

Overcorrection as a Strategy for Virtue Development

Sabrina Little, assistant professor, Department of Leadership and American Studies at Christopher Newport University

Both Plato and Aristotle make use of an image of warped wood for virtue development. Just as a carpenter straightens warped timber by dragging the timber in the direction that opposes its natural warp, so, too, should we “drag ourselves away in the opposite direction, for by steering wide of our besetting error we shall make a middle course” (Aristotle NE 1109b). Moral virtue is a mean, and we are inclined by nature to different faults. To draw closer to the mean, we can practice the opposing vice, thereby correcting our natural warp. This article assesses the plausibility and empirical adequacy of overcorrection as a strategy for virtue development. It examines what happens internally, when someone acts in terms of an opposing vice, and it explores the possibility that an opposing vice might stick.