David Schmidtz's *Living Together*

Jennifer Baker
College of Charleston

1. Introduction

There is a critique, defense, and illustration of philosophical methodology in David Schmidtz's *Living Together: Inventing Moral Science*.[1] Neoclassical economics gives us reasons to believe that raising a minimum wage will result in lessened teenage unemployment, but if evidence emerges that it has not, we should not cling to what we had thought before. Instead, as Schmidtz explains, we might use our previous models to help us think through what we can know now (pp. xiii–xiv). In this essay, I would like to highlight the factors that make a philosophical approach risk treating the rest of us like "pawns to be patronized" (p. 106) and to encourage healthy revision of philosophical models in light of what works.

The book begins by Schmidtz recounting his time spent as a research assistant in Mark Isaac and Vernon Smith's Economic Science Laboratory (p. ix). After a "disheartening" first year as a philosophy graduate student, exposure to these economists' focus on methodology about how economic experiments might be designed, when we have a theory, the role of other disciplines, and what counts as confirmation made philosophy seem relevant again to him. Philosophical methodology comes in handy when thinking through scientific methodology, but not all philosophical approaches can accommodate real-world feedback. The philosophy that Schmidtz encountered in his first year of graduate study was similar to what he would encounter later in ideal theories of justice, in thought experiments, and in confirmations-by-whatever-might-be-meant-by-intuition.

Schmidtz recommends a kind of openness that philosophy must have to other disciplines' insights. On the one hand, this makes

[1] David Schmidtz, *Living Together: Inventing Moral Science* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023). All subsequent references to *Living Together* will be cited by page number parenthetically in the text.

Reason Papers 44, no. 2 (Fall 2024): 61–74.

sense in his hands. What would not be counted as relevant to the theories we devise about justice? On the other hand, I see Schmidtz as an exemplar, developer, and defender of what I would classify as "individualism."[2] His commitment to individualism seems foundational, of a different status from neoclassical economic theory, and primarily what he uses to justify market outcomes. This makes me think that the framing of this magisterial work might not be that we should ask "How to live?" only *after* determining "how to live together," as Schmidtz's answers to "How to live?" seem, to me, to be defended in *advance* of what we might find by being open to research in other academic disciplines.

This is to suggest that Schmidtz's approach is more akin to Aristotle's than he recognizes. To the frustration of professors teaching Aristotelian ethics, Aristotle reminds us several times that ethics is of secondary interest to political science. The latter is of more importance, as it concerns more of us and getting it right is therefore of more consequence as well as being more noble and divine.[3] Ethics, for Aristotle, is a kind of building block he can use to work out how a society might be organized; he illustrates this well with his approach to markets.[4]

For Schmidtz, too, ethics works as a kind of building block. It is not his main focus; it does not consume him so that he forgets about the impact of our environs on our ethics, but I think he uses the moral psychology he proposes in order to come to the conclusions he does in the way he does about markets and justice.

To put this point another way, if it were not for Schmidtz's commitment to individualism, we would have less of a basis for seeing rights as a matter of saying "no" to boundary crossings (pp. 138–46). My contrast will be the kind of thinking about justice that we can see in Cicero, who prioritizes property rights and an observational check on whether honoring any rights brings about social harmony. He does

[2] "The word 'individualism,' which we have coined for our own requirements, was unknown to our ancestors, for the good reason that in their days every individual necessarily belonged to a group and no one could regard himself as an isolated unit." Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Régime and the French Revolution*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (1858; repr., New York: Anchor Books, 1955), p. 96.

[3] See, e.g., Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2nd ed., trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1999), I.2, 1094a28–1094b13.

[4] Scott Meikle, "Aristotle on Business," *The Classical Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (1996): pp. 138–51.

this without basing these rights on individualism, looking instead to whether they have the potential to generate harmony and order. For example, Cicero says:

> It is surely settled that laws have been invented for the health of citizens, the safety of cities, and the quiet and happy life of human beings, and that those who first sanctioned resolutions of this sort showed to their peoples that they would write and provide those things by which, when they were received and adopted, they would live honorably and happily, and that they would of course name "laws" those things that were thus composed and sanctioned.[5]

Rights on that conception are not a matter of saying "no," of excluding others from one's property, as Schmidtz has it. They are a way to fit in. They are a way to go with the flow of the universe's right design. As with many views from ancient Greek philosophy, we have a "first nature" and a "second nature"; we only find harmony and understanding if we, ourselves, contribute to the development of our second nature. I think Schmidtz can invoke this same idea of what we are before we work to design our lives and then what we are after. However, his individualism requires that he prescribe less in terms of the content of this move from a first nature, where all is given to us to like and find interesting, to a second, where we have recognized what it takes to get along with others.

I will return below to his individualism, but after positioning his view among those who also see market freedom as crucial for the development of human agency. If we distinguish a Schmidtzian view from those that are close, we can better focus on what is unique to his view.

2. Not Hayek

Schmidtz seems to reject what Friedrich Hayek calls his "two worlds" thesis in his approach to markets and ethics. Given markets and their complex, counterintuitive structures, Hayek writes, we must learn to live in "two sorts of worlds at once."[6] The concern Hayek has is how difficult it is, emotionally and intellectually, for people to

[5] Cicero, *On the Republic; and, on the Laws* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), II.11.

[6] Friedrich Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism*, ed. W. W. Bartley III (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 18.

accommodate themselves to the rules of markets. These are not like the rules of our own personal morality, the sort that we use noncompetitively at home and among friends, which are "many, often overlapping, sub-orders within which old instinctual responses, such as solidarity and altruism, continue to retain some importance."[7] Hayek sees this as positive in that it can assist "voluntary collaboration,"[8] but from these instincts we cannot get justification for a market order. Hayek's concern is that personal morality, if applied to policy about markets, could eliminate the possibility of markets.

Hayek is a booster of markets because they are crucial for us to live together; we need them to be efficient with scarce resources, to know what to produce, and even to know the value of what we have. He recognizes, though, that functioning market norms will exist in tension with personal morality. As he puts it, "part of our present difficulty is that we must constantly adjust our lives, our thoughts and our emotions, in order to live simultaneously within different kinds of orders according to different rules."[9]

Schmidtz thinks that market norms and market morality can improve our personal morality, but in a unique way differently from how Deirdre McCloskey and Ayn Rand argue. McCloskey identifies bourgeois virtues that do not have to be seen as in tension with loftier commitments.[10] She recognizes that the prime virtue in a commercial society is honesty and that markets encourage the virtues of "courage, justice, and faith to be reliable in making a deal," suggesting that courage, justice, and faith also operate outside of that context.[11] Rand sees the respect for merit in markets as what, if we are rational, would replace what Hayek considers personal ethics.[12]

3. Not Heath

Joseph Heath's "market failures" approach introduced new energy to the field of business ethics by recommending that business

[7] Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit*, p. 18.

[8] Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit*, p. 18.

[9] Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit*, p. 18. See also Friedrich A. Hayek, "Individualism: True and False," in Friedrich Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1948).

[10] Deirdre McCloskey, *The Bourgeois Virtues: Ethics for an Age of Commerce* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

[11] McCloskey, *The Bourgeois Virtues*, p. 297.

[12] Ayn Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics," in Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism* (New York: Signet Books, 1964).

managers internalize guidelines and certain rules of the game that help markets to flourish. That approach was soon renamed a "Paretian" approach, once "market failures" could not represent what Heath was after, which was that those in business are working to win a game with rules that are necessary to there being any play at all. He notes that business ethicists were taken aback by the idea that we are motivated by fierce business-to-business—and even business-to-consumer—competition. Heath thinks that the field of business ethics had hoped to downplay competition to dampen or curb some of our more aggressive and overt moves as players in markets.[13]

However, the idea that those in business are not seeking harmony or cooperation lends some verifiable realism to business ethics. Heath also points out, though, that this should be counted a failure, given how many crimes continue to occur in business. Remedying the problem of market competition through a different description of its activities does not seem to prevent fraud or collusion. Heath suggests, instead, that we appeal to the shared goal markets have, the agreed-upon ultimate outcome, namely, equilibrium.

This is a clever way to make use of economic explanations of markets, but critics pointed out that business managers undermine equilibriums and then new ones emerge. In other words, there is no natural stopping point for this limit on the justification of market behavior. Schmidtz's view is a corrective to Heath's, as he appeals to natural limits, but they are psychological ones. Here is where Schmidtz seems to use moral psychology as foundational in his argument concerning the possibility of correctly understanding and using markets.

4. Not Smith

I will suggest one more contrast before unpacking the content of Schmidtzian moral psychology. Schmidtz is not just revising Adam Smith's take on ethics. I think that Smith is not easily recognized as an individualist, for he thinks of us as collectives, believing that we will change in commercial society in predictable ways, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse. For example, we will be more attentive to time, our governments will be better, we will not experience the violence of feudal society, we will not generate the kind of soldiers we had before, and so on. Smith also sees that "[no] society

[13] Joseph Heath, *Morality, Competition, and the Firm: The Market Failures Approach to Business Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of its members are poor and miserable."[14]

When it comes to moral psychology, Smith has a bifurcated account. On the one hand, he seems to think that only a few of us can aspire to Stoic-like ethics. Most of us have a concern for reputation and an ability to live out bourgeois virtues in the way McCloskey describes, though she admits that these are more like social expectations and norms that generate commercial trust and less like morality as described in ethical theory. On the other hand, Smith recognizes a Stoic-like appreciation of our role in a great market system that I think is unappealing to (or not foundational for) Schmidtz. This appreciation of our role in something greater introduces humility that transforms what we are doing in markets into something merely contributory and perhaps a bit mysterious. I also think that Schmidtz does not recognize what Ryan Hanley identifies in Smith as our exquisite "sensitivity to solidarity."[15] That is, Smith thinks that the truly virtuous individual regards himself as but "one of the multitude" and "in no respect better than any part of it."[16] Schmidtz might be right to set this aside, though, as I explain below.

5. The Case of the COVID-19 Vaccine

Schmidtz weaves together many topics relevant to justice. He does so with a kind of perceptiveness not commonly found in philosophy, but all the while we realize he is crafting a tapestry that depicts our nature and life on this earth. His approach is broad and includes insights gleaned from decades of engagement with philosophical work on these issues. It is not thin, rushed, or contentious coverage; instead, it reveals deep appreciation of our patterns of thought on these issues. Schmidtz respects the reader as a thinker and analyst, introducing examples that he allows us to work through on our own, in a kind of pause, and then proceeds as we catch up. He makes

[14] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 2 vols., ed. R. H. Campbell and A.S. Skinner (1776; repr., Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1982), I.VIII.

[15] Ryan Hanley, "On Vernon's Smith," in *Of Sympathy and Selfishness: The Moral and Political Philosophy of Adam Smith*, ed. Charlotte Thomas and William Jordan (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2015), p. 121.

[16] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (1759; repr., Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1982), 2.2.2.1.

key points so shockingly concise that you might want a notebook on hand for entering these as you read.

I will now highlight Schmidtz's foundational normative individualism. This fundamental commitment shows up in his positions on the motivation to close off philosophy (and justice) to evidence and interdisciplinarity, our relationship to the market, and in his carefully chosen examples.

Let's first examine a case that Schmidtz draws our attention to: a mother publicly shamed for receiving a COVID-19 vaccine after her husband passed away from the virus (p. 26). In 2021 television personality Amanda Kloots lost her forty-one-year-old co-parent after a ninety-day hospital stay. As is natural after such a loss, she, like others who try to do something defiantly positive after losing a loved one, posted on social media that she had taken action against COVID-19. Kloots seemed proud to encourage vaccination and shared that a vaccine would have saved her precious husband's life. The idea that her child would lose another parent was unthinkable to her, so she regarded herself as acting responsibly to ensure she would live. She waited in a car line for a leftover vaccine, explaining they were thrown away if not used, to receive her first dose.[17]

It was a surprise to find out that members of the public, after learning that she sought a vaccine, has no sympathy for her situation and were instead furiously outraged. At the time, Los Angeles had proposed that vaccinations were to be reserved for essential workers and those sixty-five and older—Kloots met neither criterion.

To the public, Kloots seemed to feel entitled to a vaccine over it going to essential workers or those sixty-five or older. Schmidtz describes this attitude toward those categories "as reifying entitlements against lower priority people jumping the queue" (p. 26). This encourages us to reason out how the description applies. I came up with "reification" being a fair descriptor, given how spry many sixty-five-year-olds are, how we standardly consider it fair to protect the young first, and how little else is allotted to essential workers.

The language and strong sentiments behind "jumping" a line came into play to such an extent in this case that the mother had to beg the public for mercy. Here, Schmidtz hands over the reins to the reader, encouraging us to pause, turn it over, look at it in the light, and look

[17] Katie Campione, "Amanda Kloots Gets the COVID Vaccine After Husband's Death, Slams Backlash," *People*, February 20, 2021, accessed online at: https://people.com/tv/amanda-kloots-gets-the-covid-vaccine-faces-backlash/.

deeper into it. With a little analysis, I think that this case contains three features of Schmidtz's view that I would like briefly to examine.

We wonder how the public could have gotten so attached to the recommendation that only essential workers and those over sixty-five could be vaccinated, when all policies like this are made through compromise and admit of obvious exception. Furthermore, decisions about COVID-19 were coming fast and being rotated out quickly. Is our public health messaging so authoritative that it is embraced as soon as it is crafted? Does this messaging make us so confident that we condemn a victim of COVID-19 for violating them?

Although I will end with an alternative explanation about the way we internalize norms, Schmidtz gently points out how irrational the public is in this case. They fail to recognize that any order of vaccine distribution has, as a goal, the same one public health officials have: getting as many people vaccinated as possible. The widow's action did not undermine that aim. With just a moment of thought, the public might recognize that the priority categories could not possibly be honored at all times if vaccination was to be efficient. The clinicians who provided the end-of-day, leftover vaccine recognized this point easily enough.

Schmidtz takes from this example the stark reminder of our ability to instantiate mass failures of reasoning and empathy. He also (gently) suggests that this outcome can be caused by policies crafted without worries about such an effect. Making the elderly and essential workers social priorities will trigger irrationally moralized reactions.

These types of reactions are merciless, generating total disinterest in protecting or preserving Kloots, even when the whole issue at hand was protecting others from COVID-19. What are we to do? The example represents us today, so there is no chance that we can dismiss civil wars and their atrocities and other popularly endorsed travesties of justice as products of a different time or place or as the result of an overwhelming set of possible causes and influences.

Schmidtz also points out with this case that policy design must be mindful of biases in our psychologies. His case of outrage over the pursuit of a vaccine lets us dwell on far simpler truths about us:

> (1) First, we cannot assume consensus about even the most basic or essential things. Schmidtz writes that "people do not even agree on the point of getting in line" for vaccines (p. 27).
>
> (2) Second, we are vulnerable to suggestions of merited entitlements to the extent that we can overlook the reason, for

> example, for rolling out vaccines to the public in the first place. We easily lose sight of what matters in the end.
>
> (3) Third, our emotional responses are not regular. In this case, we lost sight of any compassion or empathy for someone who had experienced a tragedy.

Taking (1), (2), and (3) together, Schmidtz suggests that we can disconfirm John Rawls's underlying assumptions about us and justice. It is not the case, Schmidtz points out, that in order to have justice, we must recognize that we "share one another's fate,"[18] as (1), (2), and (3) regularly interfere with anything like that (p. 26).

It seems that one of our psychological temptations is to see others as taking a piece of our pie, even if that is, just in theory, a matter of someone else jumping a line we are not yet in. We are so sensitive to fairness that we can have harsh reactions nearly immediately, on the basis of just-generated, tentative proposals concerning goods (such as vaccines) that are by design helpful to others. Justice must operate for humans with these proclivities and function more like "traffic management" (Chapter 3) for these easily angered drivers. We cannot envision idealized people and what they might support. In the central portion of *Living Together* (Chapters 9–12), Schmidtz carefully walks us through why ideal theories of justice fail; his reasoning is clear and I support it.

There are many challenges to real-world justice that we can glean from outrage over the leftover vaccine case. If we are accurately described as not capable of seeing someone's improved circumstances as a positive thing, as if their fate is tied to ours, then what are we to do? Should we reconsider that justice is merely an ideal to talk about but never instantiate, since we lack its basic building blocks? Should we let these drivers drive, with their unjustified takes on a situation, motivated by the gratifying identification and targeting of some new member of an out-group? How can we drive alongside these swirling interests? Defensively.

Schmidtz says that we are not to take on directly the outraged people's views. He asks us not to hold out for the satisfaction of walking into this situation before deeming one "side" moral and the other immoral. That impulse is an overly philosophical one that assumes too much about the role of argument. We *could* be charitable

[18] Schmidtz here is citing John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 102.

to concerns about line-jumping and the benefits of norm-preservation in a crisis and we *could*, even on those grounds, demonstrate using argument that the outrage was overblown and unmerited. But so what?

This much is clear. It is not practical to point out how wrong outraged people are, because there is no way to be convincing to them. No one is listening or watching and there is no way even to envision something like that. Arguing with others to motivate them to become more empathetic or just is a nonstarter. Schmidtz rejects Platonic proposals about how justice can come about only once we improve people's outlooks and help them to see justice through reasoning.

What is left for philosophers and moralists to do, when it comes to justice? Schmidtz's answer is to recognize it as something other than winning an argument. Justice is what happens when we leave the outraged-over-the-vaccine-use public to their views, working around and with them. Justice, Schmidtz argues, is "traffic management," not a purity test or ethics training. Those lacking empathy or long-term thinking about vaccine prioritization need to be factored as much as anyone else into the traffic. We do not want them to take up arms, fight us, or burn down hospitals; we want to get along with them peacefully. Justice, on Schmidtz's account, is not about our own outlooks, but instead, is about how well we might coordinate despite these different outlooks. It depends on a very particular and unusual notion of what humanity is: "Justice at its most ideal is traffic management among people who see the humanity in each other" (p. 27).

We will below puzzle over what seeing humanity in each other requires. But first, what do we get from recognizing that justice is like traffic management of people who do *not* see themselves in our shoes? We get encouraged to tolerate a weird, disturbing lack of empathy and—better yet—prepare for it. Our policies can exacerbate or lessen our tendencies to be callous toward each other's lives, to see each gain as zero-sum. Throughout *Living Together*, Schmidtz applauds market systems for being an effective way to reduce these tendencies and to encourage a focus on what might make others' lives better through commerce. He also sees Smith as having discovered that markets can have this general influence, though with some costs.

6. Schmidtz on Morality

There are four basic components to the moral psychology Schmidtz advances:

(a) an internal terrain of integrity,

(b) an internal terrain of self-esteem,

(c) an external terrain of political compromise, and

(d) wanting to be respected by others.

Although he does not describe his view as such, I regard it as an extension and thorough defense of normative individualism. This is, in effect, an argument that Schmidtz's account of morality is less descriptive and more normative than it might seem. Individualism is held up as something not only to respect in others, but also as a commitment to ourselves that improves our own lives.

Alexis de Tocqueville is likely the first person to use the term 'individualism' in print (around 1835); however, his definitions are a bit befuddling and—as Schmidtz makes clear from the outset—we are certainly not, and not designed to be, solitary and self-sufficient.[19] Schmidtz, instead, frames his project in terms of how crucial it is to recognize that we are not solitary and at all times stand in need of the countless others who generate commercial systems for us—just as Smith points out. In other words, Schmidtz sees us as market creatures.

As noted above, in contrast, Smith sees us as bound to change for good *and* ill due to commercial society. Schmidtz does not see us as thriving, though, without recognizing the justification for markets. It was when he engaged with economists over methodology that he noticed that we humans adapt to our social environment and that, for it to function, we need to respect rights to free trade.

One might consider Schmidtz's view individualist because, unlike Adam Smith, Schmidtz sees our nature as unchanging through various social phenomena. Another reason concerns Schmidtz's emphasis on the way in which we access the good of markets. Markets could be defended by appeals to how they promote social harmony and general welfare, but Schmidtz does not, like Vernon Smith, talk of the rationality of markets. Vernon Smith emphasizes how we agents might hardly be aware of the influence of others' bets at, for example, the

[19] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. James Schleifer, ed. Eduardo Nolla (1835; repr., Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2012), vol. 2, II.2. See also, "individualism," in *An American Dictionary of the English Language, Revised Edition with an Appendix, Containing All the Additional Words in the Last Edition of the Larger Work* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1846).

racetrack, yet this influences our individual decisions on what to bet.[20] We gain a type of extra-personal "ecological" rationality due to how markets provide us with information about choices also made by others. This "swept along" phenomenon is at odds with how Schmidtz describes us as developing our agency. I think that he can accommodate it, but our being affected by social examples we hardly recognize is not his focus in the justification of markets or in his account of justice or morality. Instead, contemporary individualism is germane to appreciating what our agency requires us to recognize about the rights of others.

If we reconsider rights as the "right to say no" and how meaningful that renders what would otherwise be "mere liberties" (pp. 141–42), we can recognize that we need an account of moral psychology to fill out this explanation. The requisite moral psychology will have to be individualist, in the sense that Schmidtz's is, regarding us as self-interested self-creators. It has us reckoning with reasons rather than the more complicated architecture of norms. This angle explains why Schmidtz finds markets liberating, as they are a way to acknowledge that others are individuals, too, with a moral psychology that responds well to being respected as a self-choosing, self-generated agent. Rights to free trade benefit us not just because of social outcomes, but also because those rights provide a setting of freedom that reflects our need for mutual respect, achieving our ambitions, and developing agency. The market is a check, too, on the worse impulses we have, namely, treating others as pawns in our own games and imposing our visions on others in a way that fails to respect their freedom and agency.

Individualism, in its way, is an account that recognizes a lot of similarity in us all. However, Schmidtz's commitment to individualism means that what we might focus on is how we are similarly self-driven and self-creative rather than similar in holding certain beliefs to be true or norms to be worth following.

Another reason to consider Schmidtz's approach to be fundamentally individualistic is that the shared beliefs and norms we hold—in markets or elsewhere—are not bedrock or justificatory supports for him. What plays this role is, instead, the idea that such beliefs and norms might be chosen, a result of our drive for self-

[20] See, e.g., Vernon Smith, "Constructivist and Ecological Rationality in Economics," Nobel Prize Lecture, December 8, 2002, *Nobel Prize*, accessed online at: https://www.nobelprize.org/uploads/2017/05/vernon-smith-lecture.pdf.

creation and gratifying our inner lives. Although Schmidtz explains that he is committed to asking and answering the question "How to live?" only after we get some sense of what is required to live together, after having discovered some of what is required to live together, he can then make use of some ideas about how we ought to self-develop.

7. Norms-Based Virtue Ethics[21]

I end with one way to fit Schmidtz's recommendations for the development and fulfillment of our agency and psychology with virtue ethics. I have three reasons why we would want this option. First, there is some room for interpretation of the categories Schmidtz offers in terms of moral psychology. Respect for ourselves is a very open notion and we are left to fill this out as we might. It can be surprising to find out what people can live with—as their understanding and goal—and yet they do. Juliet Schor describes finding, despite her previous skepticism, that some people live with a goal of making money.[22] They believe they need to outearn others and obtain wealth; for them, that is what they find to be a fulfilling goal and mission. Not all of us could maintain this, but we might be open to the idea that some of us could. Others of us live with a goal of staying intoxicated or something like feeling superior to a few friends. There are many possibilities when it comes to what we live for.

What is lost if we seriously consider these counterexamples to Schmidtzian moral psychology is the idea that we will all see what to choose and then, on our own steam, choose well. We need not jettison Schmidtz's individualism, as he can hold up developed agency and self-respect as ideals to which we might aspire, some might achieve, and might bring obvious internal psychological benefits. But we should have an error theory, an explanation for why an individual left free to make her own choices gets swayed to choose poorly so often.

Second, we might want to bring in a virtue ethics because it enables us to be as normative as we would like about individuals' choices as well as what counts as a choice. This directly takes on those outraged about the widow getting a leftover vaccine, but this can be done mindful of everything Schmidtz recommends when it comes to allowing people freedom to choose.

And yet, we might need more material with which to work than individualism offers us, if we want to weigh in on what is right

[21] Lawrence Becker, *A New Stoicism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[22] See, e.g., Juliet Schor, *Born to Buy* (New York: Scribner, 2004).

and wrong in a case like that. If we look to and identify norms, such as market norms, we have access to an explanation of how we act on norms when we believe that most others will act on them. Jerry Gaus critiques McCloskey's explanation of the rise of markets by suggesting that she, too, should look to norms as an explanation of personal and collective behavior.[23] Norm-level explanations can show that "trendsetters" are involved in bringing about better social conditions. They can also reveal the reasoning process by which the majority of us—that is, the nonvanguard—abide by social norms with which we do not necessarily identify, providing the room necessary for explaining collective changes (or commonality) in attitudes and behavior.[24]

Virtue ethics can look, even further, into how we individually engage in practical reason with the norms we have. By combining an ability to look into how we and others reason with norms as the content on which we focus, we are given tremendous flexibility in both explaining how we lose our empathy and in how differently we might develop. Virtue ethics can account more easily than individualism for how often we can get swept away by the influence of our environs. We might be convinced enough to participate in market society without, on our own, recognizing the reasons why it, in theory, respects innovation and social harmony. Must we identify these values with reasons, in a unique or authentic way all on our own, with our own aims and our own self-respect in mind? Or can we, in a rough-and-ready manner, be satisfied enough with the way things are going?

Third, there is space for failure, even within the plan of life that Schmidtz sketches. We may live our values and get ostracized as Socrates did. Such a possibility exists and we may want to accommodate it in our descriptions of how life goes.

[23] Gerald Gaus, "The Open Society as a Rule-Based Order," *Erasmus Journal for Philosophy and Economics* 9, no. 2 (2016): pp. 1–13.

[24] Cristina Bicchieri, *The Grammar of Society*: *The Nature and Dynamics of Social Norms* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 201–5.