

Accountability, Autism and Friendship with God

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journals.sagepub.com/home/sce**Joanna Leidenhag**

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Abstract

David Shoemaker has argued that autistic persons cannot be held accountable and are not members of the moral community. Arguing against this conclusion, this article both corrects the view of autism contained in Shoemaker's paper and resituates his theory of accountability within a Christian virtue ethic based on the gift of friendship. The call to be accountable to God for one's life contains within it the gift of God's friendship and does not require the capacity for empathy (*contra* Shoemaker) or joint attention (*contra* Pinsent) as a prerequisite. Instead, the inclusion of autistic people within the moral community created by the call of God highlights that accountability is a grace given for the flourishing of all persons.

Keywords

accountability, autism, empathy, friendship, Shoemaker, virtue

Introduction

Accountability is a concept currently more associated with discourse in business and management than with Christian ethics. Oftentimes, accountability is referred to in a way that makes it seem entirely synonymous with responsibility, with a particular concern for dishing out due punishment. David Shoemaker has given a slightly more nuanced account of the relationship between accountability and responsibility through his analysis of marginally responsible human agents, or agents to whom one might feel moral ambivalence. Shoemaker's analysis includes an argument for why autistic persons should not be considered accountable and, thus, not be considered members of a moral community.

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In this article, I want to reject Shoemaker's exclusion of autistic persons from the moral community by relocating accountability within Christian virtue ethics. One advantage of viewing accountability in the wider scope of virtue ethics is that it allows Christians to consider themselves accountable to God for their lives as a whole and enables further reflection upon how we might actively cultivate and excel at being accountable. This reorients the notion of accountability, such that it is not exhaustively to do with the question of responsibility and punishment, but also the question of human flourishing and Christian identity. I argue that accountability is a polyvalent concept within virtue ethics that can be described as the necessary relational context for the development of virtue, itself a kind of virtue, and a gift of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, as with other virtues, accountability is ordered towards friendship, and ultimately friendship with God.

However, moving accountability into the broad field of virtue discourse does not by itself ensure the inclusion of autistic people within the moral community. Andrew Pinsent's work on second-personalism in Aquinas's virtue ethics provides an example of how Christian virtue ethics can exclude autistic people in a parallel way to Shoemaker's account. The commonality between Shoemaker and Pinsent that I seek to critique is not just the exclusion of autistic people, but the prerequisite of a communicable similarity between agents that undergirds this exclusion. By contrast, when it is taken for granted that autistic persons can be friends with God and held accountable by God for their lives, then what attention to autism reveals about the nature of accountability for all is its basis in the call of God, or the one who holds to account, as an act of grace which creates (rather than requires the pre-existence of) a moral community of accountable agents.

This article will first outline Shoemaker's view in more detail, highlighting problems in its depiction of autism and, more promisingly, its openness to correction via virtue ethics. Second, I explore the place of accountability in virtue ethics, with special attention to the connection between accountability and friendship in both Aristotle and Augustine. Third, I show that the same exclusion of autistic people from the life of virtue remains a threat. It is concluded that accountability, and the friendship that it is oriented towards, is established by grace, received as the call of God on all human lives.

David Shoemaker's Accountability from the Margins

Following P. T. Strawson's 'Freedom and Resentment', Shoemaker seeks to build a theory of human responsibility from the reactive moral sentiments that we feel in response to the 'quality of will' that we perceive another person to have towards us.¹ For example, if someone stamps on my foot and I interpret this as a sign that they bear an ill-will towards me and want to hurt me, I may have the reactive attitude of resentment. However, this theory also claims to explain cases where the same action does not lead to resentment, such as when the foot-stomping was an accident (excusable circumstances) or when the foot-stomper doesn't understand that this may cause you pain (excusable agent), as in the case of small children or those labelled disabled. In these cases, the action, although still painful, does not indicate ill-will and therefore does not provoke the

1. David Shoemaker, *Responsibility from the Margins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 6–10, 89.

reaction of resentment. But as Gary Watson has argued, ‘A child can be malicious, a psychotic can be hostile, a sociopath indifferent, a person under great strain can be rude, a woman or man “unfortunate in formative circumstances” can be cruel’.² How can Strawson’s quality-of-will approach to responsibility cope with such realities? Shoemaker answers Watson’s challenge by arguing that there is a range of reactive moral sentiments that we can feel, which indicate that responsibility can be something of a mixed bag; a person can be responsible in some ways and not others.

In order to account adequately for more marginal cases of responsibility, Shoemaker develops a pluralistic model of three independent *qualities* of will: attributability, answerability, and accountability. Shoemaker creates this triad of responsibility from different kinds of moral sentiments provoked in others and the requisite capacities necessary to hold a person responsible in this way. Attributability (admiration and disdain) concerns the extent to which a person’s actions can be attributed to their cares, commitments and character. Answerability (pride and regret) concerns evaluation of a person’s judgement. Accountability, the focus of this article, provokes responses of anger or gratitude and requires that agents have the capacity to regard another as having normative standing, to evaluate their feelings as morally significant and to accurately empathise with them. Accountability, according to Shoemaker, concerns quality of regard.³ Agents such as psychopaths, who Shoemaker argues cannot adopt a posture of evaluative regard (for themselves or for others) or autistic people who (again, according to Shoemaker) cannot adopt the posture of empathetic regard with another (‘identifying empathy’), cannot be held accountable for their actions, although they might be held attributable and answerable.⁴

For Shoemaker, accountability (rather than attributability or answerability) is what determines the bounds of moral community.⁵ This is because only accountable agents are susceptible to the moral demands that participants in a moral community place upon one another in holding and being held to account.⁶ Shoemaker argues that accountability operates through a kind of emotional address to one another, whereby I hold another person to account by communicating my feelings of anger or gratitude to them. Accountability is intrinsically second-personal, or something that (unlike attributability or answerability) denotes a relational context between suitably similar agents. In particular, being accountable for Shoemaker requires accurate instances of empathy; that a person be able to accurately recognise distress, understand what it is like for the injured party, and feel what the injured party feels.⁷

2. Gary Watson, *Agency and Answerability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 228.

3. Shoemaker, *Responsibility*, p. 113.

4. Shoemaker, *Responsibility*, p. 166–72.

5. David Shoemaker, ‘Responsibility, Agency, and Cognitive Disability’, in Eva Feder Kittay and Licia Carlson (eds.), *Cognitive Disability and its Challenge to Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 210.

6. Shoemaker, ‘Responsibility, Agency, and Cognitive Disability’, pp. 210–11.

7. Stephen Darwall similarly defines accountability as acting for ‘second-personal reasons’, that is, reasons that flow from the status of the person providing them and one’s relationship to them. Shoemaker sees Darwall’s second-personal reasons as corresponding to his ‘evaluative empathy’. Shoemaker, *Responsibility*, p. 100 n. 16; Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Personal Standpoint* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 43–48.

Correcting Shoemaker's Account of Autism

Perhaps the quickest way to counter Shoemaker's conclusion that autistic people cannot be held accountable or included in the human moral community is by giving a more balanced and up-to-date summary of autism research. After all, to label someone autistic is only to claim that their behaviour matches a (mutable) set of characteristics listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (or equivalent).⁸ There are a large number of theories about what causes this behaviour and why these apparently unconnected set of characteristics are found together (if indeed they are), none of which is yet fully successful.⁹

Shoemaker bases his analysis entirely on R. Peter Hobson's work, which is already a philosophical extrapolation of the Theory of Mind thesis for autism.¹⁰ Theory of Mind specifies the ability to recognise other people as conscious agents with mental lives of their own, rather than as objects or extensions of one's self. The idea that autistic people have an impaired Theory of Mind and cannot attribute mental states to others as Shoemaker/Hobson suppose, has been popular since the mid-1980s and enjoyed a good amount of predictive success in the 1990s where it was linked with other abilities such as imaginative play and empathy.¹¹ However, it has come under increasing criticism more recently and psychologists now acknowledge that it cannot alone provide an explanation for autism.¹²

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8. American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th edn (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013).
 9. In lieu of the failure of many otherwise promising theories to account for the full range of autistic characteristics, several prominent researchers are now pursuing a 'fractured triad' approach, which seeks to explain each set of diagnostic characteristics independently. Francesca Happé and A. Ronald, 'The "Fractionable Autism Triad": A Review of Evidence from Behavioural, Genetic, Cognitive, and Neural Research', *Neuropsychology Review* 18.4 (2008), pp. 287–304; Francesca Happé et al., 'Time to Give up on a Single Explanation for Autism', *Nature Neuroscience* 9.10 (2006), p. 1218.
 10. As I have argued elsewhere, there is a distinctly theological heritage to Hobson's work here, which draws explicitly from John Macmurray's Gifford Lectures and Martin Buber's I-Thou account of relations to argue that empathy and mentalising are not only important for human flourishing but a prerequisite for personhood. R. Peter Hobson, 'The Emotional Origins of Social Understanding', *Philosophical Psychology* 6.3 (1993), pp. 227–49; Joanna Leidenhag, 'The Challenge of Autism for Contemporary Theological Anthropology', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijst.12453>
 11. I have explored the relationship between the Theory of Mind hypothesis for autism, mirror neurons and theology in Joanna Leidenhag, 'Does the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit Require a Neurotypical Brain?', *Theological Puzzles*, Is. 2, 2021 (<https://www.theo-puzzles.ac.uk/2021/02/23/jleide>).
 12. The study to first apply the Theory of Mind concept (developed in primatology) to autism via false-belief tests was Simon Baron-Cohen, Alan Leslie and Uta Frith, 'Does the Autistic Child Have a "Theory of Mind"?', *Cognition* 21.1 (1985), pp. 37–46. This study compared autistic children with Down Syndrome children in order to specify what distinguishes autism from other intellectual differences. However, it was quickly recognised that deaf children and adolescents with intellectual disabilities but not autism fail false-belief tests at roughly the same frequency as autistic children through the same stages of development. C. C. Peterson and M. Siegal, 'Deafness,

Importantly, several studies have more recently suggested that neurotypical individuals have as much difficulty identifying the emotions and empathising with autistic persons as is the case vice versa, and that autistic people empathise or ‘read’ one another with as much ease as neurotypicals do.¹³ If attitudes of accountability come more easily *within* these two separate groups, but neither is impaired or unable to be morally accountable, then it seems that what is needed is the gift of holding each other, mutually, to account and thereby bridging the divide.

By adolescence, autistic people pass false-belief tests, that are meant to indicate a functional Theory of Mind, just as often as control groups. This suggests that even if partially correct the Theory of Mind thesis cannot be used to posit a wide, permanent or uncrossable divide between autistic and non-autistic communities. Moreover, non-autistic control groups often only pass the false-belief tests 50 per cent of the time.¹⁴ This brings us back to Shoemaker. We might ask whether recognising another person’s experience as normative, accurately interpreting their feelings at any given moment, *and* having a confluence of feeling with them as a result, is something that neurotypical humans do on a sufficiently regular basis to consider anyone an accountable agent? There are obvious cases of both wilful and learnt disregard for another person’s (or an identified group’s) experience. Even between spouses or the closest of friends, there are often instances of misinterpretation or impenetrability of the other’s feelings.¹⁵ As Deborah Barnbaum writes, ‘If the requirement for moral agency is that others are moved to feel what we feel when we feel

Conversation and Theory of Mind’, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 36.3 (1995), pp. 459–74; L. Abbeduto et al., ‘Relationship between Theory of Mind and Language Ability in Children and Adolescents with Intellectual Disability’, *Journal of Intellectual Disability* 48.2 (2004), pp. 150–59. Moreover, autobiographical reports from autistic people indicate that there may be factors completely unrelated to Theory of Mind that explain why autistic children fail these tests, such as chronic overstimulation. See Nick Pentzell, ‘I Think, Therefore I Am. I Am Verbal, Therefore I Live’, in Jami L. Anderson and Simon Cushing (eds.), *The Philosophy of Autism* (Plymouth: Rowan & Littlefield, 2013), p. 105. Some studies suggest that when the psychologist conducting the experiment is themselves autistic, then the autistic participants do better than control groups, suggesting that factors such as ‘in-group’/‘out-group’ status could be effecting the outcomes of these tests, and that autistic social cognition is different, rather than impaired. Sue Fletcher-Watson and Francesca Happé, *Autism: A New Introduction to Psychological Theory and Current Debate* (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 97, 111.

13. E. Sheppard et al., ‘How Easy is it to Read the Minds of People with Autism Spectrum Disorder?’ *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 46 (2016), pp. 1247–54; R. Brewer et al., ‘Can Neurotypical Individuals Read Autistic Facial Expressions? Atypical Production of Emotional Facial Expressions in Autism Spectrum Disorders’, *Autism Research* 9 (2016), pp. 262–71; H. Komeda et al., ‘Autistic Empathy toward Autistic Others’, *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* 10 (2015), pp. 145–52.
14. M. A. Gernsbacher and J. Frymiare, ‘Does the Autistic Brain Lack Core Modules?’ *Journal of Developmental Processes* 1 (2005), pp. 5–6; Sander Begeer et al., ‘Using Theory of Mind to Represent and Take Part in Social Interactions: Comparing Individuals with High-Functioning Autism and Typically Developing Controls’, *European Journal of Developmental Psychology* 7.1 (2010), pp. 104–22.
15. I am grateful to Robyn Boéré for this point. Anne Stubblefield writes, ‘Empathy is not a quality that we either have by birthright or lack as an impairment. It is a skill we learn’. This again

it, the bar may be too high for autistic and non-autistic people alike'.¹⁶ How much empathy is required for accountability? How often is it required? Shoemaker does not say. For both non-autistic and autistic people, a failure in spontaneous empathy is straightforwardly (although not always easily) overcome by more explicit communication. I see no reason why explicit communication should not satisfy Shoemaker's theory of accountability for both autistic and non-autistic persons.¹⁷

If this article were to stop here, we would have successfully corrected the exclusion of autistic people from the moral community, but not questioned more deeply the requisite of communicable similarity of feeling that lies at the heart of his theory of accountability. We can push further than this to ask what autism highlights about the nature of accountability that may otherwise be hard to see. To do this, I will explore the similarities between Shoemaker's accountability and virtue ethics, before offering a constructive analysis of the place of accountability in virtue ethics in the next section.

Shoemaker's Account and Virtue Theory

Shoemaker notes that whilst he has focused on the accountability response of agential anger, its 'wider scope may be a *virtue*, as it may reveal the contours of a type of responsibility for which the blameworthy is only a part'.¹⁸ The wider scope that Shoemaker hints at here seems to be the ability for accountability (and the agential anger and gratitude that Shoemaker identifies as its emotional markers) to not only regulate, but to 'generate and preserve the moral community'.¹⁹ Being held to account not only indicates that a person is already included in a moral community, but is a way of actively including those who have been wrongfully excluded or marginalised. Furthermore, this 'wide scope' of accountability may, upon closer examination, prove to be wider than the scope of responsibility.²⁰ So, rather than viewing accountability as one aspect of responsibility, we can view responsibility as one aspect of accountability.²¹

brings empathy, and its relation to accountability, into the field of virtue. Anna Stubblefield, 'Knowing Other Minds: Ethics and Autism', in Jami L. Anderson and Simon Cushing (eds.), *The Philosophy of Autism* (Plymouth: Rowan & Littlefield, 2013), p. 161.

16. Deborah R. Barnbaum, *The Ethics of Autism: Among Them, but Not of Them* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), p. 98. Barnbaum's book is a thorough examination of the ethical implications of the Theory of Mind thesis for autism. Although she critiques philosophies that place autism entirely outside of the moral community, her commitment to the Theory of Mind thesis still leads her to conclude that autistic persons can only be considered moral patients, as animals and infants are, and not moral agents.
17. Shoemaker seems to have accounted for this explicit form of 'identifying empathy' in an earlier article, but he does not discuss this in his later monograph where he developed his theory of accountability. David Shoemaker, 'Moral Address, Moral Responsibility, and the Boundaries of the Moral Community', *Ethics* 118.1 (2007), pp. 70–108.
18. Shoemaker, *Responsibility*, p. 91; emphasis added.
19. Shoemaker, *Responsibility*, pp. 109–10.
20. I am grateful to Robyn Boéré for this point.
21. The benefit of Shoemaker's model of responsibility is that it attempts to protect persons with various cognitive impairments from facing the full brunt of the law or punishment. This is

It is unclear if Shoemaker intended to imply that accountability could be a ‘virtue’ in the sense explored in this special issue, rather than merely suggesting that it has wider benefits beyond adjudicating punishment or sanctions. However, there is clear overlap between his theory of accountability and virtue ethics. As with Aristotle’s virtue ethics more generally, Shoemaker’s theory of accountability relies on a more fundamental psychological similarity between agents. The similarity between agents is not found merely in the potential to be virtuous or held accountable, but in specific confluence of feelings. Similarly, in virtue ethics, it is not merely enough to do the right thing in the right way; one must also do it for the right reasons or with the right desire. As Aristotle says regarding anger, which is the emotional marker for accountability for Shoemaker, it is a virtue to get angry in the right way, toward the right people, to the right extent at the right time, and for the right reasons.²²

Shoemaker’s account contains hints as to how and why accountability might be best located within virtue ethics: (1) he hints towards viewing accountability as a wider orientation towards flourishing (rather than merely an aspect of responsibility), (2) and by adding right feeling to right action and right motivation he draws accountability more in line with virtue discourse. However, virtue ethics does not necessarily demand that this right disposition or feeling is achieved through empathy. This is important if we are not only to move beyond exclusions of autism that are based on the (widely discredited) claim that autistic people can’t empathise with others, but also to give a more stable basis for interhuman accountability and the Christian claim that we see ourselves as being held accountable by the personal God, revealed in Jesus Christ.

Locating Accountability within Virtue Ethics

Virtues are dispositions to perform specific practices and activities in the right way, for the right reason, and for the right end. Therefore, to locate accountability within virtue discourse we need to identify the type of practices that manifest or constitute a relationship of accountability and which aid the development of a virtuous character. Within the Christian life, I suggest that (1) practices such as confession (which is largely retrospective), (2) personal surrender and submission to God in the present, and (3) discernment of and orientation to the will of God for the future, constitute the kinds of practices and habits that undergird accountability. Naturally, there are various virtues that sustain these practices and enable participants to obtain the goods internal to these practices. For example, being an excellent accountee (person held to account) might include virtues such as humility, honesty and courage. The virtues of an excellent accounter (one who holds others to account) will likely include mercy, patience, justice and wisdom.

important and I am not objecting to this goal. However, it is a step too far to say that autistic persons cannot then participate in the moral community. If participation in the moral community and accountability go together, which I think they do, then individual moral responsibility should only be one aspect of accountability.

22. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1985), 1109a27.

Insofar as there is a rich network of virtues required to perform the practices of accountability, we might refer to this combined grouping of dispositions under the heading of ‘accountability’.²³ For the accountee, the virtue of accountability can be practised in a wide variety of contexts where a person joyfully submits to legitimate authorities in their life and gleans the benefits of such submission whether this be correction and reprimand, praise and reward, or direction and guidance. To practise various kinds of actions with the virtue of accountability, or perhaps accountably, is to do so with cognisance and grateful receptivity to the accountee’s judgement of one’s actions and life.²⁴

Accountability and Friendship

In classical virtue theory, the closest parallel to accountability seems to be friendship. Like accountability, friendship is both a relational context necessary for the development of virtue and can be described as a virtue in and of itself.²⁵ True friendship is a virtue because it is the delight in a habit of reciprocal love for the sake of the good of the other, and which is ordered towards mutual happiness.²⁶ If we accept that friendship can be both a relationship and a virtue then there is no reason in principle that accountability could not be described in both these ways as well. However, friendship does more than provide a useful structural parallel to how accountability can function in virtue ethics as both a relationship and a virtue. I want to suggest that, as with all the virtues, friendship is the *telos* of accountability.

The easiest way to see this is to view accountability as a form of justice that marks the boundaries of moral communities. Accountability is just in the sense of giving to others what they are owed, including to those with the right authority to say who the accountee should be with regard to a specific project.²⁷ Aristotle clearly outlines how justice is a necessary ingredient of, and perhaps even co-extensive with, friendship and moral community: ‘the extent of their community is the extent of their friendship, since it is also the extent of the justice found there’.²⁸ Justice, for Aristotle, is the first building block and is

23. Rather than over-determining the virtues, Julia Annas argues that we can decide if something is a virtue (rather than merely an admirable trait) by evaluating whether one could acquire the uncontroversial virtues without also having the disputed virtue. According to Annas’s ‘filter test’ then, the fact that one cannot have the uncontroversial virtues, such as being humble, just or loving, without also embracing accountability to God, only speaks for the validity of accountability as a virtue. However, I also do not think we need to be overly dogmatic about the labelling of virtues. It may be that all the virtuous aspects of accountability can be exhaustively labelled in other ways, without remainder, but that to refer to this group as ‘accountability’ is merely a helpful shorthand. Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 88.

24. In this sense, the virtue of accountability might be counted among Alasdair MacIntyre’s ‘virtues of acknowledged dependence’. See his *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (London: Duckworth, 1999), pp. 119–28.

25. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155a3–5.

26. Paul Schollmeier, *Other Selves: Aristotle on Personal and Political Friendship* (New York: SUNY Press, 1994), pp. 42–47.

27. See Brendan Case’s article in this special issue.

28. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1159b30, cf. 1160a8. Aristotle writes, ‘friendship and justice seem to concern the same things and to be between the same people’ (8.9.1159b25–29); ‘where there is little justice there is little friendship’ (8.11.1161a30–31).

‘a mark of friendship’.²⁹ As a result, Aristotle argues that ‘friendship holds cities together’ and friendship is the aim of the law.³⁰ Aquinas takes on this idea when he argues that the law, which is a mechanism for holding others to account within larger moral communities, is a means of establishing friendship with other humans and with God.³¹

Perhaps a good way to show the importance of accountability for friendship is to consider apparent friendships that lack accountability and turn out not to be friendships at all. Few thinkers have given problematic friendships more vivid treatment than Saint Augustine. Reflecting in book 4 of the *Confessions* on the earlier incident with the pears, Augustine remarks upon the dangers of the ‘unfriendly form of friendship’ that in failing to hold each other accountable for their behaviour, instead revels together in the very perversity of sin.³²

After the death of his close friend as a young man, Augustine reveals that he was ‘not then my friend, nor, indeed, afterwards, as true friendship is’, because Augustine failed to love his friend as a genuine other standing before God. Through his description of how it had felt as if ‘my soul and his had been but one soul in two bodies’, Augustine critiques Ovid’s famous description of friends as an ‘other self’ as an unhealthy form of co-dependency and narcissism.³³ This friendship of Augustine’s youth would seem to exemplify the ancient ideal of friendship, as involving two equal, young free men of good education and leisure. Yet it is the very reliance on similarity for friendship that Augustine problematises as a merging of identity such that the other is not loved for their own sake, but for Augustine’s sake as a reflection of himself. Augustine is overcome by jealousy, fear of loss, and even plans to manipulate his friend after discovering his genuine conversion to Christianity. Augustine could no longer ‘deal with him as I wished’ or dictate who the friend should be and what he should believe, for the friend admonished Augustine for mocking Christianity with ‘a remarkable and unexpected freedom’.³⁴ Augustine seems to suggest that his friend’s conversion introduced true accountability into the friendship for the first time.

29. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 9.4.1166a2-4.

30. Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, trans. Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7.123b23-25. Aristotle’s idea of friendship is a far more expansive category than our contemporary usage of the term, which includes almost any mutually beneficial relationship (e.g., parents and children, rulers and their subjects, businessmen and clients, doctors and patients, as well as between comrades). We normally confine accountability to the political sphere and friendship to the personal sphere. I am unconvinced that such boundaries between political and personal life can be maintained and seek in this article to consider accountability and friendship as both personal and political.

31. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [ST], trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1911), I.II, q.99, a.1 & 2.

32. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4.4.7. The ‘incident with the pears’ refers to an episode in *Conf.* 2.9-18 where Augustine tells us that as an adolescent he and a group of friends stole pears from a neighbour’s garden, not to eat or give to another (they in fact threw the pears away) but purely for the joy of sinning. Augustine comments repeatedly that ‘alone I would never had done it’ (*Conf.* 2.8.16) and concludes that ‘friendship can be a dangerous enemy, a seduction of the mind’. Augustine, *Conf.* 2.9.17.

33. Augustine *Conf.* 4.4.7; 4.6.11. The description of friends as ‘other selves’ is famously affirmed in Aristotle’s account, such that it masks the dependency of the virtuous person upon another, that Augustine simultaneously highlights and problematises as a kind of idolatry.

34. Augustine, *Conf.* 4.4.8.

Augustine's solution to this problem is to be accountable to God for the friendship itself, thereby making accountability and friendship triadic affairs.³⁵ As Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches have written, 'Christians must not only see friends as gifts to one another, they must see their friendship itself as a gift. They can do this precisely because *they understand themselves to be actors within a story authored not by them but by God*'.³⁶ To understand oneself as not the author of one's own life is to be accountable to another for your identity. Since accountability is ordered towards friendship, being accountable to God makes friendship with God the means by which Augustine can then have rightly ordered and accountable friendships with other humans. Augustine then situates interhuman friendships within a wider ethical horizon of signification and meaning of accountability to God.³⁷ Whilst perhaps still imperfect, Augustine comes closest to this in his friendship with his mother. Augustine speaks of their closeness as 'one life woven out of mine and hers', thereby maintaining two distinct people who stand in their own relationships of accountability to God first, and to each other second as God gives them to one another.³⁸ Their friendship is even based on practices of accountability to God for one another, including Monica's prayers for Augustine's conversion and as he recites her sins for the reader not in blame or contempt, but to present her first and foremost as a person standing before God.

To view accountability as a virtue and aspect of friendship is to widen the purpose of accountability beyond the scope of responsibility and punishment and towards a fuller account of human flourishing. This link between accountability and friendship also emphasises a perhaps sterner side to Christian accounts of friendship than is often discussed. This harder side of friendship is perhaps best exemplified in John 15, where Jesus links obedience to friendship: 'You are my friends if you do what I command' (v. 14). What Jesus commands is clearly specified, 'Love each other' (vv. 12, 17). We are accountable to God for our friendships because *philia* is 'a task we have been given'.³⁹ The call to friendship, a call that is completed in the perfect tense ('I have called you friends', v. 15), is simultaneously a call to be held to account. This gives both friendship and accountability a gifted, or graced, quality. To be declared a friend of God is to be held to account, and to be held to account by God is to be invited to grow in God's friendship.

A Potential Obstacle: Andrew Pinsent and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Above, I noted that, for Shoemaker, accountability requires a specific kind of shared psychological capacity, which, according to Peter Hobson, autistic people do not share with neurotypical people and which I suspect humans do not share with God. It is not

35. Augustine, *Conf.* 4.4.7, 4.6.14.

36. Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, *Christians Among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancients and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1997), p. 49.

37. Richard B. Miller, 'Evil, Friendship and Iconic Realism in Augustine's *Confessions*', *Harvard Theological Review* 104.4 (2011), p. 405.

38. Augustine, *Conf.* 9.12.30.

39. Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians Among the Virtues*, p. 49.

immediately obvious that viewing accountability as a virtue alone solves this problem. This is because a similar problem is a well-known feature of Christian virtue ethics. It is famously expressed by Aquinas in the following way:

The virtue of those naturally instilled principles does not extend beyond the capacity of nature. Consequently, humanity needs in addition to be completed by other principles in relation to his supernatural end.⁴⁰

All virtues are ordered towards a specific end. Aquinas is highlighting the problem that our natural capacities do not seem capable of supporting the supernatural end for which humans are created and redeemed, namely friendship with God. The problem of the limit that natural capacities may place on virtues, such that humans are unable to reach their supernatural *telos*, is a parallel problem to the one created by Shoemaker's use of Hobson's theory of autism to suggest that autistic people do not have the necessary psychological capacities to be held accountable for their actions.

Aquinas's solution to this is not only to distinguish between infused virtues and acquired virtues, but also to introduce the category of gifts of the Spirit. Andrew Pinsent has argued that Aquinas's employment of the gifts of the Spirit in his account of the virtues reveals a more fundamental divide between Aristotelian and Thomistic virtue ethics than has previously been acknowledged. For Aristotle, virtues are formed solely by habituation in accordance with one's own practical reason. There is some measure of independence, even if others may be greatly beneficial, in Aristotle's account. By contrast, Pinsent emphasises that Aquinas's virtues are all irreducibly second-personal; they can only be gained in a relationship with God that is ordered towards divine friendship. Although Pinsent never refers to the Spirit's gift of enabling a second-personal relationship with God as accountability, accountability could certainly be seen to be a major feature of the Spirit's work here. Just as Shoemaker describes accountability as the ability to see and feel with and as another person does, Pinsent argues that true virtues can only manifest as a person comes to view an object with God and as God does, thereby merging the human perspective with the divine perspective.⁴¹ Pinsent argues that when Aquinas refers to the gifts of the Spirit, he is speaking of this joint attention with God. It seems exactly right to say that the gifts of the Holy Spirit, who comes to 'convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgement' (Jn 16:8), make accountability with God possible.

However, with respect to dismantling communicable similarity as the foundation of accountability, which tends towards the exclusion of autistic people, we are not out of the woods yet. Unfortunately, Pinsent's account of Thomistic virtues then makes the same move as Shoemaker in drawing on Peter Hobson's theory of autism for further clarification of how this works in neurotypical adults, by contrast to how it does not work for autistic people. As Hobson writes, 'children with autism were not moved to adopt the orientation of the person they were watching', so Pinsent describes the metaphorical 'onset of "spiritual autism"', insofar as . . . the person ceases to be moved by God as by

40. Aquinas, *ST* 1-II, q.63, art.3, rep.obj.3.

41. Andrew Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas Ethics: Virtues and Gifts* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 41–44.

a second person'.⁴² Just as empathy excludes autistic people from the moral community, for Shoemaker, so, arguably, Pinsent excludes autistic people from full friendship with God. For Pinsent, the difference between neurotypical and autistic people regarding the capacity for joint attention 'parallels that of living and lifeless faith', and only those with a living faith are 'ordered towards divine friendship'.⁴³ As such, 'spiritual autism' becomes Pinsent's preferred metaphor for the loss of virtue in moral rebellion.⁴⁴ Whilst Pinsent later clarifies that 'spiritual autism' is both a metaphor and as universal as original sin, the question of whether those with 'physical ASD' are able to be God's friends, accountable to God for their lives, remains worryingly ambiguous.⁴⁵ All that I said above about the reasons we have to doubt the reliability of false-belief tests and to be suspicious of the Theory of Mind hypothesis for autism in relation to Shoemaker, applies to Pinsent's account also. I will not repeat them.

Insofar as Pinsent's account of the gifts of the Spirit retains some role for natural capacities in our potentiality to be 'moved' by God, and thereby our ability to be accountable to God, he seems to undermine the radical nature of the concept of 'gift' and even 'call' in Christian theology. Hans Reinders has argued that the exclusion of people with profound intellectual disabilities from friendship with God is a common pitfall of interpretations of Aquinas's ethics, which view divine friendship as the *telos* of virtue that must correspond to some natural potentiality. Instead, Reinders rightly states that 'A relational account of being human must be grounded in the story of how God in Christ Jesus renews his relationship with every human being'.⁴⁶ This is as true for relationships of accountability as for any other aspect of our relational nature; God says who we are and should be *in Jesus Christ*. This declaration is the necessary context for the development of virtue because it places all humanity in a relationship of accountability, which we can embrace and orient ourselves towards. We might here speak of vicarious accountability, where Jesus is accountable to God on our behalf, such that humanity comes to participate in the accountability between the Father and the Son. The reason accountability to God is good news, rather than a terrifying burden, is because God's final judgement on our lives, and God's account of who we are, has been given in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

42. Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective*, p. 100; see also pp. 47, 49–50.

43. Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective*, pp. 69–70.

44. Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective*, pp. 69–70, 100.

45. Andrew Pinsent, 'Limbo and the Children of *Faerie*', *Faith and Philosophy* 33.3 (2016), pp. 304–305. Here Pinsent states that autistic children are akin to the 'ungraced innocents' in limbo who remain blameless, but 'clearly different from that of the saints' (p. 306). The appeal to metaphor is particularly unconvincing because Pinsent spends significant time emphasising both the metaphorical character of all language, and the importance of choosing the right metaphor as this is the means by which our claims touch down on reality, connect with the lived-experience of physical bodies, and shape the imagination. Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective*, pp. 9–12.

46. Hans Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology, and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 285, 297.

Conclusion

Shoemaker's recent attempt to differentiate accountability from other forms of moral responsibility was the launching pad for this article's examination of how autism might reveal the nature of accountability not by contrast and exclusion, but incorporation and belonging to the moral community. Whilst both Shoemaker and Pinsent can be critiqued for relying so heavily on Hobson's questionable theory of autism, to stop the analysis of their arguments here is insufficient. The recurring problem uncovered in this article is the tendency for theories of accountability, because of their intrinsically second-personal nature, to require a basic communicable similarity between agents. This not only attracts scholars to use Hobson's theory of autism but creates problems for Christian claims that humanity is held accountable by God.

Constructively, this article argued that accountability is best understood as a polyvalent concept within virtue ethics; equally describable as the relational context necessary for the development of other virtues, a virtue itself, and a gift of the Spirit. This expands the meaning of accountability from merely the ability to punish another for their wrongful actions, to a form of human flourishing whereby a person stands 'before another who has authority to judge aspects of who that person is and should be in their role in a shared project'.⁴⁷ The relocation of accountability within virtue ethics drew accountability and friendship together in a new way. I argued that true friendship requires accountability and is the *telos* of accountability. However, the problem of sin and unaccountable friendships, as exemplified in Augustine's *Confessions*, showed that for accountability to function as it should *vis-à-vis* friendship, then Christians must be accountable to God for their human friendships, and indeed their other relationships of accountability. Friendship with God is a gift that flows out of the call of God to be held accountable in and through the vicarious accountability (a concept I did not have time to develop) of Jesus Christ, the one who all human persons should be like and are incorporated into through baptism.⁴⁸

47. Andrew Torrance, 'Accountability as a Virtue', this issue.

48. See Andrew Torrance, 'A Baptismal Theology of Accountability', this issue.