Virtue Ethics and *My Sister’s Keeper*

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*My Sister’s Keeper* by Jodi Picoult, presents challenging characters for the reader of virtue ethics. The story provides evidence of characters being callous and unfeeling, and acting as such. It also displays characters that are warm, kind, and virtuous. The distinctions between each type of character and how to mold the idea of virtue within the story can be useful because they challenge the reader’s idea of what is innately moral.

Morality is questioned by many readers and examined by many ethical theorists. The idea of what is moral behavior ignited the theory of virtue ethics, and created a genre explored and denoted by practitioners and followers of ethical theory. Ethical theory has many facets and genres attached to its devices, virtue ethics being one of the many off-shoots of ethical theory. Virtue ethics stands apart from the other branches of ethical criticism in its application. The application of ethical theory will be explored in conjunction with the analysis of characters in *My Sister’s Keeper*. In order to explain the theory efficiently, defining the theory and then applying it to a literary work will be necessary. Below is an explanation of the virtue ethics as a theory. Following the explanation of the theory, the application of virtue ethics to *My Sister’s Keeper* will show the theory in use.
Defining Virtue

An examination of virtue is necessary to understand the theory of virtue ethics. Aristotle and Plato were the first authorities on virtue, though their notions of virtue differ in application. Virtue theory began with Plato and ancient Greek Mythology. According to virtue theorist Louis P. Pojman in his book entitled *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong*, “Greek Philosopher Plato offered a short list of cardinal rules—simply meaning ‘main virtues.’ They are wisdom, temperance, courage, and justice” (172). These four virtues were pivotal to Plato’s theory of ethics, and can also be found in Plato's book *Republic*. Like other ancient philosophers, Plato believed in a virtue-based eudemonistic ethics system. Eudemonistic can be defined as human well-being. (Pojman 194). The well-being of humanity was the basis of Plato’s ethical theory, and makes up the foundation that virtue ethics would later be built upon. Plato believed that “the virtues:” being wisdom, temperance, courage and justice were the most important acts of morality, and were needed in order to have a well-rounded character. According to Dorthea Frede, Plato believed, “Moral values must be based on an appropriate political order,” meaning that it is necessary to have a morally based society in order to live virtuously. In order to form a virtuous society Plato believed it necessary to acquire continuous knowledge.

The four virtues are also featured prominently in Aristotle's moral theories and discourses; they are referred to simply as “the virtues” by Aristotle. Aristotle took the idea of virtue a step further than Plato, and examined the human applications, rather than human ideals. Aristotle in his book *Ethics* is quoted to say, “All virtue is summed up in dealing justly” (Aristotle 52). In essence Aristotle is saying that in order to be virtuous, one must be a just dealer, centering all decisions on moral justification.
Maintaining a moral center was the most important aspect of virtue according to Aristotle, because virtue can be defined in many different ways by numerous people. Different cultures, ethnicities, races, and religions, are only a few demographics that may hold differing opinions on the virtuosity. Morality and virtue being related in function are subjective ideals; therefore, virtue as a whole can be a fluid concept.

Though related, Plato and Aristotle’s treatment of the virtues is by no means the same. For Plato, virtue is effectively an end to be sought for, for which a friend might be a useful means. Aristotle’s view of the virtues functions more as means to safeguard human relations, particularly authentic friendship. (Stocker 454).

The foundations of virtue ethics got their start in the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato, the ideas of each philosopher have evolved into what is known as the critical theory of virtue ethics. According to Rosalind Hursthouse in her book entitled *On Virtue Ethics*, “Virtue ethics is both an old and new approach to ethics, old in so far as it dates back to the writings of Plato and, more particularly, Aristotle, new in that, as a revival to this ancient approach, it is a fairly recent addition to contemporary moral theory.”(153) Consequently, though Plato and Aristotle contributed greatly to the initial thought process of virtue ethics, it is important to understand that the theory which is used today has developed aside from the ideals indicated by Plato and Aristotle. “It must be emphasized that those who espouse virtue ethics nowadays do not regard themselves as committed to any of the lamentable, parochial of Aristotle’s (or Plato’s) moral philosophy” (Hursthouse 4). Hursthouse is saying that, it is important to remember in the study of virtue as an ethical theory, that Plato and Aristotle did not create the over-arching basis of the theory itself.
Virtue ethics evolved from Plato and Aristotle’s definitions and discoveries. The idea of virtue has come a long way since Plato and Aristotle began studying the meanings and implications of virtue. The theory was born under the ideas presented by Plato and Aristotle, but has become an ethical theory that represents much more. Garret Cullity in an article written for *Virtue Ethics, Theory and Warrant*, Cullity argues that the theory of virtue ethics advocates “good grounds for thinking that the moral values of action are to be derived from individuals possessing character.” (277). Meaning those in possession of character are those whose virtue is a quantifiable thing. This explanation goes beyond what the two ancient philosophers had originally imagined, by giving the idea of virtue a leg to stand on. Meaning that in order for virtue theory to exist, the theorist must have some type of model to base his hypothesis of virtue upon: character.

The idea of character is one that presents a problem to critics of virtue ethics because it is completely subjective to the moral code of the individual. The representation of character is the foundation of virtue ethics, which emphasizes being rather than doing. Understanding the theory of virtue ethics constitutes the idea that morality stems from the identity and/or character of the individual, rather than being a reflection of the character’s actions. (Hursthouse 167). Within the circle of virtue ethics, there is a great deal of debate about which virtues are morally acceptable. However, the authorities of the theory are able to agree on one aspect of virtue ethics, being that “morality comes as a result of intrinsic virtues,” (Hursthouse 148). Intrinsic values are values held by a certain social group, be it a cultural, religious, racial, or sex oriented groupings. This means that whatever is defined as virtuous, is defined by that specific group, and must be accepted by the members of the group to be a part of the moral code. It’s not important for virtues to align themselves to everyone and
every thought process or standpoint. In order for something to be deemed virtuous it need only fit into what a group or school of thought finds virtuous. For example, a Christian finds worshipping God to be a virtuous pursuit, while an Atheist does not feel that the worship of God is something to be attributed to virtue, but feels that it is virtuous to refrain from worshipping any god. The Christian can be judged virtuous within their sphere, while the Atheist can likewise be deemed virtuous within their school of thought.

There are critics that say that virtue theory is difficult to establish because the nature of virtue can be so different. Because of the vastness of culture, society and belief systems, virtue can be defined in many different ways. Virtue ethicists argue that because virtue is so difficult to pin down, it can be applied as a universal theory. The fluidity of the theory can make it flexible and useable to all kinds of “virtue”. In essence, all moral traits, decisions, ideals can be regarded as being virtuous within on school of thought or another. Alasdair MacIntyre in his book entitled After Virtue, discusses the idea that virtues need to be derived from the area of thinking they were born into, and consequently practiced within. Virtues therefore, are located within a certain sphere, where they can be judge and practiced fairly. The society in, and context within a virtue may be created provides a unique application for whatever virtue may be being tested. (212).

The objections to virtue theory can also be viewed as being the theory’s strength. The objections being: the theory does not focus on the kinds of actions that are morally permissible and the ones that are not (MacIntyre 125). Rather, virtue ethics focuses on the qualities characters should encompass in pursuit of becoming what is assumed to be a moral person. For example, virtue theorists might say that a character that does not adhere to the established order of virtue, is not inherently bad, but missing aspects that make up what is assumed to be virtuous,
meaning that the character of the individual in question is simply not fully developed or adherent to the established order.

Virtue ethics can be applied to virtually any text; though the merit of studying virtue ethics can differ depending on what kind of literature is being looked at. Virtue ethics is a critical theory that focuses on deemphasizing rules, and consequences. It draws the focus away from particular acts, and concentrates on the kind of person that is acting. The issue however, is not if the intention of the agent is correct, even though that does play a role in the examination of the theory. The primary focus of the theory is whether or not the person exercising their agency is doing so virtuously. The foundation of character is measured against the traits a person possesses. Those traits can be good, or bad, or even fall somewhere in between. The admirable character traits an individual possesses are virtues (Garret 23).

The application of virtue ethics to a character in literature should focus on the character’s traits that relate to the virtues established by the world that character has been created in. Creating literary characteristics “is a purposeful choosing of rational activity,” according to Garret (23). The character would have to make a decision that either coincides with the ethics laid out by the world in which he/she lives, or chose to go against the established ethical code for the reader to determine if that character is acting virtuously or not. It is not enough to simply label a character virtuous or not, there must be textual evidence to support the claim (Garret 23). The character could be virtuous because they show generosity to another, which could be an established virtue among the society in which they were created, or a character could be virtuous because they make decisions based off of the moral code of their world, the action may promote or hinder the development of virtue in the character.
Application of virtue ethics, therefore, requires an understanding of the workings of virtue within the context of the literature being read. It also requires the reader to delve into a critical thinking pattern that will allow for a greater understanding of what is considered virtuous by the author and what is not. Dr. Garret says, “Application of virtue ethics requires a sensitive appreciation of human character and therefore considerable familiarity with human psychology.” (374). The reader must understand human nature on some level in order to correctly evaluate whether a character is virtuous or not, though the amount of understanding needed is unknown.

Virtue theorist Daniel Statman in his book entitled *Virtue Ethics*, has this to say about distinguishing a virtuous character: “Regarding moral motivation, the virtuous person does the right thing ‘naturally’, without having to fight with emotions, inclinations, or traits of character.” (16). This makes the determination of what is a virtuous action much easier to undertake. When a character acts without fighting their emotions, it’s easier to distinguish if their action is virtuous. When a character has to battle their desires or character traits to act virtuously, they may not be in possession of virtuous character. Virtue ethics examines character, and circumstance, so the reader needs to be aware of both before making a judgment about the virtuosity of a literary figure.

Moreover, virtue ethics is dependent on the reader. A reader must put aside their own ideas of what is virtuous in order to determine whether a character is acting virtuously. Wayne Booth in his essay entitled *Who is Responsible for Ethical Criticism*, points out that the author and reader are both responsible for the developing of ethical criticism. Since virtue ethics, fall under ethical criticism, a correlation can be drawn between what Booth has said, and the practice of virtue ethics. A reader must bring an unbiased opinion when reading a novel and an author
must be aware of their responsibility to provide the reader with characters that are developed within the particular ethical system of the novel (Booth 79-98).

**My Sister’s Keeper and Virtue Ethics Theory**

*My Sister’s Keeper* was written by New York Times best-selling author Jodi Picoult. The novel is set in modern day Rhode Island, and the plot is structured upon the perspective of seven characters; a focus of two of their characterizations are the foundation which the exploration of virtue ethics in this paper will be based upon. The story follows thirteen year old Anna Fitzgerald, who has filed a lawsuit against her parents for medical emancipation. Anna is being forced to donate a kidney to her older sister Kate, who is dying from leukemia. Kate suffers from a disease called *acute promyelocytic leukemia*, which she was diagnosed with when she was two-years-old. Anna was a medically engineered baby, designed specifically to be a donor for Kate, and hopefully to save her life. Unfortunately, Anna does not want to be a part of Kate’s treatment anymore, and files for medical emancipation so that her parents can no longer make medical decisions on her behalf without her consent.

**Building Virtue Ethics in My Sister’s Keeper**

The characters of the book have to adhere to the laws and standards set forth by Picoult, and each character displays varying levels of virtue. Picoult implants the Fitzgerald family into a society where questions of medically engineered babies, and medical emancipation become question of ethics. The moral code that the Fitzgerald family specifically lives by, is unique because the ethical decisions made in the novel are situational. Even though the Fitzgeralds operate within their own moral code, their actions can also be judged based upon the
circumstances Picoult puts them in. The issues that the novel presents for the reader will be examined through the lens of virtue ethics and based on the implications of what Picoult is saying is virtuous behavior within the novel. There are many ethical questions to examine within the text that revolve around the characterization Picoult has formed of each character, though we will focus specifically on Sara Fitzgerald and Anna Fitzgerald’s characters. Is it ethically and morally correct to engineer a child to be a donor for another sick child? Is it virtuous to believe that each child within a home should be loved equally? What happens when children are not loved or valued the same? These are ethical questions the novel raises for the reader. In order to make an ethical judgment about the answers to these questions, and to come to a greater understanding of virtue ethics as a theory, exploring the development of Sara and Anna’s virtue in the novel will be useful in discovering answers.

Sara Fitzgerald

Kate Fitzgerald is very ill, and her mother, Sara, has to make a decision about her care. Mrs. Fitzgerald in a desperate effort to save her daughter’s life decides to have doctors medically engineer a baby to be a genetic match for Kate. Anna, the genetically engineered child, presents the reader with the biggest issue of the novel, was her birth an virtuous choice on Sara Fitzgerald’s part? The problem with evaluating Sara’s virtue is that her character is not always villainous, but through the eyes of the other characters, her sins become apparent.

Anna’s view of her and her mother’s relationship is not a positive one. Through the eyes of Anna Fitzgerald, her mother doesn’t care about her as a person; she is a means to an end. At the beginning of the novel Anna says this in relation to the rank she held in her mother’s eye in comparison to her sister Kate: “As we got older I didn’t seem to exist, except in relation to her [Kate],” (Picoult 1). Anna can’t tell that her mother loves her as a person separate from her
sister; in fact, she believes that her mother only sees her in conjunction with her sister’s treatment. Anna acknowledges early in life that her purpose was to save Kate, and this hinders the development of the bond between Sara and Anna. The conflict that this mother-daughter relationship presents to the theory of virtue ethics is: does Sara’s treatment of Anna make her an agent living outside the virtues established by the novel? This question is difficult to answer, but merits deeper exploration. Picoult presents the effects of Sara’s treatment of Anna as being negative, as if to say that treating a child like they are less than other children is morally wrong. Rachana Kamtekar, in an essay for the journal *Ethics*, discusses the ideas that characterization creates for a reader by saying, “Specific traits of a character indefinitely decide their level of virtue for a reader…identifying and scrutinizing character traits will lead to the development of a character’s virtue throughout the plot of a narrative.” (472). Sara’s characterization and traits identify her as being callous toward her daughter Anna which in turn creates a barrier between her character and what is virtuous.

On several occasions, Sara Fitzgerald shows that she doesn’t consider Anna to be of any importance beyond being a donor for her sister. During an interview with a local television station after Sara became pregnant with Anna, Sara was asked to explain what she hopes to tell her new baby when she grows up. Sara callously replies: “With any luck I’ll be able to tell her to stop bugging her sister.” (139). Sara is detached from giving birth to Anna, because Anna wasn’t in her plans. The ethics of the world within *My Sister’s Keeper* denote that Sara Fitzgerald is an unethical character, because of her attitude toward having another child. She cares more for one child than another, which is stated in the novel several times as being the wrong kind of behavior. The moral order of loving each child equally is established within the novel, it is arguable that Sara is an unethical character, acting outside of the norm. According to Justin
Oakley in his essay entitled *Varieties of Virtue Ethics*, examining a character’s motives is essential to creating a conclusion about whether or not they are functioning morally. “Virtue ethicists give primacy to character in the sense that they believe reference to character is essential in a correct account of right and wrong. The novel paints Sara as being callous and unfeeling towards anyone’s plight but her own or her sick daughter Kate. Sara is shown as having many moments of reflection in the novel, and one that illustrates the idea that she can be very hardened occurs during one of these flash-backs. Sara denies her son a promise she made him to take him to get new soccer cleats after an episode of relapse for Kate. Her son Jesse is only 10-years-old at the time of this outburst, and the damages of her actions would be long lasting for Jesse.

“Your sister” I say evenly, “is incredibly sick. I’m sorry if that interferes with your dentist appointment or your plans to go buy a pair of cleats. But those don’t rate quite as high in the grand scheme of things right now. I’d think that since you’re ten, you might be able to grow up enough to realize that the whole world doesn’t revolve around you.” (201).

In the passage above, Picoult molds Sara’s character into the villain of the story. Up until this point the reader was gently lead to feel sorry for Sara Fitzgerald, but after reading how she treated a young child, and the aftermath of the way she acted being shown in Jesse’s character, her behavior slowly becomes darker and less pitiable. Through the lens of virtue ethics, Sara goes against the grain of ethical behavior, because she defies the established order with her actions. According to John M. Doris in his essay entitled *Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics*, “The person of good character is not swayed by circumstance…character is expected to have regular behavioral manifestations: we believe that the person of good character will behave appropriately, even in situations, with substantial pressures to moral failure.” According to
Doris’ explanation of what makes a character virtuous, Sara Fitzgerald does not fall into that ideal. She cannot be classified as being purely unethical, because she loves one of her children; she is by no means a monstrous character, or one that can be deemed completely without hope. But her actions are not praiseworthy according to the norm of equal and fair treatment set down by Picoult in the ethics of the novel.

Finally, Sara Fitzgerald commits a crime that the novel’s entire plot is built around; she fights to keep Kate alive, against Kate’s will. The reader is made to think that Anna brought a lawsuit against her parent for medical emancipation because she no longer wants to be forced to take part in Kate’s treatment. By the end of the novel Anna’s true reasons for filing the lawsuit come out. Kate asked her to file the suit, so that she could die when she felt ready, not when Sara Fitzgerald was out of options. During Anna’s hearing, Anna reveals that she had been convinced by Kate to file the lawsuit.

“Anna did you decide to file this lawsuit on your own?”

I know why he is asking; he wants everyone to know that I’m capable of making choices that are hard. And I even have my lie quivering like the snake it is, caught between my teeth. But what I mean to say isn’t quite what slips out. ‘I was kind of convinced by someone.’” (448-49).

Anna was convinced by Kate to initiate the lawsuit, because Kate couldn’t tell her mother that she was ready to die. While it would be difficult to tell a parent that you’re ready to move on as a child, the reason Kate enlisted Anna’s assistance in perpetuating her end, is because Sara Fitzgerald wouldn’t listen to Kate’s attempts at telling her she was ready to give up. During a flash back Anna reveals Kate’s attempt to tell her mother that she is ready to die. Kate has just been informed that she is in full renal failure, and that Anna must donate a kidney to her because
Anna is the only perfect DNA match for Kate. “I’m not doing it again, alright? I’m sick of it. The hospitals and the chemo and the radiation and the whole freaking thing.” (448), Kate tells her parents. Sara Fitzgerald responds by saying, “Fine Kate. Go ahead and commit suicide!” (448). Sara treats her daughter’s plea with a sarcastic and flippant retort, which shows she isn’t really listening to what Kate is saying, or how she is feeling. She stalks out of Kate’s room without hearing Kate’s sad reply, “It’s not suicide if you’re already dying.” (448). Kate makes it blatantly clear to the reader in the passage above that she isn’t interested in continuing her treatment, but Sara Fitzgerald continues to fight Anna’s case and forces Kate to continue her treatment.

Even though Sara is not aware that Kate has asked Anna to file the petition for a lawsuit until the end of the novel when Anna reveals it in court, Sara was told by Kate herself that she was ready to give up and neglected to listen to her daughter’s plea. Sara listens to nobody in the novel, and is in discord with everyone at some point because she is unwilling to listen to anyone’s plight. Her behavior is viewed as negative by the reader because Picoult shows the effects of Sara’s choices as being negative. Kate resorts to convincing Anna to file for medical emancipation, her husband Brian moves out of the house at one point because he needs to get away from her control and think about their marriage, the judge for Anna’s case threatens to put a restraining order on Sara because she goes against the court’s orders and tries to coerce Anna into dropping the lawsuit, all of which resulted because of Sara’s lack of character. John M. Doris in his book entitled, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior* says, “A virtue is a state of character that makes its possessor behave in ethically appropriate ways.” (15). Sara Fitzgerald is not in possession of a character that behaves ethically, because she defies the norm established by Picoult. Therefore, Sara is not a virtuous character.

Anna
Anna Fitzgerald presents the most complicated character for ethical analysis in *My Sister’s Keeper*. Anna is bright and full of life. She is kind and loving, and incredibly intelligent for a 13-year-old girl. But Anna is presented to the reader as being self-serving because she has filed for medical emancipation from her parents during a time of crisis in Kate’s disease, and she is refusing to donate a kidney to her sick sister.

Picoult allows the reader to believe that Anna is immoral because of this action, but slowly shows that Anna is not being self-serving at all. Anna often waffles about whether she has made the correct decision about filing the petition for medical emancipation. As stated above by Daniel Statman the theory of virtue ethics tells us that, “the virtuous person does the right thing ‘naturally’” (16); Anna is in a state indecision about the choice she made for the entire novel. Is that enough to label her as a character that lacks virtue? No, because the reason Anna is unsure about her actions, are because they are not her own. Anna was acting on a directive given to her by Kate to file the petition, and Anna is questioning Kate’s decision to go through with this drastic measure, not her own decision.

Anna chooses to allow her family and her lawyer to think that she has filed for medical emancipation because she doesn’t want to be forced to donate a kidney. The repercussions for her decision to keep Kate’s request a secret affect Anna harshly, because her mother believes her to be acting selfishly. Anna suffers because she chooses to act virtuously and keep Kate’s secret, but the true affirmation of Anna’s virtuosity is her willingness to be treated badly for it. Sara resorts to yelling at Anna during one scene, telling her to drop the case, but Anna firmly replies that she will not. “For God’s sake Anna! What have we done to you to deserve this?” (217). Sara Fitzgerald tries to invoke guilt with her comment towards Anna by implying that she doesn’t deserve what Anna is doing, putting pressure upon her through that guilt. Maria Merritt
discusses the idea of moral strength in relation to personality traits by saying, “To conceive of a personal disposition as a robust trait is to expect that it will reliably give raise to the relevant kind of behavior, across the full range of situations in which the behavior would be appropriate, including situations that exert contrary pressures.” (365). Meaning that if someone possessed a strong moral character, their behavior would not change due to the situation they are in despite any kind of situational pressure. Anna was pressured by Sara to drop her case, but she acted without thinking twice on her foundation of moral character and refused her mother.

Anna was acting with character because she had been asked to do something that she knew was going to be difficult. She didn’t waiver in her decision to go through with the lawsuit, she only questioned if her sister was going to regret making the decision to end her care. Anna didn’t have any concern for herself during the course of the novel, even though Picoult writes other’s perspectives of Anna in a negative way, when reading Anna’s commentary, there never comes a moment when she doubts what she is doing for personal or selfish reasons.

After the reader discovers that Anna has filed the lawsuit on Kate’s behalf, her discomfort with Kate’s choice to end her treatment becomes clear. Anna doesn’t want to lose her sister, but she also doesn’t want Kate to suffer any longer. Anna has doubts about the choice Kate has made. Anna’s identity is so connected to Kate that she fears that she will no longer know who she is without her. “I have a feeling that is I really try to figure out who I am without Kate in the equation, I’m not going to like what I see.” (216). Picoult shows the reader the bond Anna and Kate have formed, but also shows the flaw Anna recognizes in Kate’s plan; Kate will die. The remorse and sadness Anna feels at the idea of losing Kate, endears her to the reader, but the fact that she is still willing to do the hardest thing, and pursue a lawsuit that will put an end to her sister’s life demonstrates her deeply rooted virtuosity. Without the understanding of what
Picoult is deeming virtuous, making the assumption that Anna is action virtuous in this case would be a mistake.

Picoult has created a world where killing your sister is wrong, but that’s not what Anna is doing. Gregory Trianosky is his essay entitled What is Virtue Ethics All About? wrote about the idea of “norms” being established within a text. “It might remain to ‘look for norms,’ which are grounded in the facts about what is needed to flourish.” (336). Anna feels she needs Kate in order for her life to “flourish” since she does not know who she is without her. Anna’s feelings towards Kate’s decision to end her life are within the “norm” that Picoult has established, because Anna relies on Kate for her identity; she has never known herself without Kate. This makes Anna an ethical character because she is operating within an order or code that Picoult has established. She is not acting selfishly; in fact she is not “acting” at all. She simply muses on the idea of Kate’s death, and decides she doesn’t like to think of losing her sister, which is an acceptable idea ethically because Picoult has set the story up to regard that kind of idea as being virtuous because it is an establish norm.

Finally, Anna is a virtuous character because she sacrifices herself for her sister. Anna does this in several ways; first she sacrifices herself in her family’s eyes. By choosing to take on Kate’s request, Anna becomes a martyr in the eyes of the reader, because her mother persecutes her for the decision, thinking that Anna is acting out of selfishness. Self-sacrifice is glorified by Picoult in the novel, and becomes a norm or part of the ethical code the characters live by. Anna recognizes that she is going to suffer for choosing to go forward with the case and still does so. Anna then sacrifices her life. This was not by choice, but it happens as a result of the choice she makes to pursue the lawsuit in an indirect way. After winning the case against her parents at the end of the novel, Anna gets into a car accident on her way to the hospital to tell Kate. Anna is
riding with her attorney when a driver runs a red light in the rain and plows through her attorney’s small sports car. The truck hits the sports car on the passenger side, where Anna is sitting, buckled into her seat. She is dead when the ambulance arrives, and is hooked up to life support. When she arrives at the hospital, her attorney, who holds power of attorney for all of Anna’s medical decisions now that the case is closed, decides to donate her organs, knowing that Kate is in need of her Kidneys to survive.

Anna’s kidneys put Kate into a prolonged remission, which is exactly what Anna would have wanted, because of her love for her sister. She did not choose to sacrifice herself, but she was sacrificed all the same, and her love for Kate saved her life. Anna couldn’t imagine life without Kate as illustrated before, which tells the reader that she genuinely loved her sister. If Anna had actually been suing her parents so that she no longer had to be a donor for Kate then her attorney may not have chosen to donate her organs after her death. But since she expressed that everything she had been doing was by Kate’s request, Anna’s attorney made the decision Anna would have made in the first place. Anna would have willingly given her kidney to save Kate, had Kate not asked her file the lawsuit, and with her death she did just that. This act makes Anna irrefutably virtuous because had her character been given the choice, she would have acted with virtue and donated her kidney to her sister, and in death she was given that opportunity.

Conclusion

In asserting the ideas that virtue ethics presents to a reader, an understanding of character and morality is gained. Morality differs in each literary work, because the author has their own implicit ideas of what it means to act virtuously. Jodi Picoult’s ideas of virtuous behavior are pinnacled in Anna Fitzgerald’s character. She understood the norms and codes of the world in which she was created, and did not rebel against those codes, but thrived within them. She
sought for peace and something greater for someone beyond herself, which Picoult illustrated through Anna’s sacrifice as being the most important quality of the moral code she created. Kate Fitzgerald went on to live, to grow up, and to have a life. Sara Fitzgerald was asked to sacrifice a child, but not the one she expected. And Anna was made an example of what it means to live a virtuous life. Picoult may have created a novel that could be examine through many different lens of ethical criticism, but exploring My Sister’s Keeper through the lens of virtue ethics can give the reader a better understanding of Picoult’s overall message of what she feels is virtuous behavior. Beyond that message the reader is then left to decide if they will take Picoult’s idea of virtuosity and apply it to their own life, or reject it. Without studying the novel through the lens of ethical criticism the reader may not have had the opportunity to embrace or discard that idea in its entirety, because they may not have picked up on the idea of virtue specifically. Virtue ethics have merit to a reader on a personal level that other criticisms do not. The theory makes it possible for readers to determine if the author is creating a commentary about what is implicitly virtuous within the world they have created, if the virtue is applicable to the readers own set of ethics, and if the reader desires to implement the ideas of virtue presented by the author, into their life.
Works Cited


