleviated on this understanding.

Now, I acknowledge that no one might have noticed a failure to speak as inconsiderateness other than myself, not even B, but it could still be a deficiency with respect to the role that considerateness presumably plays in my life. Remember again that what is intermediate in virtue is relative to the individual, ‘not in the object’ (Aristotle 1985: 43 [1106b1–7]).

A possible objector could still argue that the difference between considerateness-as-agreeableness and as a full-blown moral virtue is more a matter of degree than of kind, and also highly dependent upon how the examples are construed. In the considerateness-as-agreeableness example, the woman in need was in a rush, and the considerate agent had to choose quickly. However, a similar story could be told in which an agent had time to form a clear intention. As for the emotional involvement, I have already acknowledged that considerateness-as-agreeableness *may* involve an emotional component, albeit not as a *necessary* feature. The only remaining substantial difference then seems to be the golden-mean structure, but even there I have acknowledged that one of the extremes of agreeableness is easily identifiable (namely, the deficiency form), although the excess form is more problematic.

This sort of counter-argument is not unfamiliar within Aristotelian territory. It has often been argued, for example, that the justice Aristotle talks about in the *Politics* is roughly the same kind of justice he explains in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and as a virtuous emotion in the *Rhetoric*, and that the difference is only about degrees: especially the number of people who will be at the receiving end of it (an in-group of closely connected individuals or the whole citizenry). It could even be

argued that Aristotelian civic virtues are simply large-scale moral virtues. However, I think this sort of argument overlooks salient differences that any Aristotelian would want to preserve. That considerateness-as-agreeableness does not require an emotional component (either as a motivator or a subsequent reward) makes it very different in nature from a full-blown moral virtue; so does the fact that it does not fit neatly into the golden-mean architectonic. Considerateness-as-agreeableness straddles the distinction between a civic and a moral virtue and comes in many ways closer to the former. It does not simply emerge at a lower level of intensity and scope. For those who believe in the fundamental difference between civic and moral virtues, as Aristotle seems to have done (Kristjánsson 2022), there is good reason therefore to honor the distinction between these two kinds of considerateness (as well as their distinction from the third intellectual kind).

A stronger counter-argument that an interlocutor could mount here is that this type of considerateness as a moral virtue is surplus to requirements, because we already have standard moral virtues doing the job, in particular compassion. This is, for example, the reason why Ullmann-Margalit (2011: 214) hesitates to extend the meaning of considerateness beyond agreeableness, for it would then begin to compete for space with more powerful and better entrenched altruistic emotional virtues such as compassion. We do not need considerateness, for instance, to describe the actions of the Good Samaritan. He simply acted compassionately.

I agree with Ullmann-Margalit about the need for parsimony and Occam's razor in the application of virtue terms. However, I do not believe that providing conceptual space for considerateness as a standalone moral virtue impinges upon the space already occupied by, say, compassion. There is a difference in kind between my decision to give a speech honoring B and the Good Samaritan's decision to help a stranger in need. *Compassion* simply seems too strong a term to explain my reaction to B's being overlooked in the speeches. B may not even have paid any attention to this himself, as his focus was presumably on his father's birthday celebrations. I was being considerate in standing up and speaking in B's favor, but it would be slightly over the top to say that I acted compassionately. We can thus act considerately in situations where compassion is simply too strong a reaction. Hence, it is not a violation of conceptual economy to posit a discrete moral virtue of considerateness, distinct from both agreeableness and due *phronetic* consideration of conflicting alternatives.

4. Concluding Remarks

Considerateness comprises three distinct virtue types in moral discourse. This is not to say that there exists a broad umbrella concept of considerateness of which the three types identified here are distinct instantiations. Rather, there are three distinct types of virtuousness that can rightly, in different contexts, be categorized as considerateness and that they are connected through family resemblances. More specifically, considerateness as agreeableness is connected to considerateness as a moral virtue through the moral concerns animating both, and considerateness as

an intellectual capacity is connected to the other two through the ideal of *phronetic* consideration.

In answer to the ‘so what?’ question, which hovers over conceptual analyses like the sword of Damocles, I would simply say that it is in the interest of moral understanding (or, more, specifically, ‘virtue literacy’; see Jubilee Centre 2022) to grasp the different nuances in the way in which the virtue term ‘considerateness’ enters moral discourse. We understand better why people who use the term, for instance in attributing considerateness to themselves or others, may not always mean the same thing—and that they may nonetheless be right in their respective understandings, in different contexts.

Additionally, this taxonomy of considerateness will have explanatory power in making sense of various surrounding issues. Consider, for instance, the kind of excessive political correctness, which in some socially conservative media is designated as *wokery*. According to this (supposedly) excessive form of liberalism, various subjective decisions people take must not only be quietly respected but openly endorsed and celebrated, for example a person’s decision to change her gender identity. Any discourse that fails to do so can justifiably be cancelled; hence, the recent emergence of super-liberal illiberalism. Whatever one may think of the substantive merits of opposing sides of this debate—and it is not my intention to adjudicate on that here—the distinctions that I carve out in this article may help traditional liberals conceptualize what they think is wrong with recent forms of super-liberal illiberalism: namely, that considerateness understood as agreeableness, which our fellow citizens have a right to expect, has been insensibly elevated to a form of considerateness as a moral virtue, involving strong emotions. For traditional liberals this would count as a category mistake. Fellow citizens have no right to expect us to harbor strong emotions about personal decisions they make, any more than the hurrying passenger in the queue had a right to expect me to feel strongly about her being late for the plane, although I rightly decided to help her through. That said, I agree with Ullmann-Margalit (2011: 208) that we often speak of being considerate towards fellow citizens’ feelings, and that this may in some cases involve much more than just quiet, if respectful, indifference.

In addition to the conceptual advantages mentioned above, some salient educational lessons can be gleaned from the above discussion. Ullmann-Margalit (2011: 205) may be laying it on a bit thick when she claims that considerateness is ‘the foundation upon which our relationships are to be organized’: both in the thin contexts of public/civic space and the thick moral encounters within close relationships. However, she is right in pointing us in the direction of exploring how considerateness is to be organized and educated. Drawing on the Jubilee Centre’s (2022: 12) distinction between character traits as ‘caught’, ‘taught’, and ‘sought’, the distinction between three types of considerateness may help us identify the respective targets of pedagogical interventions in the cultivation of its virtuousness.

Starting with considerateness as agreeableness, insofar as that is seen more as a civic than a moral virtue, Aristotle’s advice would be that it needs to be directly *taught*, just like the laws of the city. He famously and radically argued in his *Politics* (1944) that civic virtue requires nothing less than common public

schooling for all citizens. That said, Heyd goes too far in rejecting any role for habituation in this process (1995: 226). Insofar as decisions such as the one about allowing the hurrying passenger a quick way through require sensitivity to contextual contexts, it is difficult to see how all those can be taught beforehand. A great part of this sensitivity must be picked up through emotional contagion and characterological osmosis, namely through the ‘caught’ part of virtue education.

The understanding of considerateness as *phronetic* consideration opens up a Pandora’s Box of educational questions, for Aristotle is particularly unhelpful in explaining to us how *phronesis* is best cultivated; and current character educators unfortunately have not added a great deal of serviceable insights (Kristjánsson 2021). True, Aristotle does say that *phronesis* develops through ‘teaching and experience’ (1985: 33 [1103a14–16]); but we want to know: What kind of teaching? What sort of experience?

If there exists a discrete moral virtue of considerateness, however, as I have argued, Aristotle does provide extensive advice on how such virtues are best cultivated, through caught, taught, and sought methods, and also in which order (see, for example, the Jubilee Centre’s 2022 neo-Aristotelian developmental model of moral virtue). Role-modeling and habituation in childhood are thus to be followed by taught methods, and especially the students’ own aspirations to hone their virtues in late adolescence and early adulthood.

All in all, the taxonomy I provide helps to place considerateness within a framework of Aristotelian virtue ethics and character development—although in accordance only with the spirit, rather than the letter, of his own texts—and this, in turn, helps advance the discourse on considerateness in many ways: conceptually, psychologically, and educationally.

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