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978-0-521-02729-8 - Virtue Ethics and Professional Roles

Justin Oakley and Dean Cocking

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## VIRTUE ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL ROLES

Professionals, it is said, have no use for simple lists of virtues and vices. The complexities and constraints of professional roles create peculiar moral demands on the people who occupy them, and traits that are vices in ordinary life are praised as virtues in the context of professional roles. Should this disturb us, or is it naive to presume that things should be otherwise? Taking medical and legal practice as key examples, Justin Oakley and Dean Cocking develop a rigorous articulation and defence of virtue ethics, contrasting it with other types of character-based ethical theories and showing that it offers a promising new approach to the ethics of professional roles. They provide insights into the central notions of professional detachment, professional integrity, and moral character in professional life, and demonstrate how a virtue-based approach can help us better understand what ethical professional–client relationships would be like.

JUSTIN OAKLEY is Director of the Monash University Centre for Human Bioethics. His publications include *Morality and Emotions* (1992) and a number of journal articles.

DEAN COCKING is Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, Charles Sturt University. He has published articles in journals including *Ethics* and the *Journal of Philosophy*.

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JUSTIN OAKLEY

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press  
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
 Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521793056](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521793056)

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First published 2001  
 Hardback version transferred to digital printing 2006  
 Digitally printed first paperback version 2006

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Oakley, Justin, 1960–  
 Virtue ethics and professional roles / Justin Oakley, Dean Cocking.  
 p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 79305 X

1. Professional ethics. I. Cocking, Dean, 1958– II. Title.  
 BJ1725 .C55 2001  
 174–dc21

ISBN-13 978-0-521-79305-6 hardback  
 ISBN-10 0-521-79305-X hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-02729-8 paperback  
 ISBN-10 0-521-02729-2 paperback

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*To my partner, Kathryn Bailey, for her patience, support, and understanding, and our loving son, Jordan Bailey Oakley, for the life that awaits him.*

Justin Oakley

*To my father, Gordon, whose love, humour, sensitivity, and insight I adored and continue to miss greatly. To my beautiful mother, Yvonne, loving brother, Peter, and wonderful son, Harry.*

Dean Cocking

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## *Preface*

There are many people we wish to thank for their support in the course of writing this book. Work on the book began during 1992–3, with the help of a Large Research Grant from the Australian Research Council. We are grateful to the ARC for supporting this project from the outset. For his encouragement and enthusiasm about the project from the beginning, and for his helpful comments on the work in progress (especially in the early stages) we would like to thank Michael Smith. Michael's interest in the project helped to get it off the ground, and he has been an inspiration to us both, as he has been to many of his colleagues and students. For his detailed and incisive comments on every chapter, several times over, we are deeply indebted to John Campbell. John read our drafts very carefully, and his feedback was extremely valuable. He helped us refine our arguments at many points, and raised many useful questions about virtue ethics that would not otherwise have occurred to us. Warm thanks are also owed to Jennifer Radden for her valuable and stimulating comments on the entire typescript. Two anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press also provided very extensive comments on the penultimate draft, and their detailed suggestions resulted in many improvements to the typescript. We are also grateful to Jeanette Kennett, for discussing many of the issues in this book with us, and to Tim Dare, for his spirited rejoinder to a paper which was an earlier version of chapter 5.

Extensive comments on various chapters were provided by John Cottingham, Owen Flanagan, Lynn Gillam, Brad Hooker, Tom Hurka, David Sosa, Christine Swanton, and the editors of *Ethics*, and we are indebted to all of them for their help. We are also grateful for the feedback we received from Lori Gruen, R. M. Hare, Elinor Mason, Steve Matthews, Bernadette McSherry, Jeannie Paterson, Philip Pettit, Gerald Postema, Per Sandberg, Peter Saul, Julian Savulescu, Peter Singer, Michael Stocker, and Bernadette Tobin. Valuable references

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were suggested to us by Minou Friele, David Macintosh, Ani Satz, Merle Spriggs, and Alison Stubbs. Dean would also like to thank the Department of Philosophy at the University of Auckland, for their support in the form of a Post-Doctoral Fellowship, and in particular team captain Tim Dare. For his enthusiasm about the project and his general encouragement, we also thank Robert Young.

Earlier versions of the chapters in this book have been read to various audiences over the years, as indicated in the notes to each chapter. Along with those audiences, we would also like to thank Rae Langton and Michael Smith for organising the ‘Consequentialism, Kantianism, and Virtue Ethics’ conference at Monash University in June 1995, which was an excellent international forum at which to read an earlier version of chapter 1. We are also grateful to Tony Coady and Megan Laverty, for helping organise the symposium on ‘Virtue Ethics and Professional Roles’, at the Australian Association for Professional and Applied Ethics Fourth Annual Conference held at the University of Melbourne in September 1997, where we read an earlier version of Chapter 5. Justin would also like to thank Daisuke Arie of Yokohama City University, Yasunori Fukagai of Tokyo Metropolitan University, and Satoshi Kodama of Kyoto University for organising ethics symposia in Tokyo and Kyoto, where a version of Chapter 1 was read in January 2000.

On a more practical level, we wish to express our appreciation to Hilary Gaskin, Philosophy Editor at Cambridge University Press, for her patience, professionalism, and promptness. We also thank copy-editor Pauline Marsh for her meticulousness and her suggestions for stylistic improvements. Monash University generously provided Justin with two periods of study leave, which enabled significant progress to be made on this project. Justin also wishes to thank David and Beverley Macintosh, for their kindness in making available the library of their wonderful house as a peaceful area in which to write, and the Faculty of Arts staff at Monash Caulfield Campus, who provided a quiet temporary office away from the distractions of the Clayton campus. Dean is especially grateful to Seumas Miller for providing him with the research time to finish work on this book and for his tremendous support and encouragement more generally. For general administrative assistance, Justin would like to thank Heather Mahamooth, from the Monash University Centre for Human Bioethics.

We are personally indebted to a number of people for their support over the years this book was written. Justin wishes to express his heartfelt appreciation to his partner, Kathryn Bailey, for her unfailing loyalty

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and support, and to his son Jordan, for the lightness and joy he has brought during these years. Most of all Dean would like to thank his mother, Yvonne, whose continuing devotion and support have been enormous and contributed so much to his life.

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## *Acknowledgements*

Sections of the following chapters draw on our previously published material, as indicated. Permission to adapt and use parts of that material has been kindly granted by the publishers, as noted.

Chapter 1: 'Varieties of Virtue Ethics', *Ratio* 9, no. 2, September 1996, pp. 128–52. Copyright (c) 1996 by Blackwell Publishers Ltd. 'A Virtue Ethics Approach', in Helga Kuhse and Peter Singer (eds.), *A Companion to Bioethics*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1998, pp. 86–97. Copyright (c) 1998 by Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Chapter 2: 'Indirect Consequentialism, Friendship, and the Problem of Alienation', *Ethics* 106, no. 1, October 1995, pp. 86–111. Published by The University of Chicago Press. Copyright (c) 1995 by The University of Chicago. All rights reserved.

Chapter 5: 'Doing Justice to the Lawyer's Role', in Andrew Alexandra, Tony Coady, and Bruce Langtry (eds.), *Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Professional and Applied Ethics*, Melbourne, University of Melbourne Centre for Philosophy and Public Issues, 1998, pp. 77–86. Copyright (c) 1998 by A. Alexandra, T. Coady, and B. Langtry.

Chapter 6: 'The Ethics of Professional Detachment', *Journal of Law and Medicine* 7, no. 2, November 1999, pp. 150–5. This article has been incorporated into chapter 6 with the express permission of (c) LBC Information Services, a part of Thomson Legal and Regulatory Group Asia Pacific Limited.