Finding Character

Character and the Challenge from Situationism

by

Mayra Valadez

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Cheshire Calhoun, Chair
Peter French
Margaret Walker

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Recently, philosophers have charged that Aristotelian-based virtue theories are empirically inadequate because the conception of character in which they are grounded is largely unfounded by findings in psychology. These philosophers argue in favor of situationism, the theory from social psychology that situational rather than dispositional differences among individuals are in large part responsible for human behavior. Situationists dispute the existence of traits that remain consistent across time and diverse situations and argue that features of situations can better explain and predict human behavior. After analyzing the psychological literature and historical cases put forth as evidence for situationism as well as the basic premises grounding arguments against situationism, I make some conclusions about the best responses to situationism. I agree with situationists that Aristotelian-based virtue and character are not quite empirically adequate but disagree that human behavior owes more to situational rather than dispositional determinants. Basing my theory on literature from social psychology, I argue instead that a concept of character grounded in social-cognitive theory is more psychologically realistic and can explain and predict human behavior and ground a character-based virtue theory. A social-cognitive conception of character would highlight the dynamic role between situations and individual psychological factors like beliefs, values, desires and the way that an individual perceives a situation. I sketch out a non-ideal theory of virtue based in a social-cognitive conception of character that is partially dependent on social networks for its maintenance and is fragmented, or contextualized to particular types of psychological situations. However, fragmented and socially dependent virtue is not an optimal type of virtue because it is vulnerable to situational

features that place strong psychological pressures on agents to behave in various ways, including ways they would not have normally endorsed. I agree with Aristotelian virtue ethicists that argue that a type of practical wisdom can help to counter the often unwanted and dangerous influence of these strong situations but also maintain that some measure of moral luck is inevitably involved, even in the development of practical wisdom.

DEDICATION

To my family, without whose unfaltering love and support, none of this would

ever have been possible.

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Chapter 1

SITUATIONISM: THEORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

In the last few decades, virtue ethics has regained a prominent place as
one of the three major ethical theories in the field of normative ethics. Although
virtue ethics theories can vary quite widely, many of these theories are founded in
a traditional conception of character grounded in Aristotelian virtue ethics.[1]
According to Aristotle, a virtue is a disposition to perform the right action, for the
right reason, from a firm and unchanging character.

Virtues are essentially moral character traits. If an agent has developed
the virtues, he knows what action is the right one to perform in a situation and he
performs that action out of a consistent disposition to do so. Since the agent
behaves consistently to his virtues from situation to situation, he will behave
distinctly from others who have a different character (different or no virtues)
because his specific character traits determine his behavior across all situations.
Perhaps most importantly for our discussion, virtue ethics is a normative theory
so it prescribes what people *ought* to do to be moral, namely, develop good
character by developing the virtues.

However, situationism, a theory from the field of social psychology that
has since gained recognition in philosophy, challenges the idea that there is such
a thing as character. Situationism is the view that features of situations can have

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[1] For examples see: See Christine Swanton, Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View (New
York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Julia Annas, The Morality of Happiness (New
York; Oxford UP, 1993), 27-120; Robert M. Adams, A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in
Being for the Good (New York: Oxford UP, 2006); Rosalind Hursthouse, On Virtue Ethics
(New York: Oxford UP, 1999); Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue (Notre Dame: University
of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

a powerful influence on the production or constraining of human behavior. Consequently, situational features are on average better predictors than character traits of how an individual will act in a particular situation.[2] Situationists dispute the existence of traits that remain consistent across time and diverse situations. Any consistency in an individual's behavior can be explained by referencing similarities in situational features. Moreover, situational features that can affect behavior are not always morally relevant or important and often seem to operate completely beneath conscious notice.

Situationists largely base their arguments on a number of experiments from social psychology that purportedly show that variation of small contextual factors can result in significant differences in behavior, which then result in cross-situational behavioral inconsistencies. If people had character traits that were stable across time and consistent across situations, they would exhibit corresponding stable, consistent behavior across situations, not behavior that shifts along with varying contextual factors; since the social psychological literature shows this is not the case, it seems that people do not have character traits that are stable across time and consistent across situations.

Situationism is problematic for Aristotelian virtue ethics theories that rest on the supposition that there is such a thing as character. If it turns out that environment is a stronger determinant of behavior than character, then the idea of developing moral traits in order to be moral is based in a mistaken view of human behavior.

After examining and responding to data from personality research, philosophical responses to situationism, and situationist evidence, I hope to

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[2] See Lee Ross and Richard E. Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation: Perspectives of Social Psychology* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1991), 1-26.

propose a more psychologically realistic concept of character that can help explain, if not predict, human behavior and can ground a character-based virtue ethics. While my primary focus is on the problem situationism creates for Aristotelian virtue ethics, I will also theorize about the general implications of situationism on theories based in Aristotelian virtue ethics or character.[3]

In this chapter I give a brief history of situationism, from its origins in character education, to its role in the evolution of personality psychology, and finally to its recent emergence in normative ethics. I also analyze the theory of situationism and the significance of its findings for virtue ethics and other areas like personal responsibility and moral agency.

A Brief History of Situationism

Hartshorne and May

In 1922, the Institute of Social and Religious Research chose two researchers, Hugh Hartshorne, a professor of Religious Education, and Mark A. May, a psychology professor, to undertake an inquiry into character education.[4] One of their projects in this inquiry was a study of deception on elementary and secondary schoolchildren. In order to study the "honest" behavior of their child subjects, May and Hartshorne tested the children for instances of deceptive behavior.[5] Three of the behaviors that they looked at were: 1) willingness to steal

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[3] I will use the words "virtues" and "character traits" interchangeably in this paper. If Aristotelian virtues are a type of character trait, then as long as situationists can prove character traits do not exist, they are by extension proving the virtues do not exist.

[4] See Hugh Hartshorne and Mark A. May, Studies in the Nature of Character I: Studies in Deceit (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928).

[5] Hartshorne and May, *Studies in the Nature of Character*, 377-78. Hartshorne and May define honest behavior as "a behavior which does not resort to subterfuge to gain its ends." They contrast this to deceptive behavior. They define a deceptive act as one that

change left on a table in an empty classroom, 2) willingness to lie to avoid getting another child in trouble, and 3) willingness to cheat by adding false scores on a test where detection seemed impossible.

Hartshorne and May observed the dishonest behavior they were testing more than once, varying the circumstances slightly each time. For example, when they tested the children's willingness to cheat on several similar classroom tests, in one situation the experimenters gave the children the answer key after the children had taken the test but allowed the children to score their own tests. In another situation, they gave the children the answer key *before* the test and merely instructed the children not to look at the answer key until after they had completed the test.

Hartshorne and May were surprised to discover that the correlations were strikingly low between a single type of dishonest behavior in two situations with only slightly varying circumstances. A child might cheat on one test and not do so on the next. Hartshorne and May concluded that the consistency of an individual's honesty was a function of the situation in which he was placed, insofar as 1) the situations had common elements, 2) he had learned to be honest or dishonest in them, and 3) he had become aware of their honest or dishonest implications or consequences.[6] A child might behave consistently honestly or dishonestly depending on how similar the two situations were or whether those situations were ones where the child had learned to be honest or dishonest in

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"implies a conflict of wills with regard to either means or ends or both and the concealment of either the act or its intention or both in order to gain the end or utilize the means concerning which the conflict has arise." The dishonest behavior they were testing included cheating, stealing, and lying.

[6] See Hartshorne and May, *Studies in the Nature of Character,* 380.

them by being punished or rewarded or, more generally, by being made aware of the good or bad consequences of their behavior.

Hartshorne and May found that correlations in behavior among tests lowered the more the situational context of the two tests differed from one another. For example, for the deceptive behavior observed, Hartshorne and May noticed that a child that copied on one answer key was likely to copy from a key on another test, but copying from a key did not make that child more likely to cheat by adding on scores.

Hartshorne and May concluded that honesty was not an "inner entity," a trait one could possess, but more a function of the situation. An individual behaved similarly in different situations in proportion to how alike the situations were, how much those situations had been experienced as occasions for either honest or dishonest behavior, and how much the individual had categorized them as opportunities for deception or honesty.

Walter Mischel

Surprisingly, Hartshorne and May's conclusion drew little attention from psychologists until Walter Mischel's book *Personality and Assessment* brought attention back to it in 1968. In *Personality and Assessment*, Mischel pointed out that one could rarely predict individual responses to specific situations by referencing individual traits. Although Mischel analyzed studies already well known to researchers working in the field, including Hartshorne and May's, his personality assessment text shook the very foundations of personality research.

Although Mischel had merely intended *Personality and Assessment* to be a survey of the available theoretical approaches in personality psychology at the

time, he discovered that many of the studies he analyzed had come to the same conclusion: trait-based behavioral predictability was very low, low enough to question basic assumptions about behavioral consistency held by personality psychologists and laypeople alike.[7] This was because correlations in behavior from one situation to another were lower than anyone had expected.

More broadly, Mischel's work called into question personality theory, the dominant approach in social psychology at that time. Mischel challenged the very old and basic assumption that personality psychologists (also called personologists) had been working under: the assumption that behavior was the product of traits.[8] Personologists speculated that traits like extraversion and openness to experience could help explain, understand, and predict the behavior of an individual. Traits were stable across the individual's life and could reliably explain and (to an extent) predict his behavior across various situations.

According to Mischel, most definitions of personality hinged on the assumption that an individual's behavior is consistent across many conditions. If an individual possessed the trait of extraversion, for example, he would act consistently with that trait across different situations that elicited that trait to varying degrees. Personality psychologists established the consistency of traits by looking at evidence of obtained correlations between behaviors measured across similar situations. However, after reviewing the literature on intellectual ability and achievements, moral behavior, and a number of other measures, Mischel

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[7] Ross and Nisbett, T*he Person and the Situation,* 95.

[8] See Walter Mischel, *Personality and Assessment* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1968) for full discussion.

concluded that the assumption that there are personality traits that held across a

number of situations and contexts was mistaken. [9]

Mischel found that the data on moral behavior provided no support for

the belief in a trait (like honesty) that would drive behavior across differing

situations. Instead, people seemed to develop subtle discriminations depending

on many considerations. For example, people might behave consistently or

inconsistently from one situation to the next depending on the outcomes of that

same behavior in different situations; or they might behave inconsistently

depending on whether their behavior was an emotional reaction as opposed to an

intellectual or cognitive one.[10] So for example, a person might be able to do

consistently well on a number of exams testing a cognitive ability like reasoning

but might react differently in similar situations depending on the emotion

attached to certain situational features.[11]

Mischel concluded that there was simply no good evidence for the

consistency of behavior across different situations. There was little empirical data

showing individuals acting consistently across situations that elicited the same

trait to different degrees. In fact, people's behavior seemed to vary from situation

to situation, even where there were only minor changes in situational features.

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[9] Mischel, *Personality and Assessment*, 13-36. Mischel also reviewed authoritarian personality, rigidity, intolerance for ambiguity (characterized by resistance to reversal of apparent fluctuating stimuli, early selection and adherence to one solution in perceptually ambitious situations, seeking for certainty, rigid dichotomizing into fixed categories, and fixed closure), and the tendency to yield to social norms and pressures.

[10] See Mischel, *Personality and Assessment,* 178-85. Mischel does not define intellectual or cognitive behavior but his discussion implies he is talking about behaviors that require reasoning or analysis.

[11] For example, Mischel mentions a woman who was terrified of birds and feathers but only when she encountered the real objects, not in response to verbal descriptions or thoughts of them.

While Mischel was *not* claiming that predictable or measurable individual differences did not exist; he called into question the assumption by personality theory that one could predict that behavior would be *cross-situationally* consistent.[12] Perhaps the most important thing that Mischel pointed out was that the correlations between trait scores derived from standard personality assessment scales and objective behavioral outcomes were also very low. Individual behaviors could rarely be predicted with any correlation higher than the .30 barrier and most correlations were even lower. This held true even for traits like "delay of gratification" that personologists believed to be a dispositional difference that was cross-situationally consistent. Even traits like delay of gratification seemed to depend on context, or at least, on how the subjects perceived the situation.

Lee Ross and Richard Nisbett

In the early 1990's, social psychologists Richard Nisbett and Lee Ross published *The Person and the Situation*, a textbook summarizing the person-situation debate that began raging in psychology after Mischel's book was published. On one side were personologists claiming that personality traits could explain and predict behavior, while on the other were situationists claiming that situational factors were better determinants of behavior than dispositional factors.

In *The Person and the Situation,* Ross and Nisbett evaluated the diverse theories and experiments that situationists had cited as evidence in favor of a

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[12] While Mischel did believe there were individual stable differences in behavior by different individuals, he parceled this out in a different way by doing away with cross-situational consistency and replacing it with stable individual response patterns that result from dynamic interactions between an individual and his environment. I will come back to Mischel's view of personality in chapter 4.

situational approach and analyzed some of the initial responses to situationism from personologists. Ross and Nisbett also looked at lay psychology, which tended to be personological, and its sources and errors.

Ross and Nisbett wrote in the introduction of *The Person and the Situation* that they offered the textbook as a guide for situationism for non-psychologists as well as an open invitation to those in other disciplines to join the dialogue and contribute what they could. Ross and Nisbett hoped not to tear a larger rupture between personological and situational approaches but to explain how they compared to one another. They closed the book with a sketch of what they believed a more powerful conception of personality would probably look like, suggesting possible avenues of research for those interested in theorizing a more empirically sound conception of personality.

Owen Flanagan

Around the same time, philosopher Owen Flanagan began to call for some measure of psychological realism in normative ethics. Being interested in both philosophy and psychology, he noticed that although normative theories made many claims about human nature (assumptions on which many of the theories were often based), ethicists working in philosophy paid little attention to the work being done in psychology and other human sciences. In his book on the subject, *Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological Realism,* Flanagan brought some of the situationist arguments taking place in social psychology to philosophical inquiry.

Flanagan was interested in the relationship between psychology and ethics, specifically in advocating a form of psychological realism, or a

"constraining [of] ethical theory according to findings in psychology about cognition, the self, moral development and situational sensitivity."[13] Flanagan contended that a good look at what was known about human nature undermined not only overly rationalistic ethical theories but was also problematic for virtue ethics.[14] According to Flanagan, even though virtue ethicists were more realistic than deontologists or consequentialists because they asserted that moral behavior and decision-making probably had more to do with traits and dispositions than general-purpose rules or principles, virtue ethicists had underestimated just how much virtues and vices were situationally sensitive.

John Doris

Following Flanagan's call for psychological realism, philosopher John Doris has recently challenged virtue theories based in an Aristotelian conception of character by citing situationist findings from social psychology. In his book, *Lack of Character*, Doris agrees that ethical theories need to be constrained by findings in psychology and argues that ethical theories that rely on what he terms the "traditional conception of character" as a fundamental assumption do not meet this criterion.

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[13] Owen Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological Realism* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991), 15.
Elsewhere in the book (Flanagan, 32), Flanagan frames his discussion of "psychological realism" in terms of minimal psychological realism, which is defined as: "[making] sure when constructing a moral theory or projecting a moral ideal that the character, decision processing, and behavior prescribed are possible, or are perceived to be possible for creatures like us."

[14] In other words, any theory that required the agent to go through a process of reasoning before making moral decisions or acting in moral ways, such as deontological theory and consequentialism, two other currently dominant theories in philosophical normative ethics.

The Situationist Thesis

Since I base my discussion of the impact of situationism on Aristotelian character largely on John Doris' account of situationism, this section is largely about his account. I make extensive use of Doris' account because he has the most comprehensive philosophical account of situationism.

Globalism[15]

Doris refers to Aristotelian or "traditional" character traits as "global." According to Doris, the traditional conception of character has the following three criteria:

1) Consistency: character and personality traits are reliably manifested in trait-relevant behavior across a diversity of trait-relevant eliciting conditions that may vary widely in their conduciveness to the manifestation of the trait in question.

2) Stability: character and personality traits are reliably manifested in trait-relevant behaviors over iterated trials of similar trait-relevant eliciting conditions.

3) Evaluative integration: In a given character or personality the occurrence of a trait with a particular evaluative valence is probabilistically related to the occurrence of other traits with similar evaluative valences. [16]

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[15] John Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior (*New York: Cambridge UP, 2002), 22. I take the use of the term "globalism" from Doris' book. He sets this up as a contrast to situationism.

[16] Doris, *Lack of Character,* 22-23. Doris says that "both characterological [that is character-based] moral psychology and personality psychology are typically committed to the first 2 theses, consistency and stability. The idea of evaluative integration is rather less prominent in personality psychology than in characterological ethics."

Consistency

The most important of the three conditions, the consistency condition, captures the idea that if a person has some trait X, compassion for example, then they will exhibit that trait by acting compassionately in a number of different situations, not just in one or two.[17] Moreover, trait-relevant behavior should be consistently displayed across situations that vary in terms of how likely they are to elicit that trait.

According to Doris, some situations are more conducive to certain trait-relevant behaviors than other situations. Doris never explains what he means when he says a situation is "conducive" to some trait-relevant behavior other than saying that they are situations where most individuals would respond with the trait-relevant behavior. However, some conditions that might make a situation more conducive to trait-relevant behavior are: 1) it is evident to the agent that a certain trait-relevant behavior is required, 2) performing the trait-relevant behavior is of low-cost to the agent or high cost to the victim (or both), or 3) there is a great amount of pressure exerted (in some form or other) upon the agent to perform the trait-relevant behavior.

Peter Singer's famous example of the child drowning in a shallow pond would be an example of a situation highly conducive to compassionate or helping behavior. [18] All you have to do is wade in and pull the child out. You may get a little muddy in the process but that is a relatively low cost to you compared to the high cost to the child of your failing to act. This situation meets conditions 1 and 2

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[17] Since Doris and other situationists argue most strongly against this condition, I'll examine it at greater length than either of the other two.

[18] An example given by Peter Singer in "Famine, Affluence and Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, no. 3 (Spring 1972): 230.

from above: it is obvious what moral action should be taken, the action itself is of low cost to you, and your inaction would be of very high cost to the child. Considering these factors, it is probable this situation would elicit compassionate or helping behavior from most people, i.e., it is conducive to compassionate behavior.

However, compassionate behavior in this situation by itself would not be evidence for having the trait of compassion since contextual factors have made this a situation highly conducive to compassion. Consistency requires displaying trait-relevant behavior across situations with varying degrees of conduciveness to traits, not just in situations highly conducive to trait-relevant behavior.

What is more important is whether people who would save the child in a situation conducive to compassion would continue to act compassionately in other situations and show "individuating behavior" or "behavior that is outside the population norm for a situation."[19] In other words, would people who acted compassionately in a situation conducive to compassion continue to act compassionately in situations that are not particularly conducive to compassionate behavior?

Doris calls situations not conducive to particular traits "diagnostic" and defines them as situations "unfavorable enough to trait-relevant behavior that such behavior seems better explained by reference to individual dispositions than by reference to situational facilitators."[20] Doris states no conditions for diagnostic situations, though from the test cases in the next chapter I infer that diagnostic situations are situations where: 1) it is unclear that compassion is the right

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[19] Doris, *Lack of Character,* 19.

[20] Doris, *Lack of Character*, 19.

response in a situation, or 2) acting compassionately is unduly costly to the agent, or 3) there is great pressure *not* to act compassionately.

Doris uses the idea of diagnostic situations to define "robust" character traits. A person has a robust character trait if that person can be "confidently expected to display trait relevant behavior across a wide variety of trait-relevant situations, even where some or all of these situations are not optimally conducive to such behavior," i.e., where at least some of the situations are diagnostic. [21]

Doris and other situationists doubt that people possess robust traits at all but allow for the possibility of "temporally stable, situation-particular "local" traits that are associated with important individual differences in behavior."[22] Local traits are highly contextualized traits that are relatively stable across an individual's lifetime (but not across different situations). For example, Alan does not possess the character trait of bravery across a variety of situations, he possesses the trait of bravery in x, y, and z situations (e.g., in the face of battle, wild animals, and heights but not necessarily across all situations).[23] The more dissimilar the situations, the lower the consistency correlations are between them.[24] However, this contextualized trait of bravery might be one that Alan displays throughout his lifetime.

As evidence for the existence of local traits Doris draws on the results from social psychologists like Newcomb, and Hartshorne and May showing the

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[21] Doris, *Lack of Character,* 18-19.

[22] Doris, *Lack of Character,* 23.

[23] Doris, *Lack of Character,* 62. At one point Doris says even this definition isn't narrow enough because it is features of the situation and not John's character that determine his behavior after all, so one might have to hedge it further and say, John is brave in the face of gun battle but not battles with cannons or at sea, etc.

[24] Doris cites Hartshorne and May's study as evidence for this.

low cross-situational consistency of behavior with respect to traits like honesty,

talkativeness, or even aggressiveness.[25] As Hartshorne and May found out, a

single person seemed to display one trait across x, y and z situations but not in p,

q, and r situations. The predictability of individual responses in specific

situations was quite low, calling into question the assumption that individuals

displayed behavioral consistency across situations.[26] Intent on finding some

behavioral consistency, Hartshorne and May began asking questions about

people's behavior in specific contexts, for example "at parties" or "when around

coworkers." They found that low consistency correlations all but disappeared;

people displayed consistent behaviors in specific contexts.[27] For example, Smith

might act consistently politely around his coworkers or around people at the

grocery store, but his polite behavior in those contexts would not necessarily

generalize to other contexts.

Situationist Claims

Doris sets out to argue for three situationist claims, one against each of

the three conditions for global character. First, against consistency, Doris says:

> behavioral variation across a population owes more to
> situational differences than dispositional differences
> among persons. Individual dispositional differences are
> not so behaviorally individuating as might have been
> supposed; to a surprising extent it is safest to predict, for a
> particular situation, that a person will behave in a fashion
> similar to the population norm. [28]

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[25] See Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation,* 95-102.

[26] Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation,* 95.

[27] Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation*, 98.

[28] Doris, *Lack of Character,* 24.

He argues for this claim by citing a number of cases where the behavior of the subjects seems to be due to situational pressures instead of dispositional differences. Doris's idea is that if subjects had robust personality traits they would have demonstrated robust traits in the experiments instead of acting similarly to the rest of the subjects in the study (i.e., the population norm). Doris uses compassion as a sort of test case for his theory.[29] He defines compassion as "a stable and consistent disposition to perform beneficent actions; failures to behave compassionately when doing so is appropriate and not unduly costly are evidence against attributing that trait."[30]

Stability

The second defining feature of global character is that character should be somewhat stable across time.[31] Doris has this to say about stability:

> people will quite typically behave inconsistently with respect to the attributive standards associated with a trait, and whatever behavioral consistency is displayed may be readily disrupted by situational variation.[32]

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[29] Doris, *Lack of Character*, 28-30. The idea seems to be that as long as it is true of at least one character trait, it is true of all of them and so we must also reject the globalist conception of character and robust character traits.

[30] Doris, *Lack of Character*, 29. The discussion will be framed using Doris definition of compassion. In the psychological literature I reference to respond to his claims, the discussion is framed in the broader term of prosocial behavior. However, this seems to be getting at the same kind of behaviors Doris is concerned with as prosocial behavior is generally defined as "voluntary behavior intended to benefit another." (For a discussion of prosocial behavior see Nancy Eisenberg, Tracy Spinrad and Adrienne Sadovsky, "Empathy-Related Responding in Children," in *Handbook of Moral Development,* eds. Melanie Killen and Judith G. Smetana (Mahwah: Erlbaum, 2006), 375-392).

[31] Doris, *Lack of Character,* 29. Doris says that, "situationism rejects the first and third globalist theses, while allowing a variant of the second." Situationists seem to argue most strongly against conditions one and three.

[32] Doris, *Lack of Character,* 24.

It varies only slightly from what he has to say about consistency because Doris believes stability is measured by consistency of behavior *over a period of time*.

However, Doris accepts local traits can be stable across time. He argues that though an individual may be inconsistent in acting bravely or compassionately across a variety of situations, he may consistently act bravely across all situations with features x, y, and z, even across the space of many years. However, this sort of stability does not show the type of cross-situational consistency purportedly required by the Aristotelian conception of character.[33]

Evaluative Integration

Doris's position toward evaluative integration is the following:

> personality is not often evaluatively integrated. For a given person, the dispositions operative in one situation may have an evaluative status very different from those manifested in another situation; evaluative inconsistent dispositions may "cohabitate" in a single personality. [34]

According to Doris, a single individual may have very different, perhaps even seemingly contradictory, character traits. For example, Matt may be courageous but also unjust and tyrannical, or he might be generous but not particularly compassionate.[35] Doris refers to traits as having certain "valences" but never defines this term. From his discussion of the Aristotelian idea of the inseparability of the virtues, I infer that valences refer to virtuous traits like

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[33] Behavioral stability across time will turn out to be an important component of my proposed conception of character grounded in personality psychology research. I come back to stability in chapters 4 and 5.

[34] Doris, *Lack of Character*, 24.

[35] These are my examples, not Doris's.

bravery, temperance, generosity, etc., versus vices like cowardice and stinginess.[36]

The idea of evaluative integration is that if an individual has at least one virtue, it is likely he will have other virtues. Doris argues that evaluative integration is false because we *do* find apparently conflicting traits within a single personality. We also find people who have one virtue (in isolation) and seem to lack the others.[37] Doris's definition of evaluative integration was his attempt at capturing something like the inseparability of the virtues, the idea that virtues are usually found together. According to this idea, the virtues cannot exist independently of one another so in order to have any one of the virtues completely you must have all of the virtues. [38]

Aristotle claimed that one could not have one virtue in isolation; one could only be virtuous if one had all the virtues. This was because Aristotle believed that one of the requirements of virtue was practical wisdom: the intellectual virtue of being able to deliberate well, choose the best action in a situation, and be able to understand why that action was the best one.[39] Aristotle held that one either did or did not have practical wisdom; one could not have practical wisdom in degrees. If one had practical wisdom as well as the moral

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[36] See Doris, *Lack of Character,* 20-22.

[37] Personality psychologists don't hold anything like a unity of the virtues theory. This is strictly from the virtue ethics literature.

[38] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* trans. David Ross (New York: Oxford UP, 1998), 158, 1144b30.

[39] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1998, 142-43, 1140a25-, pp. 1140b30; 154-158, 1143b18-1145a11. See for Aristotle's discussion of practical wisdom.

virtues, then one had full virtue. [40] If one lacked practical wisdom, then one could

not be fully virtuous.[41]

Implications of Situationism in Other Fields

The truth of situationism does not merely affect Aristotelian or character

based virtue ethics. Situationism has far-reaching consequences for numerous

other areas outside of normative ethics. Below, I give a brief overview of how

situationism is a problem for these other areas.

Character Education

Situationism poses a problem for theories in moral education based in

Aristotelian virtue ethics or character. At the beginning of the 21st century, moral

education programs were on the rise in numerous schools, receiving federal

funding.[42] One of the dominant approaches in moral education is a type of

character education associated with Aristotle.[43] The assumption behind many of

these character education programs is that in order for an individual to become a

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[40] These are virtues that one learns by habit. I will come back to moral virtues and a more thorough look at Aristotle's definition of virtue in the fourth chapter.

[41] Although Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics,* 1998, 157, 1144b17) says that one might still have something called "natural virtue" if one lacks practical wisdom. However, because natural virtue lacks practical wisdom, one would not necessarily be consistent in acting virtuously because one would not properly understand why one should act virtuously of what virtue truly required in different situations.

[42] See Darcia Narvaez, "Integrative Ethical Education," in *Handbook of Moral Development,* ed. Melanie Killen and Judith G. Smetana (Mahwah: Erlbaum, 2006), 705, and Larry Nucci, "Education for Moral Development," in *Handbook of Moral Development,* eds. M. Killen and J.G. Smetana (Mahwah: Erlbaum, 2006), 659. Nucci writes that character education has risen so quickly in the past few years, one of his colleagues Ryan, refers to it as the "character education bandwagon."

[43] See Narvaez, "Integrative Ethical Education," 703. The other approach is associated with Kant through psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg's stage theory of moral reasoning.

moral person he must improve his character.[44] Character is believed to be an internal disposition responsible for human behavior; in order to improve one's behavior one must first improve one's character. However, if features of a situation are the main drive behind human behavior, trying to improve one's character for the sake of acting morally seems like a pointless exercise.

Knowledge of the Causes of Human Behavior

Situationism is a problem not only for Aristotelian virtue ethicists but also for laypeople attempting to explain or predict behavior by referencing robust character traits. Generally, a person's character is supposed to distinguish him from other people because the specific arrangement of character traits he has varies from that of other people. It is also supposed to determine how that person will act from situation to situation. We expect that people will behave consistently with their character across a variety of situations, including situations that require moral behaviors or actions.

The Fundamental Attribution Error

Situationists believe that due to a failure to recognize the truth of situationism and the problem of cross-situational behavioral consistency, the majority of people, especially in Western cultures, tend to make what situationists have termed "the fundamental attribution error."[45] In their book,

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[44] Most programs in moral education have a universal set of core values that the school as a whole is expected to emphasize, thus conveying a consistent message to the students about the best type of moral character. See Nucci, "Education for Moral Development"; Narvaez, "Integrative Ethical Education"; Edward A. Wynne and Kevin Ryan, *Reclaiming our Schools* (New York: Merill, 1993) and Edward A. Wynne, *Character and Academics in the Elementary School* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991) for more information on character education programs.

[45] Doris, *Lack of Character*, 105-106.

Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcoming of Social Judgment, Nisbett and

Ross defined the fundamental attribution error (FAE) as:

> the tendency to attribute overt behaviors to corresponding personal dispositions, thereby underestimating the causal role of environmental influences relative to such dispositions and overestimating the degree of cross-situational consistency in individual's behavior.[46]

Basically, the fundamental attribution error is our tendency to explain an

instance of the behavior of other people by reference to dispositions or traits

while paying little or no attention to the context of the situation. So for example,

if I see someone acting rudely to their waiter, I assume that the person is

behaving rudely because they have a disposition to be rude instead of analyzing

the situation as a possible source of explanation for the rude behavior.

The fundamental attribution error also includes our tendency to assume

consistency of behavior from one situation to the next. For example, I have a

tendency to assume that because one of my colleagues is very polite and

thoughtful around the office, he is also polite and thoughtful across other areas of

his life. The character traits that situationists assert do not exist are the very same

traits that we use to explain, predict, and evaluate each other's behavior on a day-

to-day basis. This tendency to assume cross-situational behavioral consistency

fails to recognize the situationist claim that human behavior is largely a product

of situational features rather than personality or character traits. If there are no

character traits to speak of and it is these traits we are using to try to explain and

predict people's behavior, we are not only seriously misunderstanding people's

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[46] Richard Nisbett and Lee Ross, *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcoming of Social Judgment* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1980), 120.

See also Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation,* p. 4. Ross and Nisbett define the FAE as: people's inflated belief in the importance of personality traits and dispositions, together with their failure to recognize the importance of situational factors in affecting behavior.

why people behave the way they do, we are also setting ourselves up for

disappointment or shock when somebody does not act the way we expect.

This suggests a lack of knowledge of what really drives human behavior,

including our own behavior. If situationism is correct, then not only are we failing

to recognize the true causes of human behavior, we are unable to predict not only

the behavior or others but our own as well. If we assume that because of our

strong character we are able to take on some situation that usually has a strong

influence on people, such as situations with a great amount of temptation or

pressure to behave in a certain way, we might be setting ourselves up for failure

by not realizing just how strongly situational influences affect our behavior.

Although psychologists have noted that we tend to reference character traits to

explain behavior more when we are judging the behavior of others than our own,

some of the debriefings from some of the experimental cases cited by situationists

suggest a lack of self-knowledge.[47] Many of the subjects in the experiments

seemed baffled by their own behavior after the fact and seemed unable to assess

correctly the influence of situational factors on their behavior.

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[47] See Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation,* 139. Ross and Nisbett explain that they believe Fritz Heider's explanation of this phenomenon (Fritz Heider, The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations (New York: Wiley, 1958), 54): the idea that people commit the fundamental attribution error more when judging the behavior of others than their own because when we observe another person, an actor, the actor is the "figure" and the situation is the "ground." People are active and interesting and so our attention is focused on them while the situation seems static and we know only the vaguest details of it (especially how the actor is perceiving that situation). However, in our own situation, since we cannot see the "actor" in that situation but merely the situation itself, the situation is the figure and so we are more inclined to cite the effect of situational factors on our behavior.

See also Nisbett and Ross, *Human Inference,* 123.

Moral Agency and Responsibility

It is important to note here that the situationist evidence is problematic on its own, apart from the situationist thesis concerning traditional character traits.[48] While the situationist thesis primarily attacks the traditional conception of character and is problematic for character-based theories, the historical cases and social-psychological experiments that situationists cite pose a problem of their own. As we will see in the next chapter, the situationist evidence shows that subtle situational factors can affect human behavior without the conscious notice or approval of the agent, sometimes pushing the agent to act in ways he would not have endorsed otherwise.

Situationism poses a problem for theories of moral agency and responsibility from two different fronts. On the one hand, if we really lack knowledge about the causes of our own behavior, as the situationist evidence seems to show, this is problematic for any theories of moral agency that require identification with one's motives for acting in order to attribute freedom of choice. If I do not know the motives of my actions, then I cannot identify with them. In addition, the situationist thesis is problematic for theories that require me to act out of a robust (or even global) character in order to identify with my actions. If having a robust character is not possible, then I cannot identify with my actions.

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[48] Dana Nelkin, "Freedom, Responsibility, and the Challenge of Situationism," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 29, no.1 (2005), 10. Nelkin makes a similar point. She argues we should distinguish between the threat posed by what she calls the "substantive" thesis of situationism concerning the role of traditional character traits in our behavior, and the situationist literature and what it shows independently of this thesis. For example, the situationist literature seems to show that situational features largely and unconsciously affect our behavior. This is not a point about character necessarily, but merely the observation that we may not be as free to act or as responsible for our actions as we believe ourselves to be.

Situationism is also generally troubling because it seems to show that situational features can override beliefs and values important to the agent. If features of environments can greatly influence human behavior without our conscious notice or endorsement, then at least some of the time we are not acting out of motivations that are important to us and as Dana Nelkin points out, in that case we are not acting as we would really like.[49] Whether this means we are not acting for reasons we would endorse or that we are not acting out of the kind of character we would like to have, in either case, we are not acting out of the beliefs and values that are important to us.

Nelkin suggests that a more general problem is that the situationist evidence shows that situational features override our ability to respond to good reasons in various ways.[50] So for example, psychologist Stanley Milgram that the subjects of his experiment (which we will look at in the next chapter) acted the way they did because they were responding to the authority figure of the experimenter in the room. In other words, the subjects acted out of a sense of obedience to the experimenter and failed to act out of a sense of duty or compassion to the supposed victim who apparently needed their help. Many of the subjects themselves later confessed to wanting to help the victim but feeling compelled to obey the experimenter and complete the experiment.[51] This is a failure to act for good reasons. For many of the subjects, their own beliefs and values about not harming others gave them good reason to stop the

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[49] Nelkin, "Freedom, Responsibility and the Challenge of Situationism," 18.

[50] Nelkin, "Freedom, Responsibility and the Challenge of Situationism," 17-21.

[51] See Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 33, 53-4, 81-2.

experimenter, yet they failed to act on these reasons, feeling instead compelled to act out of obedience to the experimenter.

Our lack of knowledge about the causes of our own behavior and/or failure to act for good reasons under certain types of situational pressures leads to problems for any theory of moral responsibility that requires an individual to understand or identify with the reasons behind his actions in order to be morally responsible for them. If situational factors affect our behavior to a greater degree than internal dispositions and we are unaware of this, then we do not really understand the reasons behind out behavior. However, it is not merely theories of moral responsibility requiring identification with one's motives for which a lack of self-knowledge or freedom would be problematic.

Theories of responsibility that require one to be in control of one's actions in order to be morally responsible for one's actions might also find the situationist evidence troubling. [52] If one must be in control of one's actions in order to be morally responsible but situational features largely drive our behavior in a variety of situations, then we are not in control of our behavior in those situations and are not morally responsible in those situations.[53] That means that we are not morally responsible in situations where situational features put great

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[52] For example, see R. Jay Wallace's theory of responsibility in R. Jay Wallace, "Reason and Responsibility," in *Normativity and the Will: Selected Essays on Moral Psychology and Practical Reason,* ed. R. Jay Wallace (New York: Oxford UP, 2006), 125.

[53] John M. Doris and Dominic Murphy, "From My Lai to Abu Ghraib: The Moral Psychology of Atrocity," in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 31, no.1 (2007), 25-55. Doris and Murphy argue something along these lines in response to the abuses at Abu Ghraib. They argue that causal responsibility is not sufficient for moral responsibility; one must have some sort of self-control over one's actions in order to regulate one's behavior and be responsible for that behavior. Since certain situational conditions (for example, wartime conditions like those at Abu Ghraib or My Lai, which we will look at in the next chapter) might render without one's normal "powers of self-control" and thus unable to regulate one's behavior, one is not morally responsible for that behavior. Doris and Murphy define powers of self-control as "capacities that motivate and regulate behavior in light of the relevant cognition."

pressures on the individuals in those situations to act a certain way rather than another, and that includes situations where agents committed violence or brutal crimes against innocent others. This last consideration brings up issues of moral luck.

If situational features can drive our behavior in powerful ways, sometimes overriding our moral beliefs or values, and we are not fully in control of the situations in which we find ourselves, then it is a matter of luck how moral we turn out to be. For example, if through no fault of my own I find myself in situations that exert a great deal of pressure on me to act in a way that I would usually consider immoral, then my failing to act morally in those situations will be a matter of luck. However, if acting morally is a result of my decision to act morally or a result of my having a moral character, my being a moral person would be more in my control.

Normative Ethical Theory

The lack of self-control of one's behavior shown by the situationist evidence is more generally problematic for many normative ethical theories. Most normative ethical theories assume we are at least *somewhat* in control of our actions, otherwise there would be no point in dictating the types of actions one must do in order to be moral. If situationism is correct and situational features rather than internal dispositions often drive our behavior, then we are not really in control of our actions.

The more general point is that even if we have a certain set of beliefs and values about what is important to us, if our desire to be moral can be overridden by subtle situational factors that act on us without our conscious notice, then we

are not really acting the way we would wish.[54] We might adopt a set of rules (or just one rule) that we believe will help us to act morally, but if situational features act beneath our conscious notice we may not even get the opportunity to implement those rule(s). For example, suppose I believe I have a duty not to harm innocent people but certain types of situations can affect my behavior in such a way as to make me believe harm is acceptable in those situations.[55] I may wind up not implementing the rule in a situation that demanded it and fail to act morally.

Conclusion

The situationist thesis is problematic for virtue ethics theories grounded in an assumption that character is a real psychological structure that a person might possess. If situationists are correct, then our behavior has less to do with consistent internal dispositions than it does with features of the situations in which we find ourselves. Our character as well as the consistency of our behavior is called into question by this theory and the evidence given in its support.

Moreover, the situationist evidence is troubling apart from the situationist thesis because of what it purports to show about the effects of situational factors on human behavior. If a great variety of situational features can have subtle,

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[54] Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), 141. For example, Hursthouse argues that acting morally requires one to act for the right reasons, for their own sake. Although she argues for a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, she does not require that an agent act out of character but merely that he endorse the actions that he does and that he acts for the right reason (she argues there is a list of reasons that are acceptable as "right" reasons). Acting rightly also requires having the right emotions at the time of the action. However, if situational features can somehow push me to believe this is not even a situation requiring moral action, I may still fail to perform the correct moral action because I would not realize this is the type of situation requiring me to act morally at all.

[55] As we will see in the next chapter, this can happen in any number of ways including because I am made to believe there is something else more important than the harm principle, such as obeying authority (see the Milgram example, next chapter), or because I believe I am not really harming a human being or, even, that it is my duty to harm them (see My Lai and Abu Ghraib).

unexpected effects on our behavior without our conscious notice, overriding our beliefs and values in a number of situations, then we are far less in control of our behavior than we believe. As noted above, this has implications not only for virtue ethics but other normative ethical theories as well. It is also worrying for various accounts of moral agency, moral responsibility, and moral luck.

Chapter 2

SITUATIONISM: THE SITUATIONIST EVIDENCE

In this chapter, I give a thorough analysis of the experimental and
historical cases that situationists cite as evidence for their theory. I examine the
methods and conclusions of the experimental cases as well as the history and
background leading up to the historical cases. For each case, I give a brief history
and description of the methods and conclusions, specifying the situational
influences that situationists claim are at work in each case. I then explain why the
case is important evidence for situationism and why situationists argue that
situational factors rather than dispositional factors are a better explanation for
the behavior in each situation. I also discuss how the case is evidence for the
situationist thesis described in chapter 1.

The Experimental Cases

1. Isen and Levin—"Cookies and Kindness" and "Dime in a Phone booth"

The "dime in a phone booth" is the second part of an experiment with two
studies conducted by Alice Isen and Paula Levin in the early 70's.[1] Situationists
tend to focus mainly on this study, set up in the following way: in a shopping mall
in either suburban San Francisco or Philadelphia, a confederate pretends to make

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[1] See Alice Isen and Paula Levin, "Effect of Feeling Good on Helping: Cookies and
Kindness," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 21, no. 3 (March 1972): 385.
The experiment included two separate studies with two related goals, one of which was to
try to determine whether feeling good would lead to increased helping.

an incomplete call using a public telephone booth.[2] In some cases, the

confederate leaves the dime behind in the coin return slot, while in other cases he

takes it with him. Naïve subjects in the control group were those shoppers who

used the phone after the experimenter and did not find the dime in the coin slot,

while shoppers who did find a leftover dime in the coin slot were the subjects for

the experimental group. As the subject left the telephone booth, a female

confederate walking in the same direction, but slightly ahead and to the side,

dropped a folder full of papers in the subject's path. The dependent measure was

whether finding the dime in the coin slot had any positive or negative effect on

the helping behavior of the subjects. Isen and Levin's results were as follows in

table 1: [3]

Table 1 Number of subjects who helped in experimental versus control condition

Condition	Females		Males	
	Helped	Did not help	Helped	Did not help
Dime (experimental)	8	0	6	2
No dime (control)	0	16	1	8

Source: Data from Isen and Levin, "Effect of Feeling Good on Helping: Cookies and Kindness," 387.

Isen and Levin found that for both males and female subjects, the rate of

helping varied depending on whether the subject was in the experimental or the

control group. Both male and female subjects in the experimental group who

found the dime seemed more likely to stop and help the confederate than did the

subjects in the control group who did not find a dime. Isen and Levin concluded

that finding the dime in the phone booth elevated the mood of the subjects,

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[2] Confederates are actors or subjects who are collaborators of the experimenters and know the true purpose or goal of the experiments. This is in contrast to "naïve" subjects, who are not accomplices of the experimenter and have no knowledge of the true purposes of the experiment or of the affiliation of the confederate to the experimenters. To distinguish them, I will refer to confederates merely as "confederates" and naïve subjects as "subjects."

[3] Isen and Levin, "Effect of Feeling Good on Helping: Cookies and Kindness," 387.

making them more likely to stop and help. They did not speculate on why feeling good made one more likely to help, but merely that there seemed to be a relationship between the two.

Significance

Situationists use these findings to show that even in very low cost helping behaviors like helping someone pick up their papers, a small situational cue or pressure like finding a dime in a telephone booth heavily influences whether to be helpful. This case is important to the situationist evidence because it shows how even a very small, seemingly irrelevant feature of a situation like finding a dime can affect human behavior. Moreover, the helpful behavior displayed in this situation seemed to be a result of the effect of the situational feature of finding a dime, not a spontaneous display of helpfulness from individuals with a consistent trait of helpfulness.

According to Doris's substantive theory, situationists are concerned with *robust* traits, or traits displayed across a variety situations relevant to some trait x, including situations that are not *conducive* to trait x. The Isen and Levin experiment was a situation where the trait of helpfulness would have been applicable. The subjects who failed to help in the control condition were not robustly helpful because an individual with the robust character trait of helpfulness would have helped whether or not the situation was conducive to helpful behavior. As for those in the experimental condition who did stop to help, their behavior by itself is not evidence for a robust trait since it went along with the population norm for that condition. Moreover, once one looks at the numbers for the two conditions, it seems pretty clear that the dime in the phone booth

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played a larger role in whether subjects were helpful than did some internal disposition.

Although the dime experiment is the Isen and Levin study most cited by situationists, the title of their paper "Effect of Feeling Good on Helping: Cookies and Kindness" actually refers to the first study reviewed in the paper. Isen and Levin were interested in a number of studies done in the late 60's that postulated that the role of an individual's mood affected their helpfulness. One important determinant of helpfulness was the potential helper's positive affective state or "warm glow of success."[4] Isen and Levin's first study spanned five sessions and was conducted in the libraries of a university and two colleges in Philadelphia. Fifty-two male students who were studying in individual carrels served as subjects. At the beginning of the session, a coordinator randomly assigned rows of carrels to either the "feel good" or the "neutral" condition. The "feel good" condition was induced by distributing cookies along the rows that had been assigned to that condition.

The subjects were then divided randomly into "help" or "hinder" groups. The subjects became aware that they were either in a "help" or "hinder" group but were unaware that some of the subjects had received cookies while others hadn't. A few minutes after the confederates either distributed the cookies (or didn't and simply walked by the subjects), the experimenter approached each subject individually and asked if and for how many twenty minute sessions they would serve in a psychology experiment. In the help condition, the subject was supposed to help subjects who would be attempting to discover novel uses for ordinary items. The experimenter told the subjects the purpose of this

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[4] Isen and Levin, "Effect of Feeling Good on Helping: Cookies and Kindness," 384.

experiment was an investigation into creativity. In the hinder condition, the job of the subject was to distract a randomly chosen, unwitting student who was studying in the library. In this condition, the subject would drop books, make noise, rattle papers, etc., while the experimenter recorded the reactions of the student trying to study. The experimenter told the subjects the purpose of this experiment was an investigation about distractibility.

The experimenters found that for subjects who had been given a cookie, nine out of thirteen of them agreed to be part of the "help" investigation, while only four out of thirteen of them agreed to help with the "hinder" investigation. For the subjects who had not been given a cookie, however, only six out of twelve of them agreed to assist in the "help" investigation, while nine out of fourteen of them agreed to help in the "hinder" investigation. Isen and Levin concluded that feeling good, induced naturally by the cookies, lead to an increased desire to help.

Significance

As with the dime experiment, Isen and Levin wanted to show that depending on one's mood one was more or less likely to be helpful. The researchers hypothesized that the subjects in the cookie condition were in a better mood after receiving the cookies than they had been when the researchers first walked in. Being in a better mood made them more open to the idea not only of helping with the experiment but also of being helpful to one of their fellow students with their studies. By contrast, the students who did not get cookies just went into the experiment in whatever mood they happened to be in, not having their mood enhanced by the addition of the cookies. This meant they were less likely to volunteer to be helpful to another person, as opposed to merely being

distracting (although still helping with the experiment). According to Isen and

Levin, this shows that being in a better mood leads to increased helping. Even if

what the results of the experiment actually show are not entirely clear, at the very

least we can take away that students seemed more likely to chose to help or

hinder depending on the condition they were in.[5]

2. Princeton Seminary Experiment

Psychologists John Darley and Daniel Batson conducted the Princeton

Seminary study, often dubbed "The Good Samaritan" experiment, at Princeton

University. The subjects of the study were 47 students of the Princeton

Theological Seminary. When subjects appeared for the experiment, an

experimenter asked them to give a 3-5 minute talk on some passage handed to

them. The first variable was that for some of the students the passage was the

parable of the Good Samaritan, while for others it was a passage about the kinds

of jobs seminarians could do. The second variable was the following: some of the

students were told that they were already late to give their talk and so should

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[5] Situationists do not often cite the results of this experiment, even if it happens to be the first part of the famous dime in a booth experiment studied in countless social psychology classes and mentioned by every situationist. The reason for this seems to be that the results of this experiment do not clearly show the hypothesis that an elevated mood induces one to be more helpful than not. This could be blamed on the procedure used in the experiment or other factors, but it is clear that the results of this experiment do not show with any certainty that situational features influence a person one way versus another. Isen and Levin do not talk about the fact that slightly more of the subjects who did not receive a cookie still volunteered to help with the psychology experiment (fifteen out of twenty-six as opposed to thirteen out of twenty-six in the cookie condition), even though of those that did not receive a cookie who volunteered more of them volunteered to help in the hinder condition, not the help condition. Agreeing to help the experimenter at all is a form of helping as well and roughly the same number of students in the no cookie condition agreed to help (two more actually) than in the cookie condition.

Isen and Levin do address the fact that they weren't sure if helpfulness was a result of the good mood induced by the cookies or because the subjects had just been exposed to a helpful model in the confederate handing out the cookies. This was the reason for the second part of the experiment, i.e., the dime in a phone booth experiment that would hopefully yield clearer results.

hurry to the building where they would give their talk, while other students were told no such thing.

When all of the students passed through an alley on the way to the next building there was a shabbily dressed man slumped in a doorway, head down, eyes closed, not moving. As the student went by, the man coughed twice and groaned, keeping his head down. If the student stopped and asked if something was wrong or offered to help, the man looked startled and somewhat groggy and would reply, "Oh, thank you [cough]. . . . No, it's all right.[Pause] I've got this respiratory condition [cough].. . . The doctor's given me these pills to take, and I just took one. . . . If I just sit and rest for a few minutes I'll be O.K. . . . Thanks very much for stopping though [smiles weakly]."[6] If the student persisted in helping, insisting on taking the man inside the building, the man would accept the help and stand up.

Darley and Batson found that subjects in a hurry were less likely to help than subjects who were not in a hurry. In the non-hurry condition, 63% of the subjects offered help compared to only 45% of those in an intermediate hurry and 10% of those in the high-hurry condition. This correlation held steady even across those subjects who were going to give a talk about the passage of the Good Samaritan.[7] The factor that seemed to have the largest effect on behavior was whether the subject was in a hurry.

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[6] John Darley and Daniel Batson, "From Jerusalem to Jericho: A study of situational and dispositional variables in helping behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 27, no. 1 (1973): 104.

[7] See Darley and Batson, "From Jerusalem to Jericho."

Significance

Situationists often cite this experiment because it was the rather trivial situational feature of "being in a hurry" that affected the helping behavior of the subjects. What is notable about this case is that the subjects were seminarians, individuals whose vocation includes helping others. Moreover, some of them were even reminded of this by being given the parable of the Good Samaritan to read before being sent off to the building where they would give a talk. Yet this apparently had no effect on how likely the subjects were to display helpful behavior. It was being or not being in a hurry that affected helpful behavior.

Moreover, since a trivial situational factor affected the likelihood of helping behavior, the helping behavior did not appear to be the result of a robust character trait. Those subjects that helped in the non-hurrying condition, while acting compassionately, merely acted according to the population norm, and those that did not help acted inconsistently with a compassionate or helpful robust character trait (as well as also acting along with the population norm of not helping in that condition). Seminarians would be expected to have thought more about the robust character trait of helpfulness or compassion since it is often part of their work to help those in need, and yet even among the seminarians what determined a compassionate response (helping the fallen man) depended more on the features of the situation than on a robust character trait.

3. The Milgram Experiment

One of the most important pieces of social psychological evidence often cited by situationists is the infamous Milgram experiment. Between 1960 and 1963 at Yale University, Stanley Milgram conducted an experiment with male and

female subjects from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds recruited via a newspaper ad or an automated phone call. The experiment was ostensibly a study of learning and memory where the subjects would be paid a small fee for their participation. There were a number of variations to this experiment, but the most famous variation of the experiment was set up in the following way: one confederate played the experimenter issuing commands to the naïve test subjects while the second confederate pretended to be a fellow naïve test subject.[8] The second confederate and the naïve subject drew lots (rigged beforehand) with the naïve subject ending up as teacher while the confederate was to be the learner. The learner was then strapped into a chair with electrodes on his wrist in another room and out of view of the naïve subject during the test. The experimenter explained that the straps were to prevent excessive movement, although the effect was to make it appear that it was impossible for the learner to escape from the chair. The naïve subject was given a small shock from the electrodes to convince him he would be issuing real shocks to the learner.

The experimenter then took the naïve subject into another room, where the subject sat in front of a shock generator with 30 lever switches while the experimenter sat nearby. The experimenter instructed the naïve subject to read a series of word pairs to the learner via a microphone. The learner would have to respond by pressing one of four switches in front of him that lit up one of four numbered quadrants in an answer box located on top of the shock generator. For every word that the learner got incorrectly the naïve subject would have to push a button on the shock generator that the subject believed would issue a shock to the

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[8] Some variations had no effect while others had very interesting effects. For more on the variations of the experiment and their results see: Stanley Milgram's *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

learner. After each mistake, the experimenter asked the naïve subject to give the

learner a shock of a higher voltage, with some of the highest voltages (375-450

volts) labeled "Danger: Severe Shock." With each increase, the learner responded

with increased distress that could be heard through the laboratory walls,

screaming and asking to be set free, until at 300 volts he ceased responding at all,

either in the form of protests or answers. If the naïve subject protested to the

experimenter in the room with him, the experimenter responded with a series of

predetermined responses and prods like, "please go on" or "you must continue."

Milgram found that 25 out of 40 subjects shocked the "learner" all the way to the

end, even in this variation of the experiment where the subjects were told at the

beginning of the experiment that the learner had a heart condition.

Significance

Situationists focus on this study because of the surprising number of

subjects that were willing to issue high voltage shocks to another person merely

because they were told to do so. As Doris points out, it is unlikely that Milgram

merely "tapped into a group of sadists that all happened to respond to the call for

subjects" so it is unlikely that the behavior was a result of a number of the

subjects being intentionally cruel or callous.[9] The agitated state of many of the

subjects and great reluctance to continue shocking the learner beyond 300 volts

is evidence that they felt some compassion for the learner.[10] A more plausible

explanation is that human behavior is much more sensitive to situational cues

than was previously believed and that the particular situation, not the character

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[9] For a full discussion by Doris of the results, see Doris, *Lack of Character,* 42-50.

[10] See Milgram, *Obedience to Authority,* 33; 53-4; 81-2.

traits of the native subjects, led to the results found in the Milgram experiment. In this case, the situational cues included the laboratory setting, the learner and the naïve subject being in different rooms (proximity of victim), the subject being the sole subject in the study, and the experimenter's presence and calm demeanor (authority figure). Milgram noted that in variations where the experimenter was not in the room but gave instructions over the phone or via another subject (who was actually a confederate playing the role of a naïve subject), or variations where the naïve subject had to force the learner's hand onto a touch plate in order to issue a shock, there was a sharp drop-off in compliance. This is still telling, however, since obedient behavior varied along with situational cues. [11]

A failure to behave compassionately when doing so would have been appropriate and "not unduly costly" to the agent (who merely had to get up and leave without losing anything) is evidence against attributing a robust trait of compassion to the subjects. Since most of the subjects seemed to go along with the population norm in the variations of the experiment, their behavior seems to be due to situational factors, not individual character traits.

4. Stanford Prison Experiment

Situationists cite social psychologist Philip Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE) as a piece of particularly troubling evidence of the disastrous effects of situational variables on behavior.[12] This experiment from the 1970's was supposed to be a demonstration of the effects of situational variables on the

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[11] For more, see Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*, 32-72.

[12] See Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (New York: Random House, 2007).

behavior of individuals role-playing as prisoners or guards in a simulated prison environment. Zimbardo and his team chose the subjects carefully so that none of the subjects came into the simulated prison setting with any sort of pathology like the kind that would show up later. All subjects had filled out a series of psychological personality self-reports and the experimenters chose only those subjects that showed no history of crime, emotional or physical disability, or intellectual or social disadvantage that might differentiate them from the other subjects.[13] The experimenters assigned the subjects at random to a role of either prisoner or guard.

To make everything seem as real as possible, those students assigned to play prisoners were handcuffed, body-searched, and arrested by actual police officers at their homes the Sunday prior to the experiment; some of them in front of neighbors or family. They were then driven in a police car to the police station while the whole arrest was filmed. Upon arriving at the prison, the subjects assigned to play the guards stripped the "prisoners" naked, sprayed them with a powder they claimed to be delouser, and then gave them their uniforms. Uniforms consisted of smocks with numbers on them that would replace the prisoner's name, a nylon cap to simulate the shaving of one's head, and a chain

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[13] The measures that Zimbardo tested the participants on before the experiment were the F-Scale of authoritarianism, the Machiavellian Scale of interpersonal manipulation strategies and the Comrey Personality Scales.

The F-scale tests the "rigid adherence to conventional values and a submissive, uncritical attitude toward authority" (Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect,* 198).

The Machiavellian scale assesses one's "endorsement of strategies for gaining effective advantage in interpersonal encounters" (Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect,* 198). Zimbardo found no real difference on these two scales for the scores of the guards versus the prisoners.

The Comrey Personality scale was a self-report assessment used to predict dispositional variations in trustworthiness, orderliness, conformity, activity, stability, extroversion, masculinity and empathy (Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect*, 199). On this scale, the average scores of the guards and the prisoners were virtually interchangeable although there were some slight variations within individuals.

strapped to one ankle that stayed on even while the prisoner slept. The prisoners were also given a number of rules by which they had to abide, including not talking to fellow prisoners in public, addressing each other by number only, and having many things they would come to expect in the outside world—like mail, smoking, and visitors—suddenly turned into privileges. Because the bathroom was outside of the area designated as a prison, when the prisoners used the bathroom (at pre-assigned hours), the guards placed paper bags over their heads and chained them together by their ankle chains, forcing them to walk one after another by touching the shoulder of the person in front of them.

Some of the subjects assigned to guards began to take advantage of their positions of power almost immediately, humiliating the prisoners individually or by subjecting them to whims. Within a week, guards became excessively hostile and aggressive toward the prisoners and were recorded giving harsh commands, insulting prisoners, deindividuating prisoners, and showing verbal and physical aggression toward the prisoners, for example by threatening and using instruments against them.

Meanwhile the students assigned as prisoners became passive and "mindlessly obedient," yielding to the whims of the guards with little or no resistance. [14] When one of the prisoners actually tried to take some passive resistance by going on a hunger strike, the other prisoners harassed him for being a troublemaker rather than supporting him. The prisoners were nonsupportive and noncooperative amongst themselves, as if having internalized the negative image the guards had of them. This passive obedience and noncooperative

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[14] Zimbardo often uses this term to describe the behavior of the prisoners during the SPE in *The Lucifer Effect*.

behavior amongst victims would show up again in the real-life cases of the genocides in Rwanda and during the Holocaust, a testament to the sorts of effects that certain situations can have not only on the aggressors in those situations but on their victims as well.

Zimbardo was amazed to find that when they brought in an actual chaplain to consult with the prisoners, the chaplain as well as many of the prisoners talked about their "parole" and "trials" as if actually believing that they were in a real prison awaiting a public defender to get their day in court.

The experiment, which was supposed to last two weeks, was prematurely terminated one week after it began. By one week, the guards had started to inflict sexual humiliation on the prisoners akin to some of the practices that would later happen at Abu Ghraib.[15] Many of the prisoners had already been released prior to the end of week by Zimbardo because they showed signs of extreme stress and depression.

Zimbardo was impressed with the extent of the effects on the students involved as well as on himself. Not only was he astounded by the way the subjects internalized the prison settings and their roles and came to see them as quite real, he was also amazed with the speed with which the subjects playing the guards resorted to aggression and humiliation when dealing with the prisoners. He later remarked in his book *The Lucifer Effect* that he felt that even he, as the researcher, was caught up in the situational influences of the experiment. Although he daily saw reasons for stopping the experiment immediately, he let it continue even after he saw the sorts of effects it had on the students in the experiment. Zimbardo concluded that good people can be "induced, seduced and

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[15] I will discuss the Abu Ghraib case at length below.

initiated into behaving in evil ways" as well as being led to act in ways that are "irrational, self-destructive, antisocial and stupid."[16]

Significance

As Zimbardo states, the SPE was not a study of trivial situational factors like finding a dime in a phone booth bur rather a situation where every aspect of the environment was controlled by the experimenter. One of the situational factors that affected the behavior of the subjects was the anonymity of the prisoners, achieved by giving each prisoner a number and referring to the prisoners only by their numbers. Moreover, both guards and prisoners were given uniforms that denoted their status in the experiment: guards were given clubs and glasses to hide their eyes behind while the prisoners had to wear merely smocks with their identification number on them as well as a chain around their ankle. The prisoners had all their belongings taken away and were not allowed to talk to each other in public. All of these factors contributed to making the experiment feel more real and creating a certain power dynamic between prisoners and guards, where guards had almost complete control of the prisoners (and many abused this power) while the prisoners had to submit to the whims of those in power.

The Stanford Prison Experiment is a particularly important piece of evidence for situationism because of the surprising severity of the results. It is also astonishing the speed with which both prisoners and guards accepted the simulated prison and their roles in it as reality. Moreover, the extent of the cruelty of the subjects playing guards and the passive obedience of those playing

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[16]Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect*, 211.

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the prisoners was completely unforeseen. Since Zimbardo had tried to choose psychologically healthy subjects, neither the cruelty nor the passive obedience seemed explicable by reference to the dispositions of the subjects. Furthermore, the subjects had been assigned their roles at random, yet most of them altered their behavior and dispositions to fill their roles within a few days. None of the subjects had ever been imprisoned before so the socialization into the prison environment happened over the week they spent there.

Zimbardo agrees with situationists that these sorts of situations challenge the view of a relatively stable and consistent individual personality or character, especially when it comes to morality. Zimbardo writes that he was not surprised when he heard about Abu Ghraib, which he discusses at length in *The Lucifer Effect*. Zimbardo's main contention in this book is that certain situations can make average or even seemingly good people commit brutal or humiliating acts against fellow human beings without feelings of remorse or guilt. His book, as well as the website he created for it, warn of "unwanted [situational] influences" and the various ways that they can influence our behavior.[17]

One of the requirements of robust traits is that the trait-relevant behavior be displayed in a variety of situations, including situations that are not conducive to that trait, what Doris calls diagnostic situations. The Stanford Prison experiment is a good example of a diagnostic situation because the pressure to behave according to one's prescribed roles was overwhelming. While one may argue that this is merely a failure in one situation, the extent of compliance with

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[17] Zimbardo also has some ideas on how we can counter these influences, but I will discuss those in the next chapter.

the situation seems to provide strong evidence against the attribution of robust

traits to most of the subjects in the SPE.[18]

The Historical Cases

5. Kitty Genovese

A historical case often cited as evidence for situationism is the infamous

case of Catherine "Kitty" Genovese, a young woman murdered just outside her

apartment complex within sight of her neighbors. On the night of March 13, 1964,

Genovese was attacked three separate times outside of the apartment complex in

which she lived in New York City. Over the course of half an hour, her assailant

stabbed her several times, sexually assaulted her, and then left her to bleed to

death. Although the attacks were in the courtyard of her apartment complex and

Genovese screamed for help, no one offered to help or call the police until after

she was mortally wounded. The story that ran in the New York Times later that

day was titled "37 Who Saw Murder Didn't Call the Police. Apathy at Stabbing of

Queens Woman Shocks Inspector." The journalist who reported on the story

wrote that 38 of Genovese's neighbors had seen the attack, yet none of them

interfered during the attack and only one called the police only after Genovese

was already dying.

According to a recent article about the Kitty Genovese murders by a group

of psychologists from England, the events of that night paved the way for the

development of the theory in social psychology, coined by psychologists Latane

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[18] That is, any of the subjects that complied. Zimbardo notes there was at least one "prisoner" who rebelled and several guards who were reluctant to mistreat the prisoners. (See Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil.*)

and Darley, as the "bystander effect."[19] This refers to the theory that the more people there are standing around in an emergency situation, the less likely anyone is to help.

According to Latane and Darley, the bystander effect inhibits bystander intervention in two ways. First, there is a diffusion of responsibility among the many bystanders. If there is only one person in the room when an emergency takes place, then they are the only person who can help and failure to do so would make that individual the sole person responsible for the outcome of the situation. If however, there are several people standing in the room, then each person bears some small brunt of the responsibility for the consequences. The second way the bystander effect works is that in ambiguous situation when we are unclear as to what is the proper reaction to a situation we naturally look to others. If we are unsure what the correct response is in a certain situation, the failure of others to help in a situation reinforces our belief that not helping is the correct action to take in that situation.[20]

Significance

The Kitty Genovese murder led to the most persistent account of the bystander effect, the idea that bystanders do not intervene when there is a number of bystanders in a situation because the presence of others negatively effects the likelihood of any one of them intervening. The Genovese case is mentioned in most social psychology textbooks as a powerful illustration of how factors in a situation can hinder the helping responses of a bystander when there

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[19] See Rachel Manning, Mark Levine, and Adam Collins, "The Kitty Genovese Murder and the Social Psychology of Helping: The Parable of the 38 Witnesses," *American Psychologist* 62, no. 6 (2007): 555-562.

[20] See Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation,* 41-42.

are other bystanders present. More broadly, the case shows how the presence of others can profoundly affect one's behavior *without one realizing it*.

Out of the thirty-eight people who heard Genovese's screams that night, some (if not *most)* of them had to be at least averagely moral people yet none of them responded from a robust character trait of compassion. One would expect a person of average morality would have some compassion, and compassion would require one to do at least the minimal act of calling the police or attempting to scare off Genovese's attacker from the safety of one's window. Even if this situation was a diagnostic one because perhaps it was unclear that help was required, that still leaves thirty-eight people failing to act compassionately and along with the population norm instead.

However, in a recent article, psychologists Rachel Manning, Mark Levine, and Adam Levine claim that the Genovese case is not as clear cut as most social psychology books would have it seem. Manning et al. conducted an analysis of the court transcripts from the trial of Winston Moseley (the man who attacked Genovese), plus an examination of other legal documents associated with the case, and a review of research carried out by a local historian and lawyer (Joseph De May Jr.). They found that a different picture of the events that night emerged.

According to the way the events are presented in most social psychology textbooks (and the way it was told in the original article), 38 of her neighbors saw the entire attack on Genovese and watched (or knew) that she was stabbed and then sexually assaulted over the period of half an hour and yet failed to do anything. According to the article by Manning et al., the layout of the apartment complex was such that most of Genovese's neighbors would not have seen most of the attack at all (or even any of the attack) and even the three who testified as

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eye witnesses had only partial glimpses of what could or could not have been a man attacking a woman. The second attack by Moseley happened inside a building, outside of the view of everyone. Moreover, a few of the residents of the apartment complex claimed to have called the police during the first attack despite "difficulties of contacting the police at that time," not only because of the way the emergency response system was set up at that time in history but also because there was a bar on that street known for trouble.

Manning et al. conclude that the usual account of the murder of Kitty Genovese stands more as a parable of the sorts of ways that one's behavior can be influenced by features of a situation (such as the presence of other bystanders) than a factual account of the way things really happened that night. Whether or not the Kitty Genovese story proves to be a good example for bystander effects on helping, there are a number of other studies done in this area that provide more clear cut examples of the phenomenon.[21]

6. Abu Ghraib

In the spring of 2004, the CBS program *60 Minutes II* broadcast the first pictures of the abuses at Abu Ghraib, a prison used by both U.S. and Iraqi forces until 2006. The Final Report of the Independent Panel to Review Department of Defense Detention Operations reported that "from October through December 2003, on the night shift of Tier 1 at Abu Ghraib…acts of brutality and purposeless sadism" occurred. [22]

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[21] See John Darley and Bibb Latane, "Bystander intervention in emergencies: Diffusion of Responsibility," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 8 (1968): 377–383.

[22] Steven Strasser ed., (2004) *The Abu Ghraib Investigations: the Official Reports of the Independent Panel and Pentagon on the Shocking Prisoner Abuse in Iraq* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004): 1.

The abuses that became known through the pictures that surfaced from Abu Ghraib were not part of authorized interrogations or directed at gathering intelligence from detainees.[23] Many prisoners were stripped naked, apparently for the sole purpose of humiliation, and often left in their cell without clothes or blankets for days at a time in cold weather. Sometimes prisoners were handcuffed together with other prisoners or handcuffed to their cells wearing only hoods on their heads. Detainees were sometimes placed in simulated sexual positions with other detainees, forced to perform indecent acts on each other, or forced to participate in group-masturbation with other detainees while American soldiers took photographs. Other detainees were beaten, kicked, and forced to stand in pressure positions for hours on end; sometimes soldiers sat or stood on them. In a few cases, American soldiers used military dogs to frighten detainees.

When the allegations first surfaced, they were written off as the actions of a few rogue soldiers who had committed sexual and physical abuse under the chaotic conditions of Abu Ghraib.[24] The prison had too many detainees for the number of military police guards to keep them under control. There was inadequate leadership and poor supervision that "worked to produce an attitude of fear and sullen resentment among the guards and interrogators at Abu Ghraib."[25] In September 2003, the Lieutenant Colonel in charge of the interrogation center at the prison was wounded along with ten other soldiers by a mortar attack on the prison. Two other soldiers were killed in this attack.

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[23] There were also other abuses that occurred at Abu Ghraib that were not photographed because they occurred during interrogation sessions. For example, there are pending allegations of rape and sodomy of the detainees by their American captors.

[24] For more see Strasser, *The Abu Graib Investigations,* 14-15.

[25] See introduction by Craig Whitney in Strasser, *The Abu Ghraib Investigations,* 15.

Frequent mortar attacks followed all winter, killing 22 prisoners and wounding 80 others. Major General George R. Fay, who was conducting an investigation of the matter, wrote that the morale of soldiers and civilians suffered as the attacks continued. There was a general feeling among the soldiers at Abu Ghraib that the Army had forgotten them.

Furthermore, President George W. Bush and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld decided in late 2001 that members of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban captured in Afghanistan were not entitled to be considered prisoners of war as protected by the Geneva Conventions. Craig Whitney writes that "legal memoranda prepared by the Justice Department in the period leading up to the president's decision seemed to show an administration seeking justification in law for torture."[26] This climate at Abu Ghraib provided the opportunity for such abuse to occur and to continue undiscovered for a long time.

Significance

Situationists have cited the abuse at Abu Ghraib as a case where the baffling behavior of the soldiers is better explained by the pressures of the situation than by the character of the soldiers. One of the situational factors in play here was the ambiguous standards of treatment set for the prisoners. Although the White House never authorized torture, Whitney and others have claimed that the White House was trying to get around the legal issue of torture by denying the detainees prisoner of war status (which would have meant having to follow the Geneva conventions). Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez also authorized various exceptions to the normal handling rules for treatment of the

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[26] See introduction by Whitney in: Strasser, *The Abu Ghraib Investigations*, 16.

prisoners. These vague standards left it open to the interpretation of the soldiers at Abu Ghraib whether many of the abuses that committed were considered torture. They were definitely not techniques advocated by the U.S. government, but it was unclear whether the U.S. government frowned upon them.

Other situational factors included the power dynamic between prisoners and guards, the lack of leadership, and the relative inexperience of many of the soldiers stationed at Abu Ghraib. As in the Stanford Prison Experiment, prisoners were stripped of their identities by the removal of their clothes and their names, and guards were given complete control of them. In this case, as opposed to the SPE, the guards had actual motivation to abuse the prisoners seeing as the prisoners were considered part of the enemy forces that daily attacked their prison and killed American soldiers. As in the SPE, the guards were left mostly to themselves to decide the treatment of the prisoners, and it was never completely clear that even the upper leadership did not want these prisoners tortured.[27]

While this is another case that might qualify as a diagnostic situation because the pressures of the situation are stronger than the pressure to act compassionately, because the behavior in question is so objectionable it seems to automatically discount the possibility of a robust trait of compassion. If instead one tries to explain the behavior by a robust trait of cruelty or callousness, it is

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[27] This is also the conclusion Doris and Murphy comes to in their paper "From My Lai to Abu Ghraib: The Moral Psychology of Atrocity." Doris and Murphy conclude that the lack of adequate leadership, the general climate at the prison constantly under mortar attacks, and the ambiguity of the government's position on the treatment of prisoners had potent effects on the soldiers' "ability to determine the illegality of atrocities other than unnecessary homicides," that is that the soldiers suffered from moral drift—roughly defined as losing one's sense of right and wrong (Sabini and Silver, "Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued," 553, call it "losing one's moral compass").
    Doris and Murphy don't conclude that the particular features of the situation these soldiers found themselves in completely excuses their behavior but merely that the specific situational features had a strong effect on their ability to make decisions and thus on their behavior.

hard to reconcile this picture with accounts by family and friends of the soldiers involved as having been at least averagely moral individuals before Abu Ghraib.

7. Vietnam Massacres

In the morning of March 16, 1968, Charlie Company, 11th Light Infancy Brigade of the US Army brutally murdered 300 residents in a sub-hamlet of Xom Lang on the coast of Central Vietnam known to Americans as My Lai. The victims were mostly women, old men, and small children. Many of the women were raped and some victims were tortured and then mutilated before being killed. That same morning, a mile or so away, another Task Force Barker unit, Bravo company, killed close to a hundred civilians in the sub-hamlet of My Hoi, known to Americans as My Khe.[28]

Significance

Situationists mention the massacres in Vietnam because there was more than one company of soldiers involved and the massacres were all equally pointless and brutal. Unless it was the case that a large number of cruel of callous individuals were recruited, the situational features of the war are a better explanation for the brutal behavior of the perpetrators of these massacres. The conditions American soldiers and their allies found in Vietnam were extremely hostile. Guerilla warfare was the primary mode of engagement in battle, which

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[28] See. Kendrick Oliver, *The My Lai Massacre in American History and Memory* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), 11.Although this was by far the most publicized case of the killing of civilians in Vietnam, there were a number of other known instances of large-scale face-to-face killings of Vietnamese noncombatants including: the shooting of sixteen unarmed women and children near Danang; the deaths of 20 civilians in Thanh Phong; between four and five hundred inhabitants of the village of Binh Hoa by Korean troops; and finally the killing of hundreds over a seven month period by a US platoon and others.

meant that soldiers never knew who would be the next enemy combatant; it could be a child or a woman. American soldiers were fighting against an enemy in the enemy's own turf, which included densely thick jungles and thickets.

Situationists also point out that regular situational influences that would distract us in normal circumstances, like loud noises or unpleasant smells, also affect soldiers in combat conditions.[29] To this, one must add exhaustion often felt by soldiers who have gone without sleep for hours or days in the heat of battle. There is also the fact that many soldiers have to see their closest comrades killed or maimed, sometimes in gruesome ways. This does not include the sorts of training military personnel have to go through to be able reflexively to obey orders and kill other human beings without hesitation. Perhaps considering the training the soldiers had undergone and the conditions they found themselves in, they were responding quite logically to their environment. If even insubstantial situational factors can cause moral failures, the quite substantial situational pressures of warfare can definitely impair the exercise of normative competence.[30]

8. Holocaust

The Holocaust is perhaps the most notorious example of the types of cruel and inhumane acts that human beings are capable of against their fellow man. During the Second World War, between the years of 1941-1945 in Germany, the Nazi regime deliberately and systematically murdered six million Jews, one

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[29] See Doris and Murphy, "From My Lai to Abu Ghraib."

[30] See Doris and Murphy, "From My Lai to Abu Ghraib," 30. Doris and Murphy define this as "a complex capacity enabling its possessor to appreciate ethical considerations, ascertain information relevant to particular ethical judgments, and identify behavior implementing those ethical judgments."

million people from Yugoslavia, at least two hundred thousand Gypsies, two hundred and fifty thousand handicapped, ten thousand homosexuals, and five thousand Jehovah's Witnesses.[31]

The plan of the Nazi dictatorship, headed by the infamous Adolf Hitler, was to annihilate an entire race of people, people of Jewish descent, and others who did not fit Hitler's version of the Aryan ideal. To give an idea of the scope, after WWII was over and the surviving victims of the Holocaust were rescued, one-third of all Jews in the world had perished; this was roughly one-half of all Jews in Europe and two-thirds of all Jews living in the Nazi sphere of influence.

Historians have argued that a troubled political and social climate was largely responsible for the citizens of Germany tolerating this government-sanctioned genocide of the Jews. For the few decades before World War II broke out, Germany had been going through a number of social, economic, and political problems and it wasn't long before certain small political factions started blaming the Jews for these problems. The Jews were accused of having shirked front-line duty during WWI, of engaging in black-marketeering, and generally being exploitative and unpatriotic. The Jewish were also equated with socialism, which was feared greatly by a middle class quickly losing their position and slipping into the lower class. Still, even with the anti-Semitism that began to become rampant in Germany at the time, the large majority of the German population did not see the Jews with hatred but merely apathy and indifference.

Merely creating anti-Semitic sentiments in the German populace did not yet create the right type of social environment that would end in Hitler's terrible "Final Solution," the next step was to depict them as the sole cause of all of

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[31] Saul S. Friedman, *A History of the Holocaust* (Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 2004), 397.

Germany's social and economic problems.[32] When Hitler seized power, slowly climbing the ranks of government until he had himself appointed Fuhrer, or supreme leader of Germany, he slowly began to institute anti-Semitic laws. In order to make the idea of concentration camps (and later death camps) more palatable to the average German citizen, who was usually merely apathetic toward the Jews, the Nazi began a program of conditioning that included indoctrination in the schools. History books and school texts in other subjects were changed to fit with the Nazi ideal of an Aryan world.

The Nazis also began a program of depersonalization of the Jews. They began by taking away Jewish legal rights and personhood and then began spreading propaganda that spoke of them in non-human terms. The new laws first took away the rights of Jews to take part in German society and then marked them out according to race. Later the Nazis stripped people of Jewish descent of their citizenship, deported some of them, and abrogated their rights as a minority. The Nazis would also take away the religious liberties of the Jews and would sometimes desecrate their cemeteries and houses of worship. They taxed the Jews unfairly taxed and forced them to register their property and assets before having it confiscated, leaving many of them in dire poverty and near starvation. The Nazis did everything they could to take away the individual identities of the Jewish populace so that the non-Jewish German citizens who daily saw their neighbors have their possessions taken from them before being hauled off to concentration camps would not respond with outrage.

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[32] Hitler's original plan was to make life so intolerable for the Jews that they simply left on their own. Unfortunately, other countries wouldn't take refugees and some of the Nazi policies that took away some of the right and property of people of Jewish descent also left them without the resources to do so. Moreover, once Germany began invading its neighboring countries they realized they would end up with the same problem. Eventually the Nazi's decided the only way to deal with the "Jewish problem" was annihilation.

After all the sanctions and laws that passed against the Jews and the indoctrination against them beginning from early childhood, by the time the Nazis began carting off people to the concentration camps the average German citizen was completely apathetic to the plight of the Jews, if not set against them.[33]

The final stage of Hitler's program to exterminate the Jews was to bureaucratize the process of routinely murdering millions of innocent people and dehumanize the victims at the camps so that doctors and soldiers who worked there could brutalize and murder them. [34] The prisoners were given little or no clothing and were not allowed to wash or keep up any sort of general hygiene.[35] They lived at subsistence level in stark surroundings, drinking dirty water, and getting little food. They were often given just enough scraps of food to barely keep them alive and just enough to breed conflict among them if anyone got more than their share.

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[33] Ronnie Landau, *The Nazi Holocaust* (New York: I. B. Tauris and Co. Ltd, 1992), 141-145. However, as Landau notes, after the night that the Nazi's came to refer to as Kristallnacht ("The Night of Shattered Glass"), the Nazi's learned just how much the average German citizen would tolerate. Kristallnacht took the form of the destruction and burning of synagogues, the ransacking of Jewish shops and warehouses, and the terrorizing, beating up, and murder of Jewish individuals. Ninety-one Jews were killed, more than seven thousand shops destroyed, and three-hundred synagogues razed to the ground. The German reaction was one of righteous indignation, not support towards the government's measures. Yet a mere short time later twenty-five thousand Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps. Plans of mass extermination would be put into action a mere three years later. The lesson seemed to be that people could tolerate the anti-Jewish measures only if they were not done overtly but invisibly where the Germans couldn't see the results of their elected government's policies.

[34] Sabini and Silver, *Moralities of Everyday Life,* 55-87. Sabini and Silver discuss how some of the most central figures of the Holocaust, such as Adolf Eichmann, explain their part in the murder of millions of innocent people by dispassionately claiming they were simply doing their job. Each of these bureaucrats each played a small if indirect part in the Holocaust and together contributed to the attempted genocide of the Jews and other groups. More on this discussion in the third and fourth chapters.

[35] See Friedman, *A History of the Holocaust.*

Dehumanizing the prisoners by taking their clothes and their names as well as putting them into environments where they had to cling to survival apparently made it easier for their captors to treat them with indifferent cruelty and malice. Though some Nazi doctors, like the man who is known only as Ernst B., were clearly conflicted by their duties, as shown through various physiological symptoms of stress as well as heavy drinking, the majority of them still went through with their duties as SS officers. These duties included selections of prisoners for the gas chambers and experimentation on prisoners. Some doctors, like Josef Mengele, experimented on captives in horrific ways with experiments that were as irrelevant and unscientific as they were cruel and unspeakable. Furthermore, after the war the men who had worked as Nazi doctors at the camps did not seem to regret the actions they had performed at the camps.[36] Meanwhile, the SS guards that patrolled the camps would brutalize the prisoners, humiliate them, deny them food and medical care, and finally march them off to gas chambers or shoot them one at a time. Yet these guards could go laugh, drink, and play games at the end of the night once their shift was over.

The situational features seemed to have an affect not merely on the guards and the non-Jewish German citizenry but on the victims of the Holocaust as well. Much like the observations that Zimbardo would come to make about the students playing the prisoners in his prison experiment, Ronnie Landau notes that a number of historians have wondered why the vast majority of Jews seemed to have cooperated with their own destruction or, at least, had gone, as the cliché put it, 'like sheep to the slaughter.' They had registered as Jews, they had worn

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[36] See Robert J. Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide (*New York: Basic Books Inc, 1986), 417-430.

the yellow star, they had formed Jewish councils and police forces to help the work of the Nazis, had reported at railway stations for deportation, had literally dug their own graves, and walked into gas chambers.[37] Landau reminds us that the physical and psychological condition under which the Jews subsisted in Europe was one of powerlessness, isolation, and choicelessness (and of course their failure to imagine that the Nazis, as much as they hated them, would resort to brutality and mass murder). As with the prisoners in the SPE experiment who were all too willing to cooperate with the cruel guards and not willing to work with each other against them, it was the pressures of the terrible situation in Germany at the time that led to many Jews cooperating with the Nazis in their own destruction.

Significance

Situationists cite the Holocaust as evidence for their theory because it is singular not just in its scope (the immense numbers of people that were murdered) but in its inhumanity and barbarity. It is also notable for the fact that it wasn't just the doctors and soldiers that worked in the concentration camps that were involved but the citizens of Germany who sat by while millions of people were taken away to be killed in horrific ways. Is it possible that all of the people that participated, from German citizens to the doctors and soldiers that murdered or brutalized the victims in the death camps, were simply cruel or malevolent; or is it more likely that the situational features of the political and

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[37] Landau, *The Nazi Holocaust,* 192-193.

social climate in Germany at the time facilitated the ease with which the citizenry and soldiers accepted the genocide?[38]

Situationists point to the same sort of factors that played a part at Abu Ghaib and even the SPE. In order to get the citizens of Germany to accept the genocide, the Nazis instituted a program of indoctrination, blaming the Jews for the economic and social problems that Germany had been suffering. Then the status of the Jewish populace as citizens and individuals was taken from them by a series of laws and sanctions taking their possessions, their liberties, and their rights, and singling them out as somehow "different" from other Germans. Meanwhile, once at the camps, the Jews were dehumanized through violence, forced labor, and the taking of their food, clothes, and often their family and loved ones. The situation into which they were forced left them clinging to survival, fearing death from any number of courses, including the unhealthy conditions in which they lived or death at the hands of the captors.[39] As in the SPE and at Abu Ghraib, these factors resulted in feelings of resignation and powerless obedience for the victims, and facilitated the brutal and heartless actions of the captors.

Presumably, many of the citizens of Germany who stood by and did nothing to help their fellow citizens (before or during the Holocaust) were

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[38] The concentration camps during the Holocaust are another example of a situation where every aspect of the situation was controlled (much like the experimenters controlled the situation in the SPE or even Milgram). Here it was not experimenters who controlled the environment but rather Hitler and the Nazi regime who created the type of social, political, and economic climate that would be just right for the evils of the Holocaust.

[39] Sabini and Silver, *Moralities of Everyday Life, 75*. Sabini and Silver point out that starvation destroys the body's capacity to produce a wide range of expressions and that constant hunger fixates the attention of an individual on his own internal state, further dehumanizing the subject. Moreover, extreme hunger will force one to extreme behavior, including scavenging through garbage or fighting fellow inmates for scraps of food.

presumably averagely moral people and so their indifference to the plight of the victims of the Holocaust could not be explained by reference to a robust character trait of malice or cruelty. Moreover, the SS officers and doctors, as cruel and sadistic as some of them may have been to the prisoners, were often family men who did not seem incapable of kindness in other situations so a robust character trait doesn't seem to explain their sadism and violence.[40]

9. Rwanda Genocide

"In the spring and early summer of 1994, a program of massacres decimated the Republic of Rwanda. Of an original population of about seven and a half million, at least eight hundred thousand people were killed in just a hundred days, including children and men and women of all ages. The dead of Rwanda accumulated at nearly three times the rate of Jewish dead during the Holocaust."[41] Roughly seventy-five percent of Tutsi had been killed by early May. These numbers do not include those who were raped and/or maimed but didn't die of their wounds.

Like the Holocaust, the Rwanda genocide happened in the midst of a tense social and economic climate that had been developing for years between the Tutsi and the Hutu. The Tutsi and the Hutu had a long-standing classist rivalry that spanned back at least since colonial times when the Tutsi were favored over the Hutus for political and administrative jobs. A political rivalry between the two groups continued over the years, resulting in one massacre of Tutsi in 1963 and 1964 with fourteen thousand dead and a larger scale massacre of the Hutu in

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[40] Although situationists never mention the possibility of their having formed a robust trait of cruelty while at the death camps.

[41] See Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We will be Killed with Our Families (*New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998).

Burundi resulting in one hundred thousand dead. In the years preceding the Rwanda genocide, a group of rebel Tutsi that had retired to the mountains would come down and mount attacks on Rwandan towns. After every attack, the Hutu would retaliate by killing innocent Tutsi living nearby.

Further escalating the animosity between Hutu and Tutsi, an anti-Tutsi newspaper called Kangura appeared, run by a man named Hasan Ngeze claiming, among other things, that there was a Tutsi conspiracy to murder the Hutu. Ngeze published the "Hutu Ten commandments," a doctrine of militant Hutu purity.[42] In addition, RTLM, a radio station that was the Kangura of the airwaves, began appearing. RTLM would be the same radio station that would falsely report that the Tutsi were planning an attack on the Hutu so they should attack first. Eventually this led to the attempted genocide of all Tutsi living in Rwanda by the Hutu over the period of three months in 1994.

In his book, *We Wish to Inform you that Tomorrow we will all be killed with our families*, Philip Gourevitch describes his visit to one site where a number of Tutsi were killed by Hutu. Inside a school at Nyarubuye, there is a massacre memorial where a large number of unburied dead lie, victims of the genocide in Rwanda, most of them women and some of them children. Gourevitch describes how the killers killed all day, in shifts, and at the end of the day cut the Achilles tendons of survivors so they could not run and went to feast on cattle looted from their victims and then to sleep "beneath the cries of their prey" only to awaken the next day to kill again.

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[42] The Hutu Ten Commandments embraced the ideology that the Tutsi were the rival and enemy of the Hutu and Hutu's should try to socialize with them as little as possible and try to remember that the Tutsi's real interest was to subjugate the Hutu.

One of the most disturbing facts about the genocide is that most of the killing of the Tutsi was done with machetes, at close contact (although others were killed by barrages of gunfire) by people the victims worked with, lived beside, and trusted. Moreover, stories emerging from the Rwandan genocide are filled with tales of mutilation, barbarity, and horrific cruelty. The Hutu not only killed the Tutsi but often tortured, raped, and mutilated them before their deaths.

As with the victims of the Holocaust and the subjects playing the prisoners in the SPE, it was not merely the perpetrators of the murders that seemed to respond in baffling ways to the situation. A month in, some of the Tutsi had apparently accepted their grim fate and just hoped to die quickly (as opposed to cruelly) by a bullet rather than a machete, at home rather than in the street. One Tutsi survivor describes how one group of Tutsi were so resigned they simply sat down when told to do so by a group of militant Hutu who had thrown grenades into their midst. Like the victims of the Holocaust and the SPE, feelings of powerlessness and resignation seemed to overwhelm the victims so that they merely accepted their fate rather than trying to fight back or escape.

Significance

Considering the large number of Hutu that participated in the massacre, what else but features of the situation could explain how many of the perpetrators of murder and rape during the genocide were normal citizens one day, working alongside the Tutsi, teaching them in class, preaching to them in church, and the next were killing these same people in cruel and terrible ways? The Rwandan genocide is an especially compelling case for situationism because it was perpetrated by people who were neighbors, teachers, or even priests of the

victims but also because of the way in which it was perpetrated: at close range with machetes and often with extreme brutality. Unlike in the Holocaust, where victims were forced into concentration camps where they could expect death at the hands of the guards or doctors in charge of the camps, in the Rwanda genocide, the neighbors and co-workers of the victims did the actual killing *themselves*. While one might wonder at the passivity of many of the people living in Nazi-occupied territories as the Nazis forced their neighbors out of their houses and into camps where they would surely go to die, most of these people did not shoot their neighbors or send them to the gas-chambers themselves. They stood by watching their neighbors get taken away but they did not bring down the actual object of destruction onto their neighbors head or neck. Nor did they have to listen to their neighbors cries of pain and pleas for pity as they lay dying nearby.

Situationists not only cite the large number of perpetrators as evidence that the situation is a better explanation of behavior than individual character traits, they also point to the similarities between the social climate in Rwanda during the genocide and that in Germany during the Holocaust. The two groups had lived uneasily side by side for years, often in direct conflict with each other. The group behind the RTLM radio station and the Kangura newspaper fed into the decades-long paranoia and distrust between the groups. Perhaps the actions of the Hutu perpetrators are better explained by the pressures inherent in the situation in which they lived. The social climate between the Tutsi and the Hutu was extremely tense, they were often in conflict, and individuals like those behind RTLM and Kangura helped to fan the flames of suspicion and distrust between the two groups.

The fact that the two groups lived among each other and interacted fairly peacefully on a daily basis is what makes it difficult to understand the genocide as the result of a large number of people with the a robust character trait of malice deciding to murder their neighbors. Robust character traits are consistent and what was perhaps most shocking about the genocide was that it was perpetrated by people who had lived alongside the victims. The Hutu perpetrators of the genocide had evidently been averagely moral citizens coexisting with their Tutsi victims until the call to action came from the radio station RTLM to murder the Tutsi.

Conclusion

Situational influences range from situations where a minor trivial feature of a situation can lead to one being less likely to help to situations where every aspect of the environment is controlled and agents can be influenced to commit violent or brutal acts. However, situational features and their effects on human behavior play a part in both the experiments and the historical cases, and these effects are not confined just to laboratories; there are a number of historical cases with circumstances very similar to those in the experiments performed by social psychologists.

Chapter 3

IN DEFENSE OF CHARACTER: RESPONSES TO THE SITUATIONIST

EVIDENCE

Philosophers and psychologists have given a variety of responses to both the situationist thesis and its evidence. Some of them disagree with situationists and argue that character is a real structure that can help predict or explain human behavior, while others agree with situationists that findings in psychology and social psychology have shown that the traditional concept of character is flawed and should be updated to fit the data from these findings.

In this chapter, I look at responses to specific pieces of situationist evidence from advocates of character. All of these respondents claim that though situationists may be raising genuine concerns about human behavior, these concerns are not so troubling as to provide incontrovertible evidence against the traditional conception of character or character-based virtue ethics. I also give my analysis of these responses, sometimes agreeing with and arguing in favor of one of the responses already given and other times arguing for what I believe to be a more optimal response to the case in question.

I have broken down the responses into two groups: those that argue from a position I have termed "argument from misrepresentation" and those that argue from a position I am calling "argument from deficiency of character."

Finally, I talk briefly about the evidence from historical cases. Historical cases do not seem to provide evidence for the same type of situationism as the cases I analyze in the first part of this chapter and instead seem to show that

social networks and environments play a role in the development and maintenance of individual dispositions.

Two Approaches

According to situationists, one of the necessary conditions of global character (the situationist version of the traditional or Aristotelian conception of character) is consistency, exhibited as cross-situational behavioral consistency across a number of situations. If agents show cross-situational behavioral *in*consistency, then they lack consistency; their character traits are not "robust." Robust character traits are necessary for global character so if an agent lacks robust character traits, then he does not have global character. Since experimental and historical cases have shown a number of people displaying behavioral inconsistency, many people lack robust character traits and thus global character.

Generally, advocates of character respond to this argument via one of two approaches. The main contention of argument from misrepresentation (AM) is that situationism actually does little or no damage to the traditional conception of character needed to ground virtue ethics because situationism is attacking a different conception of character than that required for virtue ethics. The idea of global character is not an accurate portrayal of the traditional conception of character.[1]

The main argument of the argument from deficiency of character (DC) is that particular subjects failed to display behavioral consistency because they lacked some fundamental aspect of character and not because character is not a

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[1] From here on, I will refer to the traditional conception of character as TC character to contrast it to robust character and global character, and for the sake of brevity.

real structure. There is nothing wrong with the traditional conception of character; the problem lies with the subject.

The basic structures of each of the two approaches are as follows: 1) give an explanation for how an individual with a character trait x can behave inconsistently to trait x in some situations and yet still possess trait x (and thus a particular occasion of behavioral inconsistency to trait x is not necessarily evidence against having trait x) or 2) give an explanation for why specific subjects failed to display behavioral consistency while still maintaining that character is a real structure.

The Argument from Misrepresentation

The main thesis of the argument from misrepresentation (AM) is that acting inconsistently with character trait x is not necessarily incompatible with having trait x and behavioral inconsistency should not necessarily count as evidence that the subject lacks trait x. Respondents arguing from AM reject the claim that cross-situational behavioral inconsistency is *necessarily* evidence against having TC character. Behavioral inconsistency seems troubling because situationists have defined consistency (the first condition of "global character") as merely cross-situational consistency in behavior, excluding other important elements of consistency. However, a correct representation of TC character can accommodate some inconsistency in behavior.

The Argument from Deficiency of Character

While the main idea of the argument from misrepresentation is that the problem is with the definition of character used by situationists, the main idea of

the argument from deficiency of character is that the problem lies in the actual character of the agents themselves. It is not that situationists are using an erroneous definition of TC character; rather, the subjects exhibiting behavioral inconsistency in the experiments and cases cited as evidence by situationists were subjects with deficiencies in their character. These deficiencies in character explain the inconsistencies in their behavior.

Respondents who argue from DC to do not deny that the actions of the subjects in many of the cases should count as inconsistency in moral behavior; they accept this claim and instead reject the assumption that the particular subjects in the experiments used as evidence for situationism actually have global character. The argument from deficiency of character does not have the implication that it is not possible to have global character but merely that some of the particular subjects in the experiments and historical cases lacked character.

One of the differences between AM and DC is that respondents who argue from AM do not find some of the situationist evidence very troubling for the attribution of global character to the subjects in the studies. The behavior of the subjects in those studies is not evidence for their lacking character. However, those respondents arguing from DC find the behavior displayed by the subjects worrying and a likely indication that those subjects lacked global character.

Experiment-Specific Responses

Below I explain the responses to each of the cases, examining both AM and DC responses and the weaknesses and strengths of each. For responses from AM, I point out how respondents have argued that behavioral inconsistency is not necessarily an indication of inconsistency in character. For responses from

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DC, I indicate what aspects of character the subjects in the cases and experiments are lacking according to the respondents from DC. For each of the responses, I point out possible problems and counterarguments to the problems and then argue for what I believe to be most optimal response to each case.

<p style="text-align:center">Isen and Levin's Dime in a Phone Booth Experiment[2]</p>

Arguments from Mood effects

There is no single account of how mood effects work but rather several different explanations of how mood effects might affect behavior. Below, I look at several different versions of this argument and the relative merits of each.

AM response (Argument from heightened attention)

The first version of this argument, the "argument from heightened attention," comes from Sabini and Silver. While Isen and Levin merely stated that a heightened mood led to more helpful behavior without hypothesizing on why this was so, Sabini and Silver propose that a heightened mood leads to heightened attention of surroundings. An agent paying more attention to his surroundings has a likelier chance of noting the unfortunate confederate.[3] In other words, their idea is that the reason the subjects who did not find the dime did not help is that they were simply less aware of the situation around them, either of the actual details of the situation or of the features of the situation that called for some kind of moral action. It was not that the subjects in this situation

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[2] In Chapter 2, I also mentioned the experiment "Cookies and Kindness," which ostensibly studied the same sorts of behaviors as the dime experiment. I do not look at responses to this one, as the assumption is that the same responses to the results of the dime experiment generalizes to it as well.

[3] Sabini and Silver, *Moralities of Everyday Life,* 540.

chose not to help the confederate because they were in a bad mood (or at least not in a good one) or because they simply did not feel like it; they did not help because they failed to notice features of this situation that made it the type of situation where they should help. How does this show that behavioral inconsistency in some trait *x* is compatible with the subject having trait *x*?

First, we must remember that one of the main contentions of the situationist thesis is that the way to determine whether an agent has a robust character trait is through cross-situational consistency in behavior. The Isen and Levin case is supposed to be evidence against character and evidence for situationism because, according to the data, it was the finding or not finding of the dime that seemed to determine whether the subjects stopped to help the confederate pick up her papers. That means that it is likely that agents would help if they were in a good mood but may not help if they are in a bad mood, and that shows cross-situational behavioral inconsistency.

However, proponents of the argument from heightened attention assume that failing to be helpful because one did not realize help was needed is compatible with the consistency requirement of TC character (even if it is not compatible with the consistency requirement of global character). According to the situationist thesis, if some agent has a robust trait of helpfulness, he will act helpfully in every situation in which behavior relevant to that trait is appropriate; failure to display trait-relevant behavior in a situation in which it would have been appropriate is good reason to think the agent does not have the trait. Proponents of the argument from heightened attention disagree with both parts of that statement. One can fail to display the trait-relevant behavior in a situation in which it would have been appropriate, but *still have that trait*.

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Proponents of the argument from heightened attention disagree with the claim that judging whether someone has a certain trait is as simple as observing whether that person displays trait-relevant behavior in every situation that calls for it. This is an oversimplification of what it means to have consistency as well as being a misrepresentation of the traditional conception of character. Traditional or Aristotelian character traits do not require one to display trait-relevant behavior in every situation in which it is appropriate.[4] If an agent fails to help because he is unaware that his help is needed, his behavior might be inconsistent with being helpful but that does not necessarily mean he lacks a trait of helpfulness.

According to proponents of the argument from heightened attention, if the effects of mood work by affecting the agent's attention to his or her surroundings, and being in a better mood means having heightened attention to one's environment (thus one noticing the person in need), then the agent whose mood has not been enhanced has a perfectly good reason not to have helped the victim. How can we count the lack of helping behavior (of those who did not help) as good reason to think they are not helpful when those agents probably did not even notice that this was a situation that called for helpfulness to begin with? Suppose I see Jones fail to stop and help an old woman who has fallen on the sidewalk behind him. When I reprimand Jones for his lack of compassion, he tells me he never even saw the woman to begin with. Can I still claim that Jones lacks compassion then? According to proponents of the argument from heightened attention, I definitely should not. Jones can still be a compassionate

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[4] This argument may be tied to the idea (which I look at in the next chapter) that consistency is not measured just according to overt behavioral consistency but also according to internal consistency. Consistent behavior is not assessed based on how some objective third person perceives a situation (for example, as requiring a certain type of behavior), but, to some extent, also how the agent perceives that situation.

person even if he failed to show the appropriate trait-relevant behavior in a situation that required it. He simply did not even see the victim in need of help! Similarly, if the individuals who did not help genuinely did not *notice* the woman (or notice that someone needed their help) then they made no conscious decision *not* to help. If asked later why they did not stop to help, perhaps they would be genuinely surprised by the question. While it is true that it is somewhat surprising how something as trivial as having an apparently very small stroke of luck in finding a dime or getting a cookie can affect our mood and thus whether we focus on our environment or not, this by itself is not inconsistent with having the trait of helpfulness.

There are some problems with this argument from heightened attention. First, the confederate dropped the papers directly in the path of the subjects; some of the subjects literally walked on the fallen papers. How could they fail to notice that the confederate had dropped her papers in front of them and was scrambling to pick them up? Secondly, it would still be open to situationists to argue that situational features were the driving force behind the change in mood of the subjects, and thus their heightened attention. Therefore, it is still true that situational factors explain the behavior of the subjects better than reference to any character trait the subjects may or may not have had. If something as small as finding a dime in a phone booth or being given a cookie can make one more aware to of one's surroundings, then situational factors are indeed playing a much larger role in our behavior than we anticipate.

It is problematic to argue that lack of attention to the details of the situation is the reason subjects failed to help in this situation. Considering the woman dropped her papers directly in their way, we have to dismiss the idea that

the subjects did not notice the woman. What about the suggestion that the subjects failed to notice the details of the situation that made it the sort of situation that required their help? Does this mean that the subjects saw the woman but this incident did not enter their conscious deliberation? Did they see the confederate in need of help but quickly dismissed this incident and gave it no further thought? This would seem to leave it open to situationists to point out that failure to notice that someone is in need seems like a failure in helpfulness. If we are going to notice whether people are in need simply because we are in a good mood (or fail to notice them because we are in a bad one), then we are going to be highly inconsistent in our helpful behavior, whether we do it consciously or not. Situationists could argue that part of being helpful includes no (or minimal) failures "to notice the relevant moral factors of a situation" (i.e., part of being helpful means noticing when one's help is required).

DC response

　　While proponents of the argument from heightened attention would probably respond to this objection by simply denying that part of being helpful includes always being aware of when one's help is needed, respondents from DC have a different reply. If noticing relevant moral factors in a situation is part of the practical wisdom that Aristotelians believe should be a part of virtue, then subjects in the Isen and Levin experiment may have simply lacked the practical wisdom necessary to notice relevant moral factors; therefore, the results from this experiment are not evidence for situationism.[5] Perhaps individuals lacking

[5] See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,*1998; Annas, *The Morality of Happiness;* Julia Annas, "Comments on John Doris's *Lack of Character," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 71, no. 3 (November 2005): 636-642; and Rachana Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of our Character." *Ethics* 114,

practical wisdom will not notice relevant moral factors and so behave inconsistently. This explains the behavior of the subjects without helping the situationists' case. Just because *these* particular subjects lacked practical wisdom and the trait of helpfulness, that does not mean that *all* subjects lack practical wisdom or even that it is not possible to have practical wisdom or the robust trait of helpfulness.

This response is problematic for its own reasons. One might ask whether people *can* develop practical wisdom or whether situational factors necessarily influence their behavior. I come back to these questions in the next chapter.

<div align="center">Analysis</div>

Argument from Choice

However, perhaps the best response to the evidence from situations of minor need is that subjects saw helping in situation where the "victim" was in minor need of help as a matter of personal choice rather than one of moral obligation.[6] Subjects felt they could fail to help without either failing to fulfill a moral obligation or failing to fulfill their duties as moral agents. This was either because subjects did not perceive helping situations of minor need as moral situations at all or because subjects perceived these helping situations as situations requiring merely morally elective (as opposed to morally obligatory) actions. If instead the subjects had perceived helping as a moral obligation, then,

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no. 3 (April 2004): 458-491. The issue of practical wisdom will be discussed in the next chapter.

[6] By "moral obligation," I mean merely to distinguish between actions that agents take to have some objective basis independent of personal choice or societal rules, as opposed to either actions required by social conventions or actions strictly up to personal choice. Because of the particular experiment to which I appeal for evidence, the term "moral obligation" as I am using it, means morally required, not morally elective.

if they considered themselves moral agents, they would have felt they had a duty to help in order to fulfill their duties as moral agents. Therefore, subjects chose not to help based on other non-moral considerations, such as whether they felt like stopping to help or not (a decision affected by mood). I call this version of the argument from mood effects "the argument from choice."

If the subjects perceived helping (on this occasion) to be a matter of personal choice rather than one of moral obligation, then they could be free to choose how to respond based on non-moral considerations without failing to fulfill a moral duty to help and thereby failing as moral agents. For example, suppose that while I am hiking in the mountains I come across a small child who is apparently lost and scared. I have a moral obligation to take the child with me and help find her guardians or someone who can help find her guardians. If I decide to just leave the child in the wilderness because I already have my route planned out and do not want to deviate from the plan or simply because I feel that children should learn to fend for themselves, I have failed to fulfill my duty as a moral agent.[7] It is not a matter of personal choice whether or not I should leave the child alone in the wilderness considering the very real harm that can befall her.

However, if the subjects perceived the situation to be one that required a morally elective action or even a non-moral action, they may have felt that they had many more options from which to choose that would not affect their status as moral agents. Agents might perceive helping situations of minor need as situations where one's moral obligations are fulfilled as long as one performs

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[7] This particular situation is one where the cost of helping is not that high, while the consequences of not helping could be exceptionally high. The class of morally acceptable actions might shrink or widen depending on the cost of helping for the agent and the consequences of not helping for the victim.

enough of that duty over the long run. An agent does not have to help in every situation of minor need in order to fulfill his moral obligation; therefore, he can choose to help on some occasions but not others. For example, suppose you work in an area of town where panhandlers on the street often solicit you for money. You may give occasionally, or even consistently every day or every week, but you probably will not give money to every person who solicits you.

The agents may also have perceived helping situations of minor need as situations that did not require a moral action at all, and so they were free to choose based on non-moral considerations. For example, when deciding on what I should have for breakfast in the morning, I might have a whole array of options from which to choose: I could eat eggs and ham, cereal, or just oatmeal. Neither an objective basis independent of personal choice nor social conventions or rules limits the class of acceptable actions in this situation. I have relative freedom to choose what I want to eat based on whatever considerations I take to be important at the time.

Moral imperatives versus personal choice

There is evidence for the argument from choice in a psychological study of moral imperatives versus social responsibilities conducted by psychologists Joan Miller, David Bersoff, and Robin Harwood with American and Indian subjects. Miller, Bersoff, and Harwood defined "moral concerns" as "(a) based on objective obligations, independent of social consensus or personal preference and (b) as legitimately subject to social regulation, rather than as the agent's own

business."[8] Miller et al. distinguished moral rules both from social conventions, which are "legitimately regulated but not as based on objective obligations," and from matters of personal choice, which are "neither based on objective obligations nor legitimately regulated." [9] The distinguishing feature of moral rules is that they are obligatory regardless of personal choice or social conventions. Even if social conventions do not enforce or even agree with the moral rules, the moral rules are still binding. Social conventions, on the other hand, are established and regulated by a particular society and may change to meet the needs of that society. Social-conventional concepts are hypothesized to be contextually relative and consensually agreed upon, unlike concepts in the moral domain which are supposed to hold in most or all situations regardless of whether social rules or laws agree with it or not. [10] Matters of personal choice were not obligatory by either social-conventions or moral rules.[11]

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[8] Joan G. Miller, David M. Bersoff, and Robin L. Harwood, "Perceptions of Social Responsibilities in India and in the United States: Moral Imperatives or Personal Decisions?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 58, no. 1, (January 1990): 33.

[9] Miller et al., "Perceptions of Social Responsibilities in India and in the United States: Moral Imperatives or Personal Decisions?" 33. See also Joan. G. Miller, "Insights into Moral Development from Cultural Psychology," in *Handbook of Moral Development,* eds. Melanie Killen and Judith G. Smetana (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2006), 375-392.
Miller et al. do not make a distinction between morally obligatory and morally elective actions. However, all of the hypothetical scenarios were set up as situations in which the cost to the victim was relatively low in comparison to the consequences for the victim if the agent did not help, especially in situations of moderate or extreme need. The agent would not need to perform any supererogatory actions in order to fulfill his moral duty in any of the scenarios. Therefore, Miller et al. were testing intuitions about morally obligatory not morally elective actions.

[10] See Judith G. Smetana, "Social-cognitive domain theory: Consistencies and Variations in Children's Moral and Social Judgments," in *Handbook of Moral Development,* eds. Melanie Killen and Judith G. Smetana (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2006), 119-153 (especially p. 121).

[11] Miller et al. "Perceptions of Social Responsibilities in India and in the United States: Moral Imperatives or Personal Decisions?" 34, 44.
Miller et al. talk about a fourth category that they labeled "personal-moral." This category included behaviors that were seen as governed by objective obligations but not as legitimately regulated. The category "was used in relation to social responsibilities that

Magnitude of Need	Hypothetical Scenario
Minor Need	not giving someone directions concerning how to get to an art supply shop, because you are busy reading an exciting book and do not want to be interrupted
	not providing a ride to the train station to someone going sightseeing, because you feel that giving the ride might be boring
	not loaning money to someone so that they can attend a movie, because you feel like keeping the extra money you have brought
Moderate Need	not providing comfort to someone who is about to undergo knee surgery, because you do not want to get up early in the morning when the surgery begins
	not giving aspirin to someone who is suffering from a painful migraine headache on a bus ride, because you do not want to bother looking for the bottle of aspirin you are carrying
	not providing a ride to someone who needs to get to a ceremony in which he or she is one of the main speakers, because you feel that providing the ride would be uninteresting
Extreme need	not donating blood to someone who requires it during emergency surgery, because you have plans to go to a movie and do not want to get tired
	not administering mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to someone who has stopped breathing, because you might get dirty administering the procedure
	not driving someone to the hospital who is bleeding uncontrollably, because you are concerned that some blood might get on your car

Figure 1. Outline of Incidents Used. Source: Miller et al., "Perceptions of Social Responsibilities in India and the United States," 47.

fell in an intermediate range between those viewed in moral terms and those viewed as matters of personal choice." For the sake of brevity, I have included the percentages for the personal-moral category under the moral rule category.

In Miller et al.'s study about how individuals from different cultures weigh and coordinate moral and non-moral considerations, the experimenters presented nine hypothetical scenarios regarding attitudes toward helping to a sample of American and Hindu Indian children and adults.[12] Miller et al. interviewed individuals from three different age groups about incidents in which an agent refused to help a dependent other who was experiencing either extreme (life threatening), moderate, or minor need. The situations varied not only in magnitude of need but also in the relationship between the agent and the potential recipient. The relationship between the agent and the potential recipient was presented as either that of a) a parent to a young son or daughter, b) a best friend, or c) a stranger. There were also questions included to "assess whether subjects felt that each behavior was (a) governed by objective obligations above [social-conventional] rule or law, (b) legitimately regulated, or both."[13] This was to differentiate whether the subjects considered the behavior to fall under either moral, social conventional or personal choice obligations. The person in need was portrayed as "dependent on the agent for having his or her needs met in a satisfactory manner" and described as "explicitly requesting aid from the agent."[14] Moreover, the cost to the agent of fulfilling the other's request was portrayed as minimal, the agent's motive for refusing the other's request was

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[12] See Figure 1.

[13] Miller et al., "Perceptions of Social Responsibilities in India and the United States," 35, add that they made sure to mention that the "stranger" in the hypothetical scenarios was nonthreatening and posed no danger to the agent, in order to prevent suspicion or fear of strangers from influencing subjects' judgments.

[14] Miller et al., "Perceptions of Social Responsibilities in India and the United States," 35.

presented as "uncompelling and selfish," and the consequences to the other of the agent's refusal to help were described (see fig. 1).[15]

Miller et al. found that in occasions of minor or moderate need, both for strangers and friends, American subjects were much less likely than Indian subjects to see helping behavior as morally obligatory (based on objective obligations). For situations of moderate need involving a stranger, 100% of Indian subjects saw helping as a moral obligation, compared to only 47% of American subjects. For situations of minor need involving a stranger, only 23% of American subjects saw helping as morally obligatory versus 73% of Indian subjects. Similar numbers held true even for occasions when the relationship between the hypothetical agent and person in need was that of best friends. In situations of moderate need involving a friend, only 65% of American subjects saw helping as morally required, as compared to 100% of Indian subjects. The numbers dipped even lower for situations of minor need involving a friend, only 33% of American subjects saw helping as morally obligatory, as opposed to 93% of Indian subjects.

American subjects were also less likely to see situations of minor or moderate need as legitimately regulated, that is, falling within the social-conventional realm. In situations of minor need, only 22% of American subjects saw helping behavior as required by social conventions, versus 73% of Indian subjects. Even in situations of moderate need, only 40% of American subjects saw helping behavior as a required by social conventions versus 100% of Indian subjects.

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[15] Ibid.

Finally, Miller et al. found that in situations of moderate or minor need involving strangers, American subjects saw helping behavior largely as a matter of personal choice: in situations of minor 72% of subjects saw helping as a matter of personal choice, and in situations of moderate need 50% of subjects saw helping as a matter of personal choice.

Miller, Bersoff, and Harwood theorized that since American culture tends to stress individual freedom and autonomy, while Hindu Indian culture places greater emphasis on interpersonal dependence and social obligations, the underlying cultural beliefs of the two groups would affect their attitudes toward helping situations. Results showed that Indians more frequently viewed responsiveness to the needs of others as an objective moral obligation while Americans saw strangers in need of help as morally obligatory only if they judged that the negative consequences ensuing from not helping were serious enough to warrant curtailing the agent's autonomy or freedom of choice.[16]

Taking Miller et al.'s study into consideration, the best response to the evidence from behavior in helping situations of minor need would be to say that most of the subjects simply did not consider helping in a situation of minor need as morally obligatory at all, but rather as either morally elective or a matter left up to personal choice. If the subjects considered helping in situations of minor need as morally elective, they may have considered helping as a morally optional way of discharging an imperfect duty of beneficence; they could choose to help or not help on this particular occasion based on other considerations. On the other hand, subjects may have considered helping someone in a situation of minor

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[16] Miller et al., "Perceptions of Social Responsibilities in India and the United States," 44.

need as a matter of personal preference. According to Miller et al.'s study, 72% of Americans perceived helping situations of minor need involving strangers as matters of personal choice. The numbers were similar for helping situations of minor need involving friends (67%) and a son or a daughter (55%). Subjects in a good mood were more helpful because they simply *chose* to be more helpful because of their good mood. Perhaps when an agent is in a good mood, he is less worried about whether his helpfulness will come off as true helpfulness or merely officiousness; or his helpfulness may be merely an outward expression of his good mood.[17]

It is entirely possible that for most of the subjects in the Isen and Levin experiment, helping the confederate was not a moral decision at all but rather a personal one. The subjects in the Isen and Levin study may have had an underlying assumption or belief that responding to the confederate's minor need was not a moral duty because the need was not serious enough to warrant curtailing the personal freedom of choosing whether to help or not. The subjects that did stop and help did not do so because they now considered the decision to help as a moral action (morally elective or morally obligatory) but rather because they were in a good mood and made a personal choice to stop and help. Like someone who is in a good mood one day and decides to smile at strangers they

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[17] It would be interesting to conduct a similar experiment to Isen and Levin's in a country with a more "collectivistic" culture where social obligations and interpersonal dependence play a greater role and helping others in need might be seen as being a moral duty, not a matter of personal choice. Although Miller et al. noted in their study that even the Hindu subjects tended to characterize minor-need stranger obligations in moral terms less frequently than other obligations.

meet on the sidewalk or to wear more colorful clothing to match their mood, the decision to help was a matter of personal choice, not a moral action at all.[18]

On the other hand, if agents perceived helping in a situation of minor need as morally elective, then they could choose whether to stop and help on this particular occasion. Why would agents perceive helping as merely morally elective in situations of minor need? For an answer, I turn to the argument by Robert Adams that perhaps consistency requirements for trait-relevant behavior depend on the trait on which one is focusing. Adams argues that behavioral consistency requirements for different traits can be divided into two main categories reflecting the Kantian distinction between perfect and imperfect obligations.[19] A perfect obligation is defined as "one that is violated if one fails in any single case to behave in a particular way," while imperfect obligations are "satisfied if one 'does enough' of the relevant sort of thing."[20] Adams argues that people may be less likely to break a perfect obligation than they are to break an imperfect one. Perhaps agents perceived helping in a situation of minor need as a merely imperfect obligation, and therefore, a morally elective action.

The consistency requirement for imperfect duties is lower than that of perfect duties. If being helpful in a situation of minor need is an imperfect duty it is not a duty that must be satisfied on every occasion; one could fail to be helpful on a few occasions and still have the trait of helpfulness if one helps in enough

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[18] It would be interesting to conduct a similar experiment to Isen and Levin's in a country with a more "collectivistic" culture where social obligations and interpersonal dependence play a greater role and helping others in need might be seen as being a moral duty, not a matter of personal choice. Although Miller et al. noted in their study that even the Hindu subjects tended to characterize minor-need stranger obligations in moral terms less frequently than other obligations.

[19] Adams, *A Theory of Virtue,* 145-147.

[20] Adams, *A Theory of Virtue,* 145.

other cases. The behavior of those subjects who did not stop and help might be perfectly consistent with having the trait of helpfulness. Helpfulness is not a trait that needs to be displayed on every occasion. Perhaps the helpful subjects in the experiment decided to help on this particular occasion because of a change in their mood that changed their perception of the situation or increased their motivation to help.

Adams points out that it is important to note that finding the dime was not the only factor that played a part in the behavior of the subjects. After all, the subjects that found the dime and stopped to help probably had some predisposition to helpfulness that was activated by their change in mood. It is possible that someone without this predisposition to be helpful would not have stopped at all, as the change in mood would not have activated anything. I come back to this interaction between predispositions and environmental factors in chapters five and six.

Some considerations. One problem with the argument from choice is that it only works as a response for helping situations of minor need or, at most, in situations where helping (or displaying some other moral behavior) is seen as elective. If the argument from choice works as a response only to situations where moral behavior is seen as elective, then the results in these sorts of cases do not necessarily generalize to cases where moral behavior is perceived (or should be perceived as) morally obligatory. Hence, the argument from choice does not work as a response to other sorts of cases where consequences are far more serious such as the Milgram experiment. Responding to evidence from situations of

extreme need, for example, will require additional arguments. I come to those later on in this chapter and in the next chapter.

Localizing trait terms. In helping situations of minor need, the trait in question (as stated in the psychological literature) is "helping behavior" or something like "helpfulness," a very vaguely defined trait at best. We could try to define helping behavior along the same lines as "prosocial behavior" from the psychological literature, which is roughly defined as "voluntary behavior intended to benefit another," but this term seems far too broad to cover only helping situations of minor need.[21] Prosocial behavior covers helping behavior in situations of minor, moderate, or extreme need. Defining helpful behavior as the behavior of going out of one's way to help or aid others in some way also seems like too broad a definition. After all, it would cover the case of someone helping a stranger pick up papers he had just dropped on the street, with little cost for helping and trivial consequences for not helping, as well as cases of people helping refugees escape from the Nazi's during the days of the Holocaust.

The problem is that while in conversation we might use "helpful" to cover all kinds of cases, we do not necessarily believe that because Alan is the type of person who would help a stranger pick up papers she has dropped in public, he is also the type of person that would hide refugees at the risk of his life and those of his loved ones. In the study on attitudes toward helping others in trivial situations, American subjects did not feel that in a helping situation of minor need helping behavior was a moral behavior at all. However, the subjects' attitudes were different toward helping situations of extreme need. Fully 92% of

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[21] See Eisenberg, Spinrad and Sadovsky, "Empathy-Related Responding in Children."

subjects considered it to be a moral obligation to help a stranger in extreme need of help while only 18% felt they had a moral obligation to help a stranger in minor need of help. Some of the same subjects that felt that helping behavior in a situation of minor need was not a moral behavior at all, felt that helping behavior in a situation of extreme need was not only a moral behavior but also a morally obligatory one. If "helpful" refers to behavior that would be morally obligatory in a situation of extreme need but merely morally elective in a situation of minor need then "helpful" refers to both a moral and a (potentially) non-moral trait or, at the very least, "helpful" refers to both behaviors that are morally obligatory and behaviors that are morally elective. In this context, "helpful" then is merely a blanket term that refers to a wide array of behaviors in different types of situations. However, since I make a distinction between morally obligatory and morally elective behaviors, this definition of helpful is not useful for this discussion. Instead, I propose to limit the definition of this term in the context of my discussion of the situationist evidence.

I borrow from the situationist idea of contextualizing traits and narrowing the scope of trait terms by restricting the types of situations covered by a single character term; for example, by limiting situations (and corresponding trait relevant behavior) according to the degree of need of the victim in that situation. Perhaps the behavior of rescuers or refugees during the Holocaust should not be called "helpful" behavior, but rather "altruistic" behavior, where altruism refers to behaviors associated with high costs to the subject and/or serious consequences for the person in need. It seems intuitive to say this as we would probably not call the helping behavior exhibited in the dime experiment "altruistic" but merely helpful. So for example, one way we could parcel out the

different traits would be to say that performing a beneficent action in cases where the cost of helping and the consequences of not helping are fairly high is an altruistic action, performing a beneficent action in cases where the cost and consequences are moderate is a compassionate action, and performing a beneficent action in cases where costs and consequences are low is merely a helpful action. [22] This is merely an example of one way we could define traits according to cost and consequences for the purposes of explaining my argument. Obviously, this classification fails to capture some of the nuances of moral behavior, such as morally elective versus morally obligatory actions, etc. I come back to this problem in later chapters.

If altruism, compassion, and helpfulness are three separate traits, then one's failing to act in the dime experiment would have no bearing on how one would act in a situation that required "altruistic" behavior like risking one's own life or limb for the sake of someone else. If the trait (and trait-relevant behavior) required in helping situations of minor need is not the same as the trait required in helping situations of extreme need, then if an agent fails to help in a situation of minor need but helps in a situation of extreme need, his behavior is not cross-situationally inconsistent. He may just have the trait corresponding to situations of extreme need, without also having the trait corresponding to situations of minor need. I come back to this discussion in chapter five.

For the purposes of my discussion so far, however, we need only to give a definition of "helpfulness" and the sorts of situations that require helpful

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[22] This is the case with some definitions of altruism at least. Altruistic behavior is sometimes defines less specifically, for example as a case where one acts to benefit another at a high cost to oneself (with no mention of consequences), and sometimes more specifically with the added caveat that the consequences of one's actions cannot benefit one in any way.

behavior. For a definition, I turn to Doris's definition of compassion in *Lack of Character.* Doris defines compassion as "a stable and consistent disposition to perform beneficent actions" with "failures to behave compassionately when doing so is appropriate and not unduly costly" counting as evidence against the attribution of that trait.[23] According to Doris's definition of compassion, to be consistently compassionate one must not fail to do beneficent actions in situations where it is appropriate to do so and doing so does not carry too high a high cost to the agent. Being consistently compassionate only requires one not to fail to act compassionately in situations where doing so is not "unduly costly" to the agent. Doris has limited compassion in scope by its costs to the agent. According to this definition, the subjects who did not stop and help in the Isen and Levin failed to act compassionately because it would have been of very low cost to them to stop and help. I disagree that compassion is the term that Doris is picking out with his definition. However, I believe he has the right idea in limiting the scope of traits terms by factors like costs to the agent or the person in need.

Defining "helpfulness" along similar lines to Doris's definition of compassion, we might define helpful as "a stable and consistent disposition to perform beneficent actions when doing so is appropriate and of low cost to the subject and its omission of low cost to the victim." With this new definition of "helpful" in mind, let us move on to the next major experiment cited as evidence by situationists.

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[23] Doris, *Lack of Character,* 28- 30.

Being in a Hurry Versus not Being in a Hurry

AM response

Similar to Sabini and Silver's suggestion that some of the subjects in Isen and Levin simply did not see the victim because of their nonelevated mood, Owen Flanagan theorized that the seminary students who did not stop to help were not paying attention to their surroundings because they were hurrying and did not even notice the victim. Either the subjects did not actually see him, or they did not stop to think about the implications of what they had seen. That is, they saw him but did not think about whether the man was in serious need of help. Thus, perhaps they did not even realize that this was a situation that warranted helping behavior.[24]

Like the argument from heightened attention, the main thrust behind the argument from misrepresentation seems to be a fundamental disagreement with the situationist claim that having the trait of helpfulness requires strict behavioral consistency. In order to have the trait of helpfulness, one need not help in every situation where helping behavior is required. An agent can fail to help and not have his failure to help in one situation count as definitive evidence against the agent having that trait.

This response also runs into the same problems as the argument from heightened attention. If I consistently fail to notice people in need, am I really still "helpful"? Should something like "notices when someone needs help in at

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[24] Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality,* 302. Nancy Snow points out that Darley and Batson themselves suggested that perhaps the seminarians did not consciously register the victim's plight because of their hurry, a sort of "narrowing of the cognitive map." The seminarians who were told to hurry were so focused on their assigned task they had little attention to pay to anything else.

least *most* situations" be part of the definition of helpful? Perhaps in order to be truly helpful one needs also to pay attention to one's surroundings and notice when someone is in need of help. This last consideration again brings us back to the argument from deficiency of character.

DC response

As with the Isen and Levin case, we could argue from DC that the agents in the Darley and Batson situation who failed to help were lacking in practical wisdom or some other trait that one needs in order to be the kind of person who pays close attention to their surroundings. Perhaps the subjects from the Seminarian and dime experiments lacked a skill or trait that would have helped them act consistently with their desire to be helpful.

Nancy Snow claims that lack of attention or awareness could be a vice that affects all of the virtues, not any specific one of them.[25] Becoming overly focused on a task often causes us to miss our surroundings. Perhaps the seminarians who noticed the man but failed to register the situation as one that required their attention might be suffering from a "general obtuseness" that affects their display of certain virtues but does not necessarily point to a lack of caring about the welfare of others.[26] There might be inconsistency in one's behavior but this inconsistency is unintentional. That is, agents acted inconsistently in regards to helpful behavior because they lacked whatever trait one needs in order to keep one's other trait-relevant behavior consistent.

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[25] As we shall see when we discuss practical wisdom, this may be the case as practical wisdom is supposed to ensure against our failing to notice relevant moral factors in our surroundings.

[26] Nancy E. Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 105.

Snow proposes some kind of general skill that one needs in order to

ensure that one acts consistently with one's traits. This general skill would help

the agent act consistently with his motivation to be helpful, compassionate or

brave, etc.; this skill that Snow proposes would in effect help one to act

consistently with one's values (like caring about the welfare of others). I will come

back to this argument in later chapters.

Ambiguity and Conflicting Duties

AM response

Snow argues that perhaps another factor playing a role in this case was a

conflict between moral duties.[27] She cites a not often discussed follow-up

experiment conducted by Batson and colleagues in 1978 to test the hypothesis

that hurrying versus not hurrying was by itself what reduced helping behavior in

the Good Samaritan experiment.[28]

In the follow-up experiment, male undergraduates were told that their

date was either important (or not) to the completion of a research project. Then

half of them were told they were late and must hurry, while the other half were

told they had plenty of time. The results were as follows in table 2:

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[27] Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence,* 103-107.

[28] See Daniel C. Batson, Pamela J. Cochran, Marshall F. Biederman, James L. Blosser, Maurice J. Ryan, and Bruce Vogt, "Failure to Help When in a Hurry: Callousness or Conflict?" *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 4, no. 1(January 1978): 97-101.
The curious thing about this study that may be somewhat problematic is that Batson et al. never describe what the "victim" in this scenario looks like. The assumption is that the victim is just as ambiguous as the one in the original study by Darley and Batson but this is left unclear in this paper.

Table 2 Number of subjects that helped in situations of hurrying versus not hurrying

	Others not counting on them—not hurrying	Others not counting on them—hurry	Others counting on them—not hurrying	Others counting on them—hurry
Helped	8 out of 10	7 out of 10	5 out of 10	1 out of 10

Source: Daniel C. Batson et al., "Failure to Help When in a Hurry: Callousness or Conflict?" 97-101.

According to these figures, it is not merely being in a hurry that affected whether the subjects were likely to stop and help. Behavior was also affected by whether the subject had other conflicting obligations. While delivering some information to help with a research project may not seem as pressing as helping someone who is in possible distress, we should remember that the motive of fulfilling one's social roles is a very strong one because we want to seem in tune with our social surroundings.[29]

Sabini and Silver argue along the same lines as Snow, except they do not maintain that the two conflicting duties the subjects were torn between were both necessarily moral duties. For the seminary students, there was a possible conflict between stopping to provide possibly unwanted or unneeded help and probably failing to arrive on time or fulfilling the *clear* obligation of delivering the talk. Whereas the situation of the person slumped in the doorway may or may not have been a case that required their help (and thus may or may not been a moral duty), they had a clear duty to deliver a lecture to the people who had asked them there.[30]

Sreenivasan argues along similar lines, maintaining that just because there might be a reason to act compassionately or honestly, for example, does not

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[29] Adams, *A Theory of Virtue,* 147.

[30] Sabini and Silver, *Moralities of Everyday Life,* 557-59. This is another instance of the effects of the perceptions of others affecting behavior. For more on this see section on group effects in next chapter.

mean there might not be a reason that can defeat this reason as the one to dictate one's behavior.[31] For example, whenever the reason not to lie or to act compassionately is defeated, it can be perfectly consistent (in that particular case) to act dishonestly or fail to act compassionately.[32] Perhaps in the Good Samaritan case it is justifiable to fail to help someone who *might* be in distress because one is hurrying and one's obligation of getting some specific place (that one has previously agreed to) defeats one's obligation to help.

One other consideration is that in the original case hurrying versus not hurrying and the possibility of conflicting duties are not the only factor operating in this situation; there is also the troubling ambiguity of the victim's situation. The seminary students could not be sure if the person slumped over in the doorway was somebody in need or simply a homeless person who was sleeping on the sidewalk and would not want to be disturbed. How does this explain the students who were not hurrying seeming more likely to stop and help? We could point back to the original idea that students who were in a hurry simply did not notice the man, or we could respond that like the subjects in the dime experiment, the subject who did not stop and help *actively* chose not to help the man because they saw this situation as one where being helpful was a matter of personal choice, not moral obligation, and not helping was not a breach in one's moral duty.

The response from conflicting duties is in line with the argument from misrepresentation—the idea that the consistency condition for character does not

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[31] See Sreenivasan, "Errors about Errors: Virtue Theory and Trait Attribution," 59-60.

[32] We should note here that the idea of "perfectly consistent with compassion" may refer here only to the subject's view of what is perfectly consistent with compassion, not necessarily some objective view of what actually is consistent with compassion. This is an important distinction that seems to be blurred here. We will come back to this in the next chapter.

necessarily translate to an agent having to display trait-relevant behavior in every situation that calls for it. For cases where helpful behavior is required, an agent can fail to act helpfully in one situation and yet still be considered helpful if s/he is helpful in enough other situations.

DC response

However, we might think that in the case of the Good Samaritan experiment, where it was ambiguous whether the victim was ill or merely intoxicated or asleep, failing to at least stop and ask the victim if he needed help is a failure in helpfulness. Being in a hurry does not justify one merely passing by without helping. Actively *choosing* to not find out whether the person needs help is way of choosing not to help. The agent would rather not find out pertinent information about the victim's situation that might help him make a truly informed decision (such as which obligation is overriding). If the agent is not helpful, or at the very least, that he lacks some aspect of being helpful because he actively chooses.

This might strike us as a surprising conclusion about the behavior of the seminarians considering that it seems like seminary students should have developed a trait like helpfulness and should always pick moral duties over other personal goals. However, Nomy Arpaly remarks that the assumption that seminary students would be any more helpful than other people is strange, or at least misguided, and adds that this is simply an example of how terrible we are at judging one another, which doesn't by itself prove the situationist point. [33] All it would prove, presumably, is that perhaps we are mistaken about which types of

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[33] Arpaly, "Comments on *Lack of Character* by John Doris," 644.

people are more helpful than others. If we merely overestimate how helpful

people really are, this may be an error in our general beliefs about what character

traits are more common in a population (or certain populations), but it would say

nothing about the broader idea character.[34]

Analysis

Conflicting Duties and the Powerful Effects of Ambiguity

Although being in a hurry may have contributed to some of the subjects in

the Good Samaritan experiment deciding against helping the victim, the

underlying factors at work were conflicting duties and ambiguity. An agent that is

in a hurry has less time to weight costs and consequences and so may weigh

conflicting duties incorrectly. Moreover, the facts of the situation were

ambiguous and agents could have assumed that the victim was only in need of

minor help. For situations of minor need most people consider helping a stranger

as either a non-moral or a morally elective choice so one does not need to help on

every occasion; rather, it is a matter of choice when one helps. If it is unclear to

an agent whether a victim is in minor or extreme need (or even, not in need at all

but possibly dangerous), the agent may assume the former is true and choose not

to help on that particular occasion because of a conflicting duty that takes

precedence.

Alternately, even if one sees helping a stranger in need as a merely

morally elective action, sometimes greater obligations might demand our

attention, especially when it is unclear that our help is needed (as it is arguable

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[34] This would bring up questions of the fundamental attribution error however, discussed in Chapter 1. The fundamental attribution error is as follows:
  (FAE) People's inflated belief in the importance of personality traits and dispositions, together with their failure to recognize the importance of situational factors in affecting behavior. For more information see Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation*.

that it was in the Seminary experiment). Does the victim really need help? Are

they simply intoxicated or potentially dangerous?

Ambiguity may seem like a poor reason not to help someone who is

potentially in need, but there are numerous experiments conducted by

psychologists to prove just how strong an influence it can have.

Experiments on ambiguity

Clark and Word. In the early 1970's, psychologists Russell Clark and Larry

Word conducted a study attempting to establish just what sorts of situational

cues would have an effect on the helpfulness of bystanders during a simulated

emergency (i.e., what kind of situational effects could lead to the bystander

effect). Clark and Word ran two experiments "investigating the effects of

ambiguity of an emergency situation on helping behavior."[35] They also studied

what kind of effects group size would have on helpful behavior.

The subjects were told that the purpose of the experiment was to

determine how, why, and under what conditions sexual attitudes change. The

subject would fill out a standard survey and afterwards would attempt to change

the sexual attitudes of one or two females. The subject was escorted to an empty

room where he was asked to take a seat and fill out a questionnaire. A few

minutes later, a confederate posing as a maintenance man entered the room

carrying a ladder and a venetian blind, then exited into an adjacent room where

he could be heard working through a closed door. A few minutes later, the

confederate pushed the ladder against the wall and fell to the floor, pulling the

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[35] See Russell D. Clark III and Larry E. Word, "Why Don't Bystanders Help? Because of Ambiguity?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 24, no. 3 (1972): 392-400.

blinds down from a thirteen-foot window with him. He then groaned sharply and moaned, "Oh my back, I can't move," and then knocked the fallen ladder into a wall in a struggle to stand. He continued giving out cries, each less audible and less frequent, until he stopped altogether.

In some variations, one or two female confederates (whose mind the subject was supposed to change regarding sexual attitudes) would be in the room with the subject. The confederates were instructed to react with surprise but to make no movement to stand unless the subject did so. The confederates should take any remark by the subject and return it in the form of a question. There were five conditions: in one the subject was alone, in a second he was accompanied with a *naïve* stranger (i.e., a stranger unaware of the real purpose of the experiment), in a third he was with an *informed* confederate (informed of the real purpose of the experiment), in a fourth he was with a naïve friend, and in a fifth he was with a friend who had been informed of the true purpose of the experiment.

Clark and Word found that all of the subjects in this study helped with a variation of merely seconds between the times it took them to help. In other words, neither the number of people in the room (from one in the condition where the subject was alone, up to three when informed strangers joined him) nor the relation of the people in the group (either strangers or friends) affected whether subjects helped or not. Naïve subjects helped even in variations where the naïve subject was placed in a group with informed strangers (or an informed friend) who were told not to react to the sounds of the maintenance man falling. This is particularly important to note because the causes of the bystander effect are supposed to be diffusion of responsibility caused by the presence of multiple

people and dependence on the reactions of other people for cues about what the right action is in a situation.

At least in this variation of the experiment, diffusion of responsibility did not seem to take place, nor did looking to others for cues about how to act. Even though the confederates (whether strangers or friends of the naïve subject) did not react in any real way to the sound of the maintenance man falling, all of the naïve subjects still offered to help.

In the second study, Clark and Word tried a different variation of the experiment that they termed the "high ambiguity" variation. In this variation, they split up the subjects (all of them naïve subjects) to sit by themselves or into groups of two or five, and when the maintenance man fell he made no verbal signs of being injured or needing help. Helping dropped by approximately 70%. Only 30% of subjects in the alone condition helped, 20% in the two-person group, and 40% in the five-person group. In this case, the size of the group did make a difference to how much subjects helped. However, the influence of the *size* of the group was unclear as it dropped dramatically for a two-person group then increased again for a five-person group.[36]

Clark and Word proposed that the reason that the group made a difference at all in this variation was because of the ambiguity of the situation. In the first study, it was clear that the maintenance man had fallen and needed help, while in the second study it was not completely clear whether he had fallen or merely dropped something. Since the situation was ambiguous, the subjects looked to the other people in the group for an appropriate interpretation of the

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[36] There was also not much difference whether the group was made up of strangers or informed friends although they found that in most of the groups with informed friends, they acted slightly slower than in the group of strangers, (see Clark and Word, "Why Don't Bystanders Help? Because of Ambiguity?" 395).

event in hopes of discovering a proper course of action by observing the behavior of their peers.

Clark and Word concluded that ambiguity, rather than just group size alone, made a big difference to how a subject would respond to a certain situation. If a situation is ambiguous to the subject, the subject will begin to look around his environment for information that will help him figure out the proper course of action; this produces the "bystander effect."[37] For now, what is important to note is that ambiguity of the situation seemed to play a large role in whether people helped as well as how quickly they offered help.

Piliavin, Piliavin and Rodin. Piliavin, Piliavin and Rodin also conducted a study on ambiguity in the form of a field experiment in the New York City subway.[38] This study is relevant not only because it offers a response to anyone who might claim that the effects of ambiguity only work in the lab, but also because it parallels the ambiguous description of the victim from the Princeton Seminary experiment.

The researchers set up this study in a New York City subway train using commuters who happened to be on the subway as the subjects of the study. The researchers were interested in discovering what effect the type of victim (intoxicated versus ill) would have on speed and frequency of responding. Four different confederates played the victim, all males between the ages of 26 to 35.

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[37] See Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation,* 41-46. This is basically the idea that the more people there are in some emergency situation, the less likely that any one individual will offer help.

[38] See Irving M. Piliavin, Judith Rodin, and Jane Allyn Piliavin, "Good Samaritanism: An Underground Phenomenon?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 13, no. 4 (1969): 280-299. The researchers were also interested in seeing which race would respond in each case, but my focus is not on that aspect of the study.

All of them wore Eisenhower jackets, old slacks, and no tie. The intoxicated victim smelled of liquor and carried a liquor bottle wrapped tightly in a brown bag, while the ill victim appeared sober and carried a black cane. The researchers hypothesized that people regarded as partly responsible for their plight (i.e., the intoxicated victims) would receive less sympathy than would people not seen as responsible for their plight. Moreover, they assumed whatever sympathy people did feel when they saw an intoxicated victim collapse would be dampened by fear of the victim becoming embarrassing or violent.

Since the researchers were also interested in the effects of modeling behavior on the subjects in the study, they placed a confederate on the subway train that would intervene and help the victim if no one else offered to help after a predetermined amount of time. Depending on the different variations of the test, the model would wait a predetermined amount of time before stooping to help the fallen victim into a sitting position and staying with them for the remainder of the trial. The researchers noted that other social psychology tests had shown that an individual's actions in a situation could lead others in that situation to engage in similar actions, including actions dealing with good samaritanism.[39] The researchers wanted to test for this and to see what sorts of effects they could induce in the subjects via the confederate exhibiting the modeling behavior.

Piliavin et al. found that the major differences among the variations of the test were in response times and how often the model would have to intervene before help was offered. Response times for the victim with the cane were much shorter than they were for the intoxicated victim; the model also had to intervene on a smaller proportion of the trials with the cane than the ones with the

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[39] See James H. Bryan, and Mary A. Test, "Models and helping: naturalistic studies in aiding behavior*," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 6, no. 1 (1967): 400-407.

intoxicated man. The victim with the cane received spontaneous help (before the model acted) in sixty-two out of sixty-five trials; the intoxicated victim received spontaneous help in nineteen out of thirty-eight trials. The differences could not be explained by reference to the numbers of potential helpers in the car since the mean numbers for both conditions were roughly the same.

Just as in the study by Clark and Word, Piliavin et al. noted that they did not find that it mattered how many people were in the area when the incident occurred; what mattered was the type of incident that occurred. The authors concluded that the type of victim (intoxicated versus presumably just ill) was the most important factor in how often and how quickly help was offered.

Although the researchers only considered one possible explanation for the response times associated with the different victims, there is another possible explanation. Perhaps the people who saw the intoxicated man fall did not see this as an occasion to help, not because they blamed him for his plight, but because it was not clear that he would want the help. While subjects could automatically interpret the fall of the man with the cane as inadvertent and his failure to get up as a need for help, they would not necessarily interpret the fall of the presumably intoxicated victim as a need for help. The subjects might have weighed this consideration and the consideration that the intoxicated victim might not want the help offered and might get violent, "embarrassing," or aggressive in some way. The subjects who failed to help might have weighed costs versus consequences and decided that the consequences were not so serious as to incur the possible costs to themselves.

Darley and Batson Revisited

The best explanation for the behavior of the subjects in the Princeton Seminary experiment is that there was some ambiguity playing a part in how the subjects interpreted the situation because it was unclear whether the victim was in need of help or merely asleep or intoxicated. The ambiguity surrounding the actual situation of the victim and the conflicting duties that the subjects seemed torn between together probably produced the results of the study. If researchers had tried another variation of the original experiment with the same hurry versus non-hurry conditions with a victim who was in *obvious* need of help, results may have been quite different.

Possible problems

Situationists could still point out that failing to act was a failure in helpfulness because the seminary students should have reasoned that helping someone in possible need was still more important than giving a lecture. If situationists believe that weighing duties correctly is part of being helpful, then failing to do so is a failure in helping behavior. Perhaps the inability to weigh duties correctly stems from a failure to understand what being helpful demands. This could once again be a failure in practical wisdom or some other kind of skill or practical knowledge that one needs in order to act consistently with one's values.

If we have a strict consistency requirement for helpfulness, we can agree with situationists that not helping in trivial helping situations is evidence against attributing helpfulness because it shows the subjects lack some aspect of helpfulness. On the other hand, if we agree that one can fail to act helpfully in a

few situations (of minor need) and still be considered consistently helpful, then conflicting duties and ambiguity are just two of the many reasons that an agent can have for choosing not to help in some situations without this thereby being evidence against the agent having a trait of helpfulness.

Whichever side we come down on in regards to this problem, there is a bigger problem highlighted by the effects of ambiguity. If an agent chooses not to help a victim in an ambiguous situation because he believes the victim probably does not need help (or is not in extreme need of help) and it turns out the victim *is* in great need of help, the agent may end up making a decision he would not have endorsed had he known the victim was in need of help. If the agent cares about helping people in moderate or extreme need, and wants to help consistently in these types of situations, then he has failed to act as he would have wanted in the ambiguous situation. This is especially problematic if the agent consistently finds himself in ambiguous situations.

Ambiguous situations might be another problematic area for many agents. Just like lack of attention due to being in a bad mood or in a hurry, ambiguous situational features might also increase the probability of an agent missing important details of a situation and consequently misinterpreting the situation. Failure to read ambiguous situations properly might be, as Nancy Snow put it, another "vice" that affects all of the virtues, not any specific one of them. Ambiguous situations may be situations in which we need to pay particular attention to situational features in order to have an accurate interpretation of the situation. We may need a particular skill in order to counter the effects of ambiguous situations. I will come back to this.

Milgram Experiment

All the experiments we have looked at so far tested for the trait of "helpfulness," or coming to someone's aid when costs and consequences are low for the agent and the victim. In the Milgram experiment, however, especially particular variations of it, the supposed consequences of not helping the victim were much more severe. The experiment was set up to make it look as if the victim could have suffered serious injury or even death because of the shocks. Possibly because of the severity of the supposed consequences, or because this experiment is testing for compassionate behavior, there are no responses arguing that the inconsistency in overt behavior in this case is consistent with having the character trait of compassion. Instead, all of the advocates of character seem to agree that some deficiency of character was responsible for the way agents behaved in this situation. That is, they agree with situationists that failing to act compassionately in this situation was evidence against attributing the trait of compassion.

However, they disagree among each other on what deficiency of character causes these inconsistencies and continue to disagree with situationists that this is evidence that situational contexts are always better predictors of behavior than character, even if this happened to be the case in this situation.

DC Response

Some philosophers like Nomy Arpaly reject the situationist claim that the subjects all reacted similarly to the experiment: some subjects stayed all the way through, some left at different points, and some exhibited more overtly anxious

behaviors than others.[40] Owen Flanagan also points out that "it's important to keep in mind that a significant minority—fully one-third of the participants—did refuse to obey," although he maintains that it is unclear to him what caused some people to comply and not others.[41] Perhaps, many (though clearly not all) of the subjects simply lacked some aspect of compassion. Perhaps they lacked practical wisdom or some other skill that would help ensure that they acted consistently compassionately; or perhaps another trait they had overrode their compassion.

Philosophers and psychologists (Milgram included) have theorized that the reason most people complied with the experimenters request was the subjects' deference toward authority. [42] Since the subjects had more practice obeying authority than performing compassionate acts, the trait of obedience overrode the trait of compassion. Robert Solomon points out that most often "people display compassion 'by feeling sorry for' those much worse off than they, a very small expenditure of effort even when it is sincere."[43] In other words, feeling sorry for others in bad situations is the most effort that most people usually put into trying to be compassionate. In circumstances like the Milgram experiment, where "unpracticed efforts" are required, people are capable of "beastly behaviors."[44]

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[40] Arpaly, "Comments on *Lack of Character* by John Doris," 644.

[41] Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality,* 295

[42] See Sabini and Silver, "Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued," 547; Jonathan Webber, "Virtue, Character and Situation," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 3, no. 2, (2006): 199; Robert C. Solomon, "What's Character Got to Do with It?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 71, no. 3 (November 2005): 648-655. p. 653; and Jonathan Webber, "Character, Common-sense and Expertise," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 10, no. 1 (January 2007): 89-104.

[43] Solomon, "What's Character Got to Do with It?" 653.

[44] Solomon, "What's Character God to Do with It?" 653.

Webber makes the further claim that we have a tendency to cite uncommon traits like cruelty to explain the behavior of subjects in the Milgram experiment, instead of common traits like obedience to authority.[45] The behavior of the subjects was not showing inconsistency in compassion, it was showing consistency in obedience. However, the question remains, how could obedience so easily override compassion?

To answer this question let us turn back to Sabini and Silver and their paper on the sociopsychology of the Holocaust.[46] According to Sabini and Silver, the Milgram subjects (like some of the people who aided in the Holocaust before them) did not intend the evil of shocking the learner all the way up to max voltage. The evil was unintended; they only intended the good of being deferent to authority. Since the experimenter was the authority figure, subjects didn't feel as if they were fully responsible for what happened to the learner.[47] Like people who aided the Nazi regime, Milgram's subjects assumed the institution would bear the responsibility.

This is an obvious confusion between technical and moral responsibility. Like people who aided the Nazi's, Milgram's subjects seemed to ignore the fact that once the institution they were helping was no longer legitimate (because the institution was committing immoral actions), they could and should stop

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[45] Webber, "Character, Common-sense and Expertise," 100. While this may be a problem of wrongly attributing traits to people, by itself this wouldn't count as evidence for the situationist claim that there are no robust character traits.

[46] Sabini and Silver, *Moralities of Everyday Life,* 66-68. Sabini and Silver argue that evil actions aren't always tied to desire, as in the Milgram case.

[47] See Milgram's full discussion of this in *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View (*New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

obeying.[48] The subjects failed to see that virtue required them to stop obeying the rules of a corrupt institution; failing to realize this was a failure in reasoning and practical wisdom, a deficiency of character that led to inconsistency in compassionate behavior.[49]

Sabini and Silver and others have also pointed out the stepwise character of the situation in the Milgram case.[50] The subject's evil behavior is not the consequence of a decision to do evil; it is the result of prior commitment to relatively unobjectionable behavior with escalating minor commitments that eventually result in complicity in a "pointless, cruel, and dangerous ordeal."[51] Because subjects felt that they had only made a commitment to doing something relatively unobjectionable, they did not feel fully responsible for the objectionable actions they ended up doing. They were simply following through on their initial commitment. Once again, this is a failure in reasoning of not being able to see the relevant moral factors in the situation or, perhaps, a failure to weigh duties properly (with the duty not to harm weighing more than the duty to obey).

Sabini and Silver also argue that people (especially Americans) don't like confrontation, and walking away from the experiment would have required

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[48] Sabini and Silver, *Moralities of Everyday Life*, 66-68. Sabini and Silver argue that evil actions aren't always tied to desire, as in the Milgram case.

[49] More on this in the section on practical wisdom in the next chapter.

[50] Sabini and Silver, *Moralities of Everyday Life,* 69. (See also Sabini and Silver, "Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued," 553; Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality,* 297; Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation,* 50-58).

[51] Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation,* 56. See also Sabini and Silver, "Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued," 553.
Flanagan also points out that people also feel a justification problem. Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality,* 297.

confronting the experimenter and telling him that the experiment was immoral.[52] This is another failure in reasoning or failure to weigh duties properly. Duties of compassion clearly outweigh any squeamishness subjects' might have felt at failing their duty to the experimenter. What are a few moments of discomfort to the possibility of hurting or possibly even killing someone (viz. the learner)?

Analysis

Obedience and Social Influence

In another paper, Sabini and Silver argue that it wasn't just obedience to an authority that drove many of Milgram subjects to continue with the experiments; it was obedience to a specific kind of authority figure.[53] The experimenter served as the guide and rational person in a situation that the subjects found morally baffling and unfamiliar. While this situation was not ambiguous in the same way as the Seminary experiment (in the most famous version of the Milgram experiment, the victim was, after all, yelling for help), the situation was wholly new to many of the subjects.

In unfamiliar situations, just as in ambiguous situations, subjects look to others in the situation to determine the correct course of action and in the Milgram experiment an authority figure had told the subjects that the experiment was perfectly safe. Not only was the situation unfamiliar to the subjects, an *authority figure* had told them the experiment was safe. Not only did the subjects feel a duty to obey the authority figure to go through with the experiment

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[52] Sabini and Silver, *Moralities of Everyday Life,* 552-53. In response to an experiment also dealing with the perceptions of others, Sabini and Silver claim that (557) "people do not want to embarrass themselves by looking like a fool, by losing their cool." This seems to play an important role in this experiment as well. More on this in the section of group effects.

[53] See Sabini and Silver, "Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued," 547-53.

(because they had agreed to participate in it), they were in a situation that was unknown to them but well known to the authority figure. On the other hand, the victim was calling out for help and so there was a duty to him to help if he was in pain, or at the very least, not to harm him. However, the victim was also outside of his own environment and was not an authority figure. This experiment was the domain of the experimenter and if anyone knew what was supposed to happen within that environment it was he, not another subject.[54] As Sabini and Silver pointed out, the subjects saw the experimenter as the "rational man" in the experiment. As if the strong compulsion to obey authority was not enough, the subjects also found themselves within the domain of that authority figure, making the impulse to obey even stronger.

Moreover, as mentioned above, subjects seemed to confuse technical (or legal) and moral responsibility. They assumed the authority figure had full responsibility for his commands (and the consequences of his commands), especially since the authority figure was issuing commands within his domain to an outsider.

Whereas for helping behavior in situations of minor need there may be some leeway regarding consistency requirements for each trait, for behavior in situations requiring compassion, especially those with possibly severe

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[54] There is some evidence for this. Among the many variations of the experiment that Milgram conducted were the following ones: in one variation the learner demands to be shocked after the experimenter (as authority figure) has told the naïve subject to stop, in another the experimenter is strapped in as the victim while an ordinary man takes on the role of experimenter in giving commands, and in another, two experimenters give conflicting commands to the naïve subject about whether to stop the experiment or not. In all of these variations, the naïve subject stopped when the experimenter told him to (or when the two experimenters began arguing). In the last variation with the two experimenter giving conflicting demands, the naïve subject seems to see this as evidence that even though the two experimenters are within their own domain, since both have equal authority and cannot decide on one command, neither command is valid. See Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, 105-10.

consequences to the victim, there seems to be a much more stringent consistency requirement. If the choice not to help was the result of poor reasoning or some inability to act according to one's values (like concern for victim), this points to potentially dangerous deficiencies in character.

We have already noted that ambiguous or unfamiliar situations confuse subjects, leading them to commit errors in reasoning. In the Milgram experiment, an unfamiliar situation was coupled with other problematic factors (such as conflicting duties and the subject's impulse to obey authority) to create a situation that would baffle most subjects. Unfortunately, these types of situations are all too common and familiar in the annals of history and that makes the results of this case particularly troubling. It matters very little whether the subjects in the Milgram experiment *felt* compassion for the confederate if they did not act on that compassion. If certain types of situations pose problems for the expression of certain values for many agents, these are the types of situations we must evaluate closely in order to find a way to counteract situational influences in these situations.

However, not all of the subjects complied: fully one third of them quit the experiment early on. While these numbers may be disheartening, it is clear that correcting this deficiency is not impossible. Perhaps what we should take away from the experiment is that people are not as compassionate as they believe themselves to be but this may be due to an error or deficiency in moral education or a lack of attention to developing this particular trait. I come back to this issue in the following chapters.

From the fact that at least a third of the agents refused to continue with the experiment until the end, we can surmise that it is not impossible to counteract these influences.

Response to Historical Cases

Finally, I would like to address the Stanford Prison Experiment, Abu Ghraib, the Rwandan genocide, and the Holocaust as evidence for the situationist critique. There have been few responses to these cases as evidence for situationism and these types of cases seem to fall into neither the argument from misrepresentation nor the argument from deficiency of character approach. The problem is that while these cases do have some features in common with the rest of the evidence for situationism, none of them presents clear-cut examples of evidence of the power of the situation over personal dispositions.

First, situational factors have a different meaning in these cases, referring not to the features of a single instance of a situation but rather to a complete environment, often for long periods. "Environment" here is defined as including the social and political climates of a particular place as well as the goals, values, and beliefs of the people in that place. Furthermore, there is little to no attention paid to the role of enduring beliefs, goals, or values on people's behavior. The influence of values, beliefs, or goals developed because of a particular environment seems to be equated with the influence of purely situational influences like finding someone else's discarded change in a phone booth.

The situational factors in these cases are long-term situational features. Often they refer to the environments that people grew up in and/or lived in. This type of "situational feature" is very different from experiments where a single

situational feature in a situation influences an individual to behave differently than they otherwise would have. The idea that people are affected by the environments in which they live and grew up is not one disputed by defenders of the traditional conception of character. Aristotle argued that in order for an agent to develop virtue, he must first be taught the moral virtues from his youth. Presumably, a parent, teacher, or guardian would help habituate him with the right moral beliefs, desires, values, affects, etc. Developing practical wisdom required time and the right sorts of experiences. According to Aristotle, the development of virtue was dependent on an agent's environment.

According to the situationist critique, situationism is correct if behavioral variation owes more to situational rather than dispositional differences. However, if dispositional differences developed because of living in or growing up in a particular environment are also considered situational influences, it is unclear that there is a difference between dispositional and situational differences, if any. Moreover, the idea that an environment in which an individual grows up or resides has an effect on the development or maintenance of virtue is consistent with Aristotle's idea of virtue.

For example, from historical analysis, we know that there were tensions between the Hutu and the Tutsi long before the genocide. The Hutu felt great animosity toward the Tutsi long before. There had been recurring violence between the two groups for decades. In 1963 and 1964, there was a massacre of Tutsi with fourteen thousand dead and a larger scale massacre of the Hutu in Burundi resulting in one hundred thousand dead. The two groups did not live happily side by side. They may have coexisted peacefully enough, but it is highly probable that ingrained in the mind of every Hutu and Tutsi child was the idea

that they should be deeply suspicious of members of the other group. The peace between the two groups was likely a highly fragile peace, easily disrupted. Once the RTLM radio station and Kangura newspaper began disseminating aggressive discrimination against the Hutu (see the militant doctrine of Hutu purity described in Chapter 2), and the false rumor that the Tutsi were about to attack the Hutu, it was only too easy to convince the ever suspicious Hutu that the Tutsi were planning yet another large scale massacre.

The Hutu had a certain mindset towards the Tutsi. They may have been genuinely compassionate, loyal, kind, etc., to their families and those of their group, but this mindset likely did not extend to members of the other group. They lived in a tense political and social climate that had shaped the way they viewed themselves and others. While their dispositions may have been a result of the environment in which they lived, this is vastly dissimilar from a situational feature in a single situation influencing them to behave differently than they would have if they had behaved according to their disposition. While the mindset of the Hutu may have been a result of the situation in which they lived (and had lived in for decades), this is less of a clear-cut example of "situationism" as someone deciding to help or not based on finding a dime in a phone booth. In a situation like this, it seems that behavior is not solely the result of situational features, rather, it is the result of a situational stimulus (like propaganda) interacting with a certain disposition (that included being suspicious of a certain group).

Conditions on the ground in Vietnam were even worse. Although soldiers had not grown up in the wartime environment in Vietnam, they lived in that environment for several months or even years. Kendrick Oliver writes that there

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was a deep cultural divide between American soldiers and Vietnamese civilians; American soldiers simply did not understand Vietnamese culture or language. As a result, Vietnamese culture was subject to stereotypes, many of them negative. The view of Vietnamese culture was that it was inferior to American culture, that Vietnamese people did not feel anything regarding their own fates, that of their families, or that of their fellow citizens. As Oliver puts it, "The Vietnamese has been placed almost entirely beyond the reach of empathetic consideration." As American casualties started adding up, more and more soldiers began to view the already misunderstood Vietnamese people as enemy combatants; soldiers presumed that every civilian was working with the enemy. Soldiers often destroyed whole villages for the sake of one sniper and sometimes merely because they simply didn't know whether there could be an enemy amongst the people living there.

This type of environment would have produced a certain mindset in many American soldiers. Whether or not a particular soldier was kind or compassionate to people of his own family or in-group, he may have had an increasingly negative view of Vietnamese civilians, seeming them as not worthy of kindness or compassion. Instead, the mysterious Vietnamese civilians of whom they knew so little may have been responsible for members of his in-group being killed or wounded.

We can make similar arguments about many of the non-rescuers in Nazi Germany. According to historians, the social and political climate in Germany around the time of Hitler's rise to power was one already anti-Semitic. The Jews were blamed for social, political, and economic problems and were equated with socialism, feared greatly at the time by Germany's middle class. Hitler's rising to

power would have increased anti-Semitic sentiment in much of the German populace. German youth were inculcated with anti-Semitic beliefs, encouraged to believe that Jewish people were responsible for all the country's problems and were even somehow less than human. School texts in German schools were changed in order to indoctrinate German children to a Nazi ideal of the Aryan world while at the same time Jewish rights and personhood were slowly taken away via new anti-Semitic laws and propaganda. Like the Hutu, many non-rescuers may have genuinely compassionate, kind, or loyal towards their family or in-group (the group to which they belonged) while still holding aggressively discriminatory attitudes toward those in the out-group.

The inaction on the part of much of the native German populace would be largely a result of the social-political climate driven by Nazi ideologies in the form of heavy use of propaganda, inculcating of anti-Semitism from early youth, and a series of laws aimed at stripping a whole group of people of their rights and personhood combined with anti-Semitic attitudes heightened by this self-same environment.

The situation at Abu Ghraib during the time prisoner abuses happened had similar features. At Abu Ghraib there was inadequate leadership and poor supervision of relatively inexperienced guards. There were frequently mortar attacks on the prison, one of which had wounded many of the guards and even killed a few of them. The orders coming from above regarding the proper treatment of prisoners were purposely vague and so many abuses that would normally be considered torture were left to the interpretation of the guards. Abu Ghraib was already a prison to begin with, which meant that the guards would have seen the prisoners as the out-group versus fellow guards as the in-group.

Moreover, the prisoners were part of the group against which the in-group was fighting. Members of the out-group had wounded or even killed members of their in-group. The soldiers would have likely resented the prisoners, if only because they belonged to the enemy.

Family and friends of the guards involved in the abuses showed surprise at the behavior of the guards, arguing that their family member or friend had always been the most compassionate, kind, just, etc., person that they knew. How could this same person be capable of such abuses of another human being? However, as with the Hutu or many non-rescuers during the Holocaust, if the prisoners were seen as part of the aggressive out-group, the enemy, the guards may not have felt that compassion, kindness, or justice extended to them. The guards may have had the right sort of beliefs, desires, and feelings consistent with the virtues towards their friends, while having none of these towards the prisoners.

The historical cases cited as evidence for situationism do not provide clear-cut examples of situational features influencing behavior over dispositional differences. Instead, the historical cases provide evidence that environments can influence the development or maintenance of individual's actual dispositions, which in turn influence his behavior. An individual's dispositions will depend in large part on the social and political environment in which he lives as well as the people with which he lives on a daily basis. In some cases, some part of an individual's dispositions will reflect the social-political environment into which he was born or in which he grew up, as in Rwanda and the youth in Nazi Germany.

In other cases, long-term environments like Vietnam, Abu Ghraib, or Nazi Germany can affect an individual's dispositions. In many cases of this sort, the environment seems merely to expand on, rather than radically change, goals, beliefs, values, etc. that an individual already had. In Nazi Germany, for example, there was already a tendency toward anti-Semitism among many in the German populace that resulted in feelings of apathy toward the plight of the Jewish at the hands of the Nazis, at Abu Ghraib, there was already a justifiable fear and suspicion of enemy combatant that quickly grew into disdain and contempt.

While these are types of "situationism," they seem markedly different from someone deciding to help or not because of an annoying noise or a pleasant scent in the area. Instead, the historical cases are evidence that an individual's environment can shape or change that individual's personal dispositions. Behavior in those situations seems to be the result of the interaction between situational and dispositional features. This idea ties in with the theory that I look at in the next chapter, that behavior is the result of the interaction of dispositional and situational features, not one or the other.

However, more generally, the lesson we can take away from these historical cases seems to be that social contexts play a large role in the development and maintenance of virtue for many people. I come back to this issue in later chapters.

Conclusion

For helping situations of minor need, it seems quite likely that (at least in many Western countries) agents perceive these types of situations as requiring either morally elective or non-moral behavior. Helping in any particular situation

is merely a matter of choice and so helping behavior is inconsistent, dependent on many factors like whether one is hurrying, in a bad mood, or simply confused by some ambiguity in the situation. Virtue ethics theorists might be able to accommodate for inconsistent helping behavior in some situations of minor need by stipulating that there are virtues that require perfect obligations while others require merely imperfect obligations, as Robert Adams has argued. Helpfulness might be a virtue that does not require perfect obligation as it does not need to be satisfied on every occasion and whose consistency requirements merely require one to do enough of a certain behavior in order to be consistent in that virtue.

However, this does not include agents who are confused by ambiguous situations or are unable to weigh duties properly. It is debatable whether we should consider them to have the traits of helpfulness or compassion considering their failures in reasoning could lead to severe consequences for people in need. Whether agents can fail to act helpfully or compassionately and still have the trait in question will in part also depend on the definition of the particular trait and the stringency of its behavioral consistency requirement. If the particular virtue in question requires strict behavioral consistency, or that agents are always aware when a situation calls for compassionate or helpful behavior and are rarely or never confused about their duties in that situation, then failing to act helpfully or compassionately is evidence against attributing the trait. Perhaps the agent lacks some necessary skill or knowledge to have that virtue.

Moreover, we still have the difficulty of problematic situational features that can influence the behavior of agents in subtle, troubling ways. These include situations that facilitate assigning personal responsibility to someone else, and

situations that include conflicting duties, unfamiliar or ambiguous elements, or authority figures issuing commands.

This brings us back to the explanation from deficiency of character. Perhaps certain skills are a necessary requirement for virtue and the agents in these situations simply did not possess them and so did not possess those virtues. For example, one possible skill these agents may have been lacking is practical wisdom. The argument from practical wisdom says that virtue requires a specific type of knowledge that helps one know what the right thing to do is in every situation and why it is the right thing to do. An agent who does not have practical wisdom simply does not have the virtues and will often act inconsistently with those virtues. In the next few chapters, I discuss practical wisdom and other suggestions for possible skills necessary for improving behavioral consistency and combating the effects of problematic situational features.

I also argued that the historical cases, rather than being evidence for situationism, seem to be evidence that the environment in which a person grows up in or lives in for some amount of time has a strong influence on the development and maintenance of his virtue. The type of environment in which an individual grows up or resides may shape or change that individual's character. I come back to this in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4

IN DEFENSE OF CHARACTER: THE ARGUMENT FROM PSYCHOLOGICAL

FACTORS

In the previous chapter, I reviewed the two approaches employed by

advocates of character, namely, the argument from misrepresentation (AM) and

the argument from deficiency of character (DC). According to respondents

arguing from AM, situationism has misrepresented the Aristotelian conception of

virtue. "Global character," or the situationist description of the Aristotelian

conception of character, is not an accurate portrayal of an Aristotelian or

traditional conception of character (TCC); an accurate portrayal of TCC can

explain away apparent behavioral inconsistencies as well as explain the role of

dispositional features in the production of behavior.

In this chapter, I look at the principal contention behind AM—the

argument from psychological factors (PF). The general idea of the argument from

psychological factors is that the biggest flaw of the situationist thesis is its heavy

emphasis on overt behavior as the primary (or even sole) indicator of consistency

in character.

Ultimately, I conclude that PF serves not only as a response to some of the

situationist evidence from psychology but also as a response to one of the

premises of the situationist critique. Psychological factors (neglected by

situationists who focus exclusively on overt behavior) can explain some of the

behavior in cases cited as evidence for situationists. Attention to psychological

factors can also give us greater insight into human behavior and can help us

understand, explain, and predict behavior with greater accuracy. For this reason,

the argument from psychological factors can point us toward a more realistic conception of character. I come back to this in later chapters.

I also analyze whether arguments from PF are consistent with the three main contentions of AM: 1) human behavior is not largely driven by situational determinants, 2) experiments cited by situationists do not in fact show behavioral inconsistency, and finally 3) an accurate portrayal of TCC can account for both 1 and 2 above.

I conclude that in order to respond to the first two claims, advocates of AM must give up the third claim and alter the traditional conception of character. The conception of character described by PF is one that diverges in some ways from TCC.

The Argument from Psychological Factors

Philosophers have argued that one of the weaknesses of the situationist thesis is the emphasis placed on direct behavioral dispositions alone as indicators of virtue and character.[1] The consistency requirement of traditional virtue and character does not refer merely to behavior; it also includes some of the psychological factors of agents.

The argument is not that overt behavior is not an important component of character, but rather that the complex and multifarious causes of human

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[1] See Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*; Annas, "Comments on John Doris's *Lack of Character*"; Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Character on the Content of Our Character"; Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality*; Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence*; Solomon, "What's Character Got to Do with It?"; Sabini and Silver, "*Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued*"; Sreenivasan "Errors about Errors: Virtue Theory and Trait Attribution"; and Candace Upton, *Situational Traits of Character: Dispositional Foundations and Implications for Moral Psychology and Friendship* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009).

behavior are just as important as indicators of character or virtue as the actions they cause.

For example, philosopher Robert Adams writes that:

> human behavior, except most routinely habitual, is a product of multiple psychological factors which differ in different situations. A theory of virtue will have more explanatory power to the extent that the excellent qualities it identifies as virtues are found among those factors that lie behind behavior, rather than in direct behavioral dispositions.[2]

In order to judge an agent's virtue or character, we need to look not only at that agent's overt behavior but also at some of the possible causes of that behavior.

Some of the psychological factors that should be included in the concept of character or virtue are goals, beliefs, values, and an agent's subjective construal. There is some disagreement over whether the traditional conception of character already includes these features or whether it *should* include them, but there is agreement that character (and by extension virtue) is more than just the sum of overt behavior.

Construal

In the previous chapter, I briefly mentioned the argument that one of the possible explanations for the variability of a single agent's behavior across different situations is that we measure behavioral consistency from a third person "objective" perspective, instead of measuring it from a first person "subjective" perspective. For example, if I want to judge whether Alan behaves consistently compassionately, I may observe Alan's behavior in a number of situations where compassionate behavior is appropriate. When Alan does not behave

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[2] Adams, *A Theory of Virtue,* 131.

compassionately, I take note that he has been inconsistently compassionate. However, I used my own criteria for determining which situations require compassionate behavior. Perhaps I base my criteria on which situations seem appropriate from my own perspective, or perhaps I poll a random sample of individuals on what types of situations they believe require compassionate behavior. I then observe Alan in a number of situations that *I* believe fit the criteria that I (or a random sampling of people) have judged to be situations that require compassion. However, I do not perceive the situations based on Alan's own perspective of the situation, I perceive them from my own perspective and make my judgment based on my own perspective.

According to the argument from construal, two agents might perceive the same situation differently from one another (or in the case of experiments, from the experimenters that set up the situation) and so might disagree on what they perceive the correct behavior to be in that situation. This may result in one agent judging the behavior of the other agent inconsistent with a certain virtue or trait. Yet from the point of view of the agent himself, his behavior may seem perfectly consistent with that same trait or virtue. So for example, if Matt and Alan are both in situation *x* and Alan feels that this is a situation requiring helpful behavior but Matt does not, Alan may feel that Matt's failure to help is inconsistent with the trait of helpfulness. On the other hand, Matt did not perceive situation *x* as a situation that required helpful behavior so his failure to be helpful in situation *x* indicates nothing at all about his character.

The general thesis of the argument from construal is that in order to understand a particular individual's behavior we first need to understand how that individual perceives and understands the situation. In other words, we need

to understand the agent's "construal" of the situation. Merely observing an agent's overt behavior will actually tell us very little about why the agent behaves the way he does. We may learn to recognize some patterns in behavior but unless we understand the underlying causes, including construal, we will not really be able to explain the agent's behavior with any real insight or accuracy. Moreover, because different individuals have their own distinctive construal of a single situation, most experiments set up with an "objective" stimulus that all subjects should perceive in exactly the same way are actually disregarding the way human beings actually perceive the world.

According to social psychologists Lee Ross and Richard Nisbett, construal is the "personal and subjective meaning" that an actor attaches to a situation; that is to say, it is an actor's subjective perception of a situation.[3] Ross and Nisbett wrote in 1991 that because of issues of construal (how an agent perceives and interprets a situation), no two situations, no matter how similar, will necessarily be judged the same even by the same person, let alone by two different people. Any approach that wants to make behavior explicable and predicable "must take into account the subjective perspective of the actor, not that of the observer or researcher."[4]

One of the "tools of construal" is the use of knowledge structures or "schemas."[5] A knowledge structure "summarizes generic knowledge and previous experience with respect to a given class of stimuli and events and, at the same time, gives meaning and guides anticipation with respect to similar stimuli and

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[3] Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation,* 11.

[4] Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation*, 163.

[5] Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation,* 12.

events in the future."[6] Different individuals can view the same situation distinctly depending on a number of factors, including the schemas and scripts that each of them has constructed. Schemas are a product of the individual's personal history, temperament, and his individual goals and beliefs. So for example, I might have a schema revolving around my previous experience in a grocery store that leads me to anticipate having the same kind of experiences whenever I am in a grocery store environment. Every time I have been in a grocery store, there have been carts and hand baskets near the entrance somewhere. I do not have to pay for the items I intend to purchase until I reach the register, and I have to pay for my items using cash, credit, or some other form of currency before being allowed to take them from the store. Therefore, I expect that next time I enter another grocery store, whatever type it may be, I will find carts and hand baskets near the entrance and will have to pay for my purchases before leaving the store. I may also have some particular idea of how one is supposed to act in a grocery store, how the other shoppers will act towards me and each other, what expectations I can have of the employees that work there, etc. I expect that my experience will vary little from one grocery store to the next. Moreover, I will categorize different types of situations into different classes based on the different experiences I have in each. For every class of situation that I am in (work, school, banks, shops, at home, on the street, in a restaurant, with friends, etc.), I will have a different set of expectations as well assumptions about how I should behave that are partly based on previous experiences.

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[6] Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation,* 12.
See also Darcia Narvaez and Daniel K. Lapsley Eds., *Personality, Identity, and Character: Explorations in Moral Psychology.* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2009) Narvaez and Lapsley define schemas as organized knowledge structures that channel and filter social perceptions and memory, p. 195.

There is little cognitive processing required for the enactment of schemas, which we use to guide our behavior in familiar situations; it is when we are in unfamiliar situations that we have to stop and think about how to interpret the situation since there is no knowledge structure to provide us with expectations for that situation. For situations with which we have much experience, our knowledge structures guide our expectations and behavior, so we rarely stop and interpret situations we have encountered before. However, when we are in unfamiliar or ambiguous situations, we are more likely to turn to other people to help us interpret the situation.

Different judgmental strategies or "heuristics" that the mind employs when making inferences lead to the formation of schemas.[7] While there are a variety of different heuristics, most of them seem to operate without conscious or deliberate effort. Nisbett and Ross mention two common and simple heuristics as an example: the availability heuristic and the representativeness heuristic.

The availability heuristic operates when the relative availability of objects or events (i.e., the accessibility of objects or events in the processes of memory, perception, or construction from imagination) influences how an individual judges the relative frequency of some actual event or object. The accessibility of certain objects or events makes them more salient to the individual. However, the salience of certain objects or events in our minds often is not correlated to the actual frequency of those events. Instead, many different factors unrelated to actual frequency can affect the salience of certain objects or events in our mind. For example, if I am currently unemployed, then I may overestimate the rate of unemployment because I share the neighborhood, socioeconomic background, or

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[7] Nisbett and Ross, *Human Inference,* 18.

occupation of other unemployed individuals. Perhaps I run into other unemployed individuals during my attempts at job-hunting, at job fairs, at employment agencies, etc. Another example is that if I belong to a particular group or class of people (say, being a resident of New Mexico), I might overestimate the successes of that group of people because I pay more attention to the successes of members of my group as compared to other groups.[8]

The availability heuristic may also play a part in the way we judge relationships between events, particularly causal relationships. Nisbett and Ross cite the propensity of observers to cite dispositional rather than situational factors when observing the behaviors of others while attributing their own actions to situational factors. The observer sees the actors as the most available causal candidate, while the actor himself sees the environment as the most available causal candidate. For the actor, the active stimuli of the environment leads to his acting a particular way, whereas for an observer the environment is merely the "ground" and the actor himself is the figure or active causal agent. Ross and Nisbett claim that this phenomenon is what contributes to our propensity to commit the fundamental attribution error.[9]

Goals, Beliefs, and Values

An agent's goals, beliefs, and values also affect the creation of that agent's schemas, as well as providing reasons and motives for the agent's actions. Including goals, beliefs, and values in the concept of character seems to be something on which both virtue theorists and some situationists can agree. In the

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[8] See Nisbett and Ross, *Human Inference,* 18-21.

[9] See the first chapter for definition. I come back to the fundamental attribution error in the last chapter.

quintessential situationist textbook *The Person and the Situation*, Ross and

Nisbett offer advice for finding a conception of personality that holds up to the

problem of situational influences; part of that advice is to include goals,

preferences, and construal into an account of personality. According to Ross and

Nisbett, the real intentions of the agent can only be fully appreciated once one

takes into account the agent's "subjective representations of situations" (i.e., his

construal) as well as the goals and preferences of the agent. Goals and

preferences are important to intentions because according to Ross and Nisbett,

human behavior is organized around short-term, long-term, and even lifetime

goals.[10]

      For example, let's say Jones is a very introverted person who happens to

work at a company that throws rowdy office parties a few times a year. From past

experiences, he has formed a schema of office parties as situations in which no

one comes over to talk to him and (due to his introverted nature) he stands off by

himself because he feels uncomfortable approaching groups of his co-workers

already engaged in conversation. Every time he knows there is an office party

coming up, he feels exceedingly uncomfortable and sets a goal of merely staying

as long as he needs to in order to be polite. His fear of approaching groups of his

co-workers in order to join their conversation is due to his introverted nature and

so his introversion is in part responsible for his past experiences in these sorts of

situations. His past experiences in turn form schemas that inform future

situations of this kind, resulting in Jones setting the goal of merely staying as

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[10] Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation,* 163-168. The other criteria on Ross and Nisbett's list are: 1) the agent's competencies and capacities, 2) the agent's conception of himself, and 3) the agent's attributional style (or how much control the agent feels he has over his own life).

long as necessary at future office parties. This goal in part informs his construal of the next office party, perpetuating the cycle.

Now let us suppose that because Jones feels exceedingly uncomfortable at office parties, he is often rude to his co-workers when approached in these types of situations even though Jones is usually friendly and approachable, even if a little shy. Due to his construal, his beliefs about parties, and his introverted nature, Jones is now inconsistently friendly. Even though Jones has the belief that it is right to be friendly or polite, values doing so, and has formed a long-term goal to be friendly and polite, his introverted nature results in an immediate goal at the party of leaving as soon as possible.[11] Since he is so eager to leave and fulfill his immediate goal, Jones does not even notice that he is being rude at the party. If we know enough about Jones and understand his construal and his goals, both long-term and immediate, we understand a little more about his actions at the party.

Moreover, beliefs or goals might also make an individual's behavior merely apparently or outwardly inconsistent while still being internally consistent, that is, while still being consistent to one's own subjective construal, goals, beliefs, or values. To illustrate what I mean I turn to a story from Robert Cialdini's book *Influence: Science and Practice*. Cialdini observed the highest-earning waiter at a restaurant to try to determine the best strategy for earning tips. He found that there was nothing consistent about the waiter's behavior…except maximizing tips. Depending on the clients, the waiter behaved differently: with families the waiter was "effervescent, even slightly clownish,"

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[11] This is not a technical term. By long-term I merely mean a goal that one wants to satisfy across a wide span of time and/or a variety of situations.

with a young couple on a date he was "formal and a bit imperious in an attempt to

intimate the young man...into ordering and tipping lavishly," with older couples

he was formal and respectful, and with lone diners he was "cordial,

conversational, and warm."[12] However, his varying behavior was consistent with

his goal of maximizing tips. The goal of maximizing tips stayed consistent, but the

waiter employed different strategies in order to reach that goal and this resulted

in apparently inconsistent behavior.[13]

<div align="center">Analysis</div>

Let's stop and reflect on the aims of the situationist thesis. The driving

force behind situationism is the idea of greater psychological realism in

philosophical ethics, or the idea that ethical theories should be constrained by

findings about human psychology. The main critique of the situationist thesis is

that the traditional conception of character does not accurately reflect the reality

of human psychology and so the concept must be altered or scrapped altogether

for a concept that does.

One of the main conclusions of the situationist thesis is that people are

not behaviorally consistent. Consistency is defined as "character and personality

traits [being] reliably manifested in trait-relevant behavior across a diversity of

trait-relevant eliciting conditions."[14] However, according to situationists:

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[12] Robert Cialdini, *Influence: The New Psychology of Modern Persuasion,* (New York: Quill, 1984), 226.

[13]. Cialdini, *Influence*, 190-191

[14] Doris, *Lack of Character,* 22.

behavioral variation across a population owes more to situational differences than dispositional differences among persons. Individual dispositional differences are not so behaviorally individuating as might have been supposed; to a surprising extent it is safest to predict, for a particular situation, that a person will behave in a fashion similar to the population norm."[15]

Situationists advocate a move to "local" traits, or traits contextualized by a particular time and situation.

The argument from psychological factors can respond to situationism in a number of ways. PF gives a partial explanation for apparent lack of behavioral consistency in at least some instances and provides a partial response to the situationist claim that situational rather than dispositional differences drive behavior. Moreover, the argument from PF calls into question the validity of some of the evidence used in favor of the situationist critique and has greater explanatory and predictive power than the move to local traits advocated by situationists.

Validity of Experimental Results

Since two agents can (and often do) perceive the same situation differently from one another, setting up an objective stimulus in an experiment that all agents should perceive the same way is simply ignoring the way that agents perceive situations. For example, suppose I set up an experiment like the Princeton Seminary "Good Samaritan" experiment. From my point of view as the experimenter, the correct action in this case is obvious: to help the possibly ill man that is slumped over some steps in the alley. I have constructed my

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[15] Doris, *Lack of Character,* 24.

experiment with the assumption that this is the correct action, that is, that this is the helpful action, while no action shows a lack of helpfulness. Anyone that does not help the victim has failed to exhibit helpful behavior because this situation has been set up to appeal to all agents in the same way, namely, it is set up as a situation that calls for helping behavior

However, if there is no way to set up an "objective" stimulus in an experiment about helping behavior in situations of minor need, then it is unclear what the results of the experiment show. Situationists typically use the results of the Princeton Seminary Experiment as evidence for the inconsistency of helpfulness because it *should have* been obvious that the victim was in need of help (because it was obvious from the point of view of the experimenters who set up the experiment). If it was unclear to the subjects in a hurry that this was a situation requiring help, then one can argue that some of them chose not to help because they were unclear that the victim required help or because of the effects of ambiguity on weighing conflicting duties. We could also argue that the subjects simply failed to notice that there was someone in need of help because they were overly preoccupied with getting to their talk on time. The subjects may still have held a consistent goal of helping someone in moderate or serious need, even if their behavior on this occasion was inconsistent with that goal because of their failure to realize this was a helping situation of moderate or extreme need.[16]

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[16] I have mentioned elsewhere that the experiment does show that people are less likely to notice their environment when they are in a hurry and in an ambiguous situation, so hurrying and ambiguity are sources of bad reasoning leading to inadvertent failures to help. These sorts of situations may just be problematic for the majority of agents.

Response to Consistency Requirement

The argument from psychological factors also responds more generally to the claim in the situationist thesis that agents fail to meet the consistency requirement for global character because their behavior is inconsistent. The argument from PF provides a possible explanation for the variability of behavior in a single person across different situations or in different people in the same situation. If two people in the same situation perceive and construct the factors of the situation differently, they will act according to their own version of the situation. Moreover, if a person does not notice the relevant factors in two similar situations, they might take them to be two different situations requiring two different responses, resulting in seemingly inconsistent behavior.[17]

An agent's psychological factors might go a long way toward explaining apparent inconsistencies in behavior without rejecting TC character traits. Subjects fail to meet the consistency requirement for character only if we take character to be nothing but the sum of our overt behavior. However, if we understand how a person construes a certain situation, we might realize that his behavior is perfectly consistent from his point of view, just not from ours.

Effects of Character Traits on Behavior

Another central claim of the situationist thesis is that behavioral variability has more to do with situational determinants than dispositional ones, and that individual dispositions are not so behaviorally individuating as one would think. Situationists single out overt behavior as the main indicator of character; the first two conditions of the situationist thesis are about behavioral

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[17] This could be due to a of lack practical wisdom, the knowledge to notice the relevant factors across situations.

consistency across situations and time. However, according to situationists, people generally display widespread behavioral inconsistency and any observed behavioral consistency owes more to situational determinants than it does to dispositional ones. People do not have robust character traits; if they have any traits at all, those traits are only slightly responsible for the person's behavior.

However, according to the argument from psychological factors, differences in construal have great effects on behavior and construal is in part a result of knowledge structures and schemas that form due to personal history and the differing needs or goals of an individual. Furthermore, individuals create goals in part due to differences in temperament and personality, so differences in construal, knowledge structures, and schemas among agents show the effects of character traits on behavior.[18]

Let's go back to my example of Jones, an introvert who does not enjoy office parties and so is often rude or standoffish to his co-workers at parties, even though he is friendly and approachable the rest of the time. I mentioned how Jones's construal influences his behavior, and his construal is formed in part from knowledge structures formed through past experiences, his temperament, and his current beliefs and values. Jones's construal of the party will likely be very different from that of his co-worker, Smith, who is more outgoing and extroverted and so enjoys office parties and looks forward to them every year.

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[18] Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Ethics," 472. Kamtekar argues, "if people's differing goals lead them to behave differently, one might think, isn't this very close to admitting that differences in character result in differing behavior?"

Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Ethics," 481. Kamtekar adds that a virtuous action must have value for us (and practical wisdom is what will give it value).

Arpaly, "Comments on *Lack of Character* by John Doris," 645) says something similar in her statement that perhaps depth of concern for a certain virtue should also be included in the notion of character.

The two men may behave very differently at the party because of their particular construal.

Moreover, differing construal and goals can drive behavior even when they *do not* lead to differences in overt behavior. Let's suppose that even though Jones does not look forward to these parties and seeks to leave as soon as possible, he also believes it is right to be polite and friendly, and so he goes to the parties and makes an extra effort to be friendly to all of his co-workers while he is there. On the other hand while Smith really enjoys rowdy parties, because he aspires to, a promotion to management, he tries to look professional at these parties and so is also merely friendly and polite while there. Depending on how restrained Smith is or how outgoing Jones is willing to be for the sake of friendliness, the two men may behave very similarly at the party and yet have a completely different reason for doing so. Their respective goals, beliefs, values, and construal of the situation drive their behavior. Jones is friendly and polite because he values friendliness; Smith is friendly because he is hoping to look good in front of his superiors.

Better Explanatory and Predictive Power

According to situationists, people do not possess cross-situationally consistent (or robust) traits; instead, people possess merely local traits. Traits contextualized in various ways by specific situations. The move to local traits is supposed to be for the sake of achieving the goal of psychological realism: a better understanding of behavior and a greater ability to predict future behavior.

For example, Jones appears to have a merely a local trait of being rude at office parties, so even though he may be rude at office parties, he is not

necessarily consistently so across different types of situations, nor should we expect him to be. However, this merely gives us an idea of what kind of behavior we should predict of Jones. If we really wanted to understand Jones's behavior, we might have to observe Jones in different situations, draw up a list of his local traits, notice patterns on that list, and then infer some of the reasons behind the patterns.

However, the argument from psychological factors can give an even fuller explanation of some inconsistencies in behavior. Let us go back to Jones for a second. Jones is introverted but he is also usually very friendly and thoughtful. However, at office parties, because he is so uncomfortable and eager to leave, Jones becomes uneasy and responds curtly to his co-workers. Situationists might claim that Jones has merely a local trait, something like "rude and unfriendly at office parties," that does not extend past that situation. However, Jones may feel sorry for his behavior come Monday when he realizes he was rude to his co-workers, or he may have been so focused on leaving the office party, he did not even realized he was rude to his co-workers. His introverted nature overrode his friendliness. It is unlikely that come Monday we would say of Jones that he is no longer friendly and thoughtful. We might be surprised by his behavior at the office party, but if we carefully observe Jones, we might begin to notice a pattern.[19] If we know that Jones is shy, we might make a guess at why he is not very friendly at office parties. Jones's behavior would be consistent with Jones's personality (considering both his shyness and his friendliness) taken as a whole, even if his behavior was not consistently friendly. Not only does this provide us

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[19] In the next chapter, I examine Walter Mischel argument that in order to find behavioral consistency we need to view it as a series of patterns of behavior across similar types of situations.

with a better explanation of Jones's behavior in both types of situations than merely assigning him local traits, if we understand the reasons for Jones's unfriendly manner at office parties, we may be able to predict Jones's behavior in situations similar to the office party. On the other hand, merely saying that Jones has a local trait of "unfriendly at office parties" does not help us predict his behavior beyond office parties and does not even attempt to explain why Jones is unfriendly at office parties.

Following the argument from psychological factors, if we know an agent's construal of the situation, as well as his goals and beliefs (formed in part from past experience and temperament), we can begin to understand and perhaps even predict the agent's behavior in future situations beyond the situation in which we observe him. Character is more than overt behavior, it is partly also the sum of an agent's psychological factors.

In Chapter 6, I look at an approach to personality from psychology called social cognitive theory, which incorporates the influence of psychological factors into one's personality and behavior. In social-cognitive theory, traits are dispositions to interact with one's environment in certain ways; the variability we notice in behavior is due to the interaction of an agent's personal variables (like his knowledge structures, construal, goals etc.) with his environment. I argue that social-cognitive theory can provide us with a framework for personality that can ground a more realistic philosophical conception of character (including moral character).

Deficiency of Character

Although the argument from psychological factors may provide us with a realistic conception of character, a problem remains. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the argument that agents chose not to help in a particular situation because of the way they construed that situation (the argument from choice) does not apply to agents who fail to behave consistently with a particular trait because ambiguous situations confuse them or because they are unable to weigh duties properly. In these cases, situational factors seem to be the strongest influence on the behavior of agents. According to PF, the interaction of psychological factors and situational features together produce behavior, so what can we say in defense of PF in regards to situational features whose influence seems to override rather than merely interact with an agent's psychological features?

What is troubling about situational features like ambiguity is that these types of situational features can influence an agent to behave in ways opposed to that agent's previous commitments to certain goals or values. If psychological factors have such large effects on behavior, then why did the subjects in the Milgram experiment and the SPE not show individuating behavior?

Strong Situations

Walter Mischel and other social psychologists believe there is a distinction between psychologically powerful or "strong" situations and psychologically

"weak" situations.[20] Psychologically strong situations are powerful to the degree that they lead a large majority of people to construe the moral facts of the situation in the same way. This leads everyone to have uniform expectations regarding the most appropriate response pattern. Strong situations usually require skills that everyone has to the same extent and provide adequate incentives for the performance of a particular response pattern.[21] Mischel gives the example of a red traffic light. A red traffic light exerts a powerful influence on the behavior of most motorists because they all know what it means, are at least somewhat motivated to obey it (failure to obey means getting ticketed or possibly causing a traffic accident), and have the ability to stop when they see it. On the other hand, weak situations do not generate uniform expectations about what the desired behavior should be and do not offer sufficient incentives for the performance of this behavior. They are also unstructured enough that an individual can feel that a variety of responses are equally appropriate.[22]

Situations are either strong or weak depending on how restricted the appropriate range of behaviors is in that situation. In the case of the red traffic light, the range of behaviors that are appropriate is extremely limited. For other situations like my grocery store example, there is probably a wider range of appropriate behaviors.

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[20]Walter Mischel, "The Interaction of Person and Situation" in *Personality at the Crossroads: Current Issues in Interactional Psychology*, eds. David Magnusson and Norman Endler (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1977): 346-348, and Mark Snyder and William Ickes, "Personality and Social behavior" in *Handbook of Social Psychology: Volume* 2, eds. Gardner, Lindzey and Elliot Aronson no. 2 (New York: Random House, 1985): 904-907.

[21] Mischel, *The Interaction of Person and Situation,* 347.

[22] For a full explanation of weak vs. strong situations, see Mischel, *The Interaction of Person and Situation,* 344-352, and Snyder and Ickes, "Personality and Social Behavior."

Milgran's experiment is an example of a strong situation. The reason the Milgram experiment was not a weak situation was because of the unfamiliarity of the situation. The subjects should have felt like a variety of responses were equally appropriate considering they had no schema for the situation, however, this unfamiliarity with the situation resulted in most of the subjects looking to the experimenter to guide them and tell what behavior was appropriate for this situation. The experimenter served as a guide or "rational man" as Sabini and Silver put it. Moreover, the experimenter was an authority figure and most people have been conditioned to obey authority. The experimenter as authority and guide defined *one* appropriate response pattern—following directions and continuing to shock the victim until the experiment was over. Following this instruction required skills that all of the subjects had (reading out word pairs, pushing buttons, etc.). Whenever the naïve subject asked the experimenter about stopping the experiment, the experimenter insisted that they must go on, that the experiment had to continue etc., thus reaffirming following directions as the only appropriate response pattern.

While it may seem that the appropriate response pattern should have been clear to the subjects in the Milgram experiment (that is, refusing to continue with the experiment), we should remember what Robert Solomon pointed out about compassion: for most people, "compassion is usually displayed merely as feeling sorry for others."[23] Therefore, in a situation that requires more effort than merely feeling sorry for someone in order to act compassionately, people do not know how to act.

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[23] Solomon, "What's Character Got to Do with it?" 653.

However, most people are accustomed to obeying authority, whether it is in the form of their parents, older siblings, teachers, police officers, or other law enforcement. Perhaps most people have not developed the knowledge structures necessary for disobeying authority in the face of competing demands because they are so rarely called to do so.

The Stanford Prison Experiment is another example of a strong situation. The experiment was set up so that depending on the role of guard or prisoner, the subjects came to see certain response patterns (which were limited severely by pre-assigned roles) as the appropriate ones. Students assigned as prisoners even shunned any prisoner who tried to protest their treatment at the hands of the guards because they perceived the scope of appropriate behavior to be severely limited (and appropriate behavior did not include acting in opposition to the demands of the guards). This may be due to a failure on the part of the agents to develop the necessary skills to disobey authority when commanded to behave in a way they would perhaps not endorse in different circumstances.

According to the argument from psychological factors, our values, goals, beliefs, construal, and other psychological factors are formed in part from our personal history and expectations. If the subjects in the Milgram and Stanford experiments had never come across similar situations in their personal history (as it seems likely), they may simply have lacked the experience necessary to deal with these types of situations. This would not necessarily imply that the subjects lacked any compassion, but merely that they had not developed the sort of schemas necessary to know what to do in these situations. Perhaps the reason the subjects who obeyed the experimenter all acted similarly is that they all lacked the schemas necessary for those types of situations.

On the other hand, perhaps obeying authority is a schema that all of them shared. Going back to Mischel's red light example, most of us have had many experiences with traffic lights and have learned what to do at a red traffic light. We have come to expect that others will also obey the traffic light and that if we do not obey, we risk causing an accident or getting a ticket. The fact that the majority of people have this same schema is a result of our shared societal and governmental law, as well as a shared culture. Similarly, perhaps obeying authority may also be a schema that a majority of us shares.

Being able to explain why people behaved the way they did is by no means the same as saying that the behavior is not problematic. While the psychological factors operating in strong situations may be able to explain *why* individuals act the way they do in response to these types of situations, it does not tell us how we can avoid letting subtle situational cues lead us to act in ways which we would not normally approve in these situations. Certain types of situational features may be problematic for behavioral consistency.

What is most disturbing about inconsistent behavior due to situational influences in strong situations is the inability for the agents in those situations to remain consistent to their previous commitments to various values or beliefs. The fact that setting up a situation in a specific way can interfere with the performance of those goals or values is what is most disturbing about situational influences.

The propensity to act according to the population norm is extremely disturbing in strong situations like the SPE, the Milgram experiment, and especially for historical cases where the consequences for the victims included injury or death. Although we may not encounter strong situations often, it is

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important to address possible ways to avoid falling under their influence. In order to try to find a solution to the problematic influence of strong situations we need to look at some of the possible factors that make strong situations so influential. In the next chapter, I look at the argument from group effects or social influence, which also gives us some insight into countering the problem of strong situations.

<div style="text-align:center">Strong Situations and the Situationist Critique</div>

In their discussion of strong versus weak situations, psychologists Mark Snyder and William Ickes make the point that very strong situations are not ideal for exposing personality traits or dispositional attitudes because strong situations are by definition situations in which situational pressures lead a large majority of people to behave the same way.

However, according to the definition of a diagnostic situation in the situationist thesis, a diagnostic situation is one that is "unfavorable enough to trait-relevant behavior that the behavior would be better explained by reference to individual dispositions than by reference to the situation, because the behavior is outside the population norm for a situation."[24] This definition tracks the idea of a strong situation. Strong situations are situations where only one type of behavior seems appropriate, making all other types of behavior seem inappropriate.

Going back to my example of a red traffic light, we could explain why people stop at a red traffic light by referencing situational features like the light itself, but we could also explain why people stop by referencing psychological

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[24] Doris, *Lack of Character,* 18-19.

factors. Presumably, people who obey the red light do so because of similar beliefs, goals, and values. For example, an individual might value obeying the law or may have the goal of not being ticketed. Perhaps he may simply value public safety (as well as his own safety) and obeying the red light would be the appropriate response to behave according to those goals or values.

However, situationists rarely cite these types of situations because one of the premises of situationism is that character traits should show up as individuating behavior. Apparently, we cannot learn anything about a person's character in situations where they behave according to the population norm because we can explain those situations by referencing situational features. By this logic, since most people stop at red lights we could not learn anything about a person's character by observing that he observes traffic lights. This seems to ignore one side of the equation. As I argued above, a majority of individuals may behave similarly to one another in a situation because they have similar goals, values, or beliefs that interact with similar ways with a situational feature. On the other hand, if we were to observe an agent running a red traffic light, then we could explain the agent's behavior by referencing the agent's personal dispositions (his goals, beliefs, values, etc.) instead of the red traffic light because he would be behaving outside of the population norm.

Presumably, because of the idea that character should show up as individuating behavior, as evidence against character situationists predominantly cite social psychology experiments (and historical accounts) that pick out strong situations. When agents fail to show individuating behavior in these situations, situationists take that as evidence that most people do not in fact have "global" character because they are behaving according to the population norm. This

seems to bias the argument unfairly in favor of the situationist thesis. If situationists predominantly cite strong or "diagnostic" situations to assess individuating behavior and these are exactly the types of situations where individuating behavior is not displayed, then the results will always turn out in favor of situationism.[25]

Situationists cannot support their claim that behavioral variation across a population owes more to situational rather than dispositional differences among persons mostly by citing strong situations.[26] At best, the behavior of subjects in strong situations can only support the narrower claim that different situations have varying degrees of situational pressures and that behavioral variation practically disappears in strong situations. The situationist claim that behavioral variation owes more to situational differences would remain true only if people generally found themselves in only (or at least, predominantly in) strong situations for most of their lives. If this were the case then it is true that behavioral variation would be due more to the situation than to the person. However, for the most part, people generally find themselves in a mix of weak and strong situations.[27]

Moreover, the fact that some people *did* show individuating behavior by getting up and leaving or refusing to continue with the Milgram experiment might be taken as further evidence that psychological factors are playing a part in motivating behavior. It is evidence that the different values, goals, beliefs, or

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[25] See Mischel, *The Interaction of Person and Situation.*

[26] Doris, *Lack of Character,* 24.

[27] Doris does use the Isen and Levin experiment as an example of a weak situations where situational cues should have been vague enough that behavioral variance due to dispositional traits would have been displayed. However, there are other explanations for the findings in that study that have already been discussed in this paper.

schemas that people have influence their behavior. Milgram himself noted that

some of the subjects who refused to comply also turned out to be people who had

lived through the Nazi occupation of much of Europe and so had perhaps formed

schemas in relation to blind obedience in the face of commands that go against

one's moral commitments.[28] I look at this suggestion in greater depth in the next

chapter.

Analyzing the Argument from Misrepresentation

As mentioned above, the three main contentions of AM are: 1) human

behavior is not largely driven by situational determinants, 2) experiments cited

by situationists do not in fact show behavioral inconsistency, and finally 3) an

accurate portrayal of TCC can account for both 1 and 2 above. In order for AM to

work as an argument against situationism, PF, the main contention behind the

argument from misrepresentation, must be consistent with all three assertions.

Below, I argue that the argument from psychological factors fails to meet

the third claim of AM, the claim that an accurate portrayal of TCC can show why

experiments cited by situationists do not in fact show behavioral inconsistency

and how human behavior is not mostly driven by situational determinants. It is

not completely clear that the description of character given in arguments from PF

is consistent with TCC at all.

As evidence for the first claim, advocates of character arguing from AM

refer back to the agent's construal. Particular situational features do not simply

cause agents to behave in a particular way. How an agent responds to particular

situational features will depend on his construal of a situation, which in turn

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[28] Milgram, *Obedience to Authority,* p. 50-52.

depends on the interaction between the particular features of that situation and the agent's psychological factors (his knowledge structures, beliefs, goals, etc.). Human behavior is caused by the interaction of situational and dispositional features, not just one or the other. The argument from psychological factors appeals to evidence from psychology to show that differences in construal, goals, beliefs, and values can lead to differences in behavior or motives for behavior.

Furthermore, according to TCC, virtue requires that a virtuous action be correctly motivated in order for that action to count as truly virtuous. Virtuous actions are not determined merely by overt behavior; the agent must also have the correct motivation (a type of psychological factor). Motives are psychological factors that can be the result of an agent's beliefs, values, and goals. Aristotelian virtue does include some psychological factors as a part of character. This is consistent with Aristotelian virtue as a disposition to do the right thing from a firm and unchanging character. If an agent has the goal of acting compassionately because he believes compassion is the right thing to do and so it has value for him, then that agent's disposition to behave compassionately is a result of his goals, beliefs, and values. Moreover, if that agent consistently holds those same beliefs, goals, and values throughout his life then we may say that his disposition to act compassionately is firm and unchanging, determining his behavior across time and situations. The first claim of AM then is consistent with TCC.

Advocates of character arguing from AM argue for the second claim by maintaining that agents themselves should measure behavioral consistency rather than a third person observer. When judging behavioral consistency, it is important to take into account the agent's construal of the situation. In the

previous chapter, I argued that at least for situations of minor need, the argument from choice was the strongest response to situationism. According to the argument from choice, subjects sometimes will fail to help because they see a particular helping situation of minor need as a matter of personal choice (or a morally elective action) rather than one of moral obligation. That is, for helping situations of minor need, one need not display trait-relevant behavior in every situation and so an agent can choose when to display the trait-relevant behavior. However, since this argument only applies to helping situations of minor need, the implication is that different traits have different requirements for behavioral consistency.

While the argument explains the apparent behavioral consistency in the experiments examined above, it does so by making a claim about behavioral consistency requirements that are not Aristotelian. Aristotelian virtue theory says little about the behavioral consistency requirements of different virtues, so the claim that virtuous agents need only have behavioral consistency for traits that require perfect obligations is a claim that Aristotelian virtue does not share with advocates of character arguing from AM. Consistency is expected from virtuous agents as a result of their having developed virtue so both the situationist and Aristotelian conceptions of character stress the importance of characteristics of an agent that dispose the agent behave in certain ways. In the Aristotelian conception of character, just as in the situationist conception of character, if you have the disposition to be brave then you are—as Annas put it—"habitually and reliably" a brave person.

The argument from misrepresentation depicts a conception of character that diverges in some ways from the traditional conception of character. Since PF,

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the underlying argument of AM, offers a strong response to the situationist thesis, the ways in which this new conception of character diverges from the traditional conception may point us in the direction of a more realistic conception of character.

Conclusion

The argument from psychological factors provides the strongest response to the situationist claim that situational rather than dispositional influences are the major drive behind human behavior. With the argument from psychological factors, we have an account of the effects of character on behavior. Once we understand how psychological factors that are a part of character affect our behavior, we have a greater ability to explain and predict behavior. The argument from psychological factors also calls into question the usefulness of the move to local traits advocated by situationists, as well as the validity of some of the experimental evidence cited by situationists.

However, as I pointed out in my analysis of the argument from misrepresentation, the argument from psychological factors depicts a conception of virtue (and character) that diverges in some important ways from the traditional conception of virtue. Since the argument from psychological factors appears to be the strongest response to the situationist thesis, the ways in which this new conception of virtue diverges from the traditional conception may point us in the direction of a stronger conception of character.

Unfortunately, although the argument from psychological factors may point us toward a more realistic conception of character, it cannot provide us with an answer to the problem of psychologically strong situations. In strong

situations, individuals often behave inconsistently with their previous behavior, but more importantly, they behave inconsistently with their commitment to certain goals and values. Moreover, they behave in a way they would not have actively endorsed or identified with. In the next chapter, I look into possible underlying factors that make certain situations have such powerful psychological effects on agents and some possible ways of combating those effects.

Chapter 5

IN DEFENSE OF CHARACTER: SOCIAL INFLUENCE AND PRACTICAL

WISDOM

According to the argument from deficiency of character, certain experiments showing inconsistencies in behavior show nothing more than that many of the agents in those situations lacked something in their character to keep their behavior consistent with their beliefs and values. This does not imply that character does not exist but merely that those particular agents did not have character. Two of the most common tacks for this argument are the argument from social influences (SI) and the argument from practical wisdom (PW).

The argument from social influences is the claim that one of the most common deficiencies in character is the propensity to be influenced by other people, often leading to behavior of which an agent would not normally approve. This deficiency is responsible for the inconsistent behavior of agents across different situations. I review the argument as well as some possible theories that philosophers and psychologists have put forth as possible solutions to the problem of social influences.

According to those making the argument from practical wisdom, much of the inconsistency that exists in behavior is due to a lack of practical wisdom. An agent who has practical wisdom can deliberate well and determine the right course of action in every situation. Agents who fail to act consistently with their values or beliefs because of subtle situational cues probably do so because they lack this kind of practical deliberation.

I conclude that social influences can be both disastrous and beneficial and so we must exercise great care in how our social environments influenced us. To counter some of the destructive effects of social influence, we need to develop some practical wisdom so that we can differentiate between beneficial and potentially harmful social situations and influences.

Social Influence

According to the argument from social influence, many agents have a weakness in their character that makes them likely to succumb to the subtle pressures of social influence thus failing to stay consistent with their commitment to various goals, beliefs, and values. People are greatly "influenced by the attitudes and behavior of other people, even of other people whom [we] don't know and who have no control over [our] lives."[29]

The effects of social influence can work in at least three different ways. In unfamiliar situations, the agent might turn to those around him for guidance on how he should behave. In many cases, this can influence agents to behave inconsistently with their previous commitments to certain values, for example, by behaving with cruelty when the agent values compassion and usually behaves compassionately. The second way social influences influence an agent's behavior is due to the agent coming to perceive others in his environment as a sort of audience to his actions. Since agents want to seem attuned with their environment (which includes other people in that environment), the opinion of the majority carries "normative or moral force."[30] In other words, the need to feel

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[29] Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation,* 44. For more on this see 44-46.

[30] Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation,* 45.

that one is in agreement with others in the same situation is a powerful drive.

Finally, situational influences can work through what Ross and Nisbett refer to as

"tension systems," which help to keep the opinions of the individual in line with

those of the group. According to Ross and Nisbett, when an agent discovers there

is a discrepancy between the beliefs of the group and his own view, this creates a

tension that must be resolved by influencing the group toward his own view,

opening himself to the influence of the group's view, or rejecting the group's

opinion for his own. Social influence is an especially insidious deficiency because,

as Ross and Nisbett put it, "other people are among our best sources of

information about the world."[31]

One of the ways the opinions of others (even strangers) can influence our

behavior is due to the informational aspects of social influence; we use other

people as sources of information about our environment and the world. We are

not in the habit of ignoring the opinions of others because in the past listening to

others has proven to be a good way of leaning about the world.[32] Others serve as

guides to our behavior in certain ways. For example, in an unfamiliar situation

where you do not know what the correct action is, you might turn to your peers to

see their reactions in order to decide how you should act in that situation.

[31] Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation,* 44.

See also Adams, *A Theory of Virtue,* 141-143. Adams argues that virtue is socially dependent so if one is in the wrong situation, or has the wrong sort of peers, one is less likely to be virtuous. Since we are social creatures we take our cues from the environment, particularly in situations that are unfamiliar to us.

See also, Sabini and Silver "Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued," and *Moralities of Everyday Life*; Solomon, "What's Character Got to Do with It?"

[31] Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation,* 44. See also Cialdini, *Influence: Science and Practice.* Cialdini also mentions how we are influenced to buy things we do not like, or behave in ways of which we would not normally approve because of our desire for internal consistency and being manipulated by our commitment to the rule of reciprocity.

[32] Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation,* 44.

The subjects in Milgram's experiment were in an unfamiliar situation and did not know how to act, so they took their cues from the experimenter. They accepted an interpretation of the situation given to them by the experimenter when they were unable to come up with one of their own. The experimenter told them (or led them to understand) that the experiment needed to continue, that there was no problem with the learner yelling for help, and that they were not morally responsible for anything that happened to the learner; the subjects accepted this interpretation. It is not necessarily true that all the subjects that continued to shock the victim to the end were lacking some virtue of compassion, more likely still they could have all shared a character defect that resulted in blocking an appropriate show of compassion. Similarly, in the Stanford Prison experiment, the students playing the guards seemed to respond to the way the environment was set up, and the students playing the prisoners took their cues from the guards.

Another way that the perceptions of others can influence our behavior is by our viewing others as audience to our actions, which inhibits us from doing actions that we think will make us look foolish.[33] Subjects in the Milgram experiment might have been afraid of looking foolish by confronting the experimenter who seemed calm and collected and not at all nonplussed by how things were unfolding. Similarly, the subjects of the Seminary experiment may have been afraid of the embarrassment they might suffer at having failed to deliver the lecture they were supposed to give. This could have affected them via diversion of attention (so they did not notice the fallen figure or did not give a second thought to him) or because the subjects felt that the obligation of giving

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[33] Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality,* 304.

the lecture (or finishing the experiment in the Milgram case) overrode any possible obligation they may have felt toward the victim.

Moreover, in both the Milgram and Stanford Prison Experiment, there was great pressure to conform to the "group" norm and not deviate in judgment. In the case of Milgram, the group was merely the experimenter, while in the Stanford Prison Experiment the group was all of the subjects together playing their assigned roles. The need to feel attuned to the environment (which includes the group) played a large part in both experiments, as many of the subjects in the Milgram experiment seemed unwilling to tell the experimenter they did not like the direction the experiment was taking, and in the Stanford experiment both guards and prisoners followed their roles dutifully, even resenting the one or two prisoners who actually tried to rebel against the harsh oppression of the guards.

Analysis

The argument from social influence can explain the behavior of agents in many strong situations. However, this still leaves us with the problematic nature of social influence. Social influences are especially problematic because in many situations we take our cues on how to act from features of the situation or other people in that situation. Since we are always living within a social context and trying to get along within it, we cannot completely ignore our social environments. We could not get along in our social environments if we simply ignored features of our environment (including people in that environment) and trying to do so would probably be maladaptive.

However, if the most common thread found in a lot of situational pressures that can influence our behavior is the pressure of social influence, then

at least we know that the situational cues that can influence our behavior are not as numerous and diverse as situationists would have us believe.[34] Moreover, we also have some idea of the kinds of situations in which social influence is more likely to have an effect on us.

Possible Solutions to the Effects of Social Influence

Rather than trying to counteract the powerful effects of social influence on our behavior, some philosophers instead have opted to embrace these effects and harness them toward the maintenance of virtue. These philosophers contend that social networks (and in some cases communities) are not only helpful in maintaining the virtues, they are absolutely necessary.[35]

Lawrence Blum writes about the "fundamentally social nature of virtue" and the ties between community and virtue. He argues that not only are the ties between community and virtue more significant than hitherto has been given credit to them by moral theory but that some forms of community are crucial to the maintenance of a "moral psychology of excellence," not only in sustaining virtues but in learning them as well. Blum bases his account largely on the case of Le Chambon, a French enclave that sheltered thousands of refugees during the Nazi occupation of France. The Chambonnais risked their lives by aiding and sheltering refugees. Although André Trocmé, the town's pastor and spiritual leader, is considered a central organizer of part of the rescue effort simply by calling people in his sermons to the true teachings of Christianity as he understood them, "to love one's neighbor, to cherish human life, not to consort

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[34] Sabini and Silver, "Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued," 553-559. See also Adams, *A Theory of Virtue,* 153-155.
[35] See Lawrence Blum, *Moral Perception and Particularity (*Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

with evil, to be nonviolent" the people of Le Chambon helped refugees individually, without the rescue effort being an explicit collective enterprise or one that was openly talked about amongst them.[36] While Trocmé's moral leadership may have helped the people of the community see for themselves that rescuing was the right thing to do, community values may have made particular moral motivations salient, familiar, and "owned" that would not otherwise have been salient to an individual making moral decisions independently. The community of Le Chambon had a history of religious persecution and resistance to religious persecution which may have made "salient, familiar and 'owned' the motive of resisting an evil perpetrated by the state and state authorities" which linked their resistance to their own persecution with the persecution of Jews by the French state.[37] Furthermore, if the people of Le Chambon already had certain values or virtues like 'love thy neighbor,' 'cherish life,' etc., the community, through its actions, may have helped to fill in the practical content of what may have otherwise been merely abstract values or virtues.[38]

Maria Merritt also believes there is a "sustaining social contribution to character" and writes on the varying strengths of what she calls the "motivational

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[36] Blum, *Moral Perception,* 151.

[37] Blum, *Moral Perception,* 154.

[38] Blum, *Moral Perception,* 144-156. Blum also notes (157-160), that since the people of Le Chambon didn't seem to feel as if they were doing anything extraordinary in harboring refugees at such a risk to their own lives, it seems like communities can shape members' ability to sustain a level of virtuous conduct beyond what in some other contexts would be regarded as too much to be demanded.. So, communities can raise (and probably lower) the ordinary standards of what is expected of someone.

self-sufficiency of character" (or MSC for short) in different virtue theories.[39]

According to Merritt:

> a conception of character advances a strong ideal of MSC to the degree that it calls for the possession of the motivational structure of virtue to be, in maturity and under normal circumstances, independent of factors outside oneself, such as particular social relationships and settings.[40]

We use the concept of MSC to gauge the degree to which a particular conception of virtue theory calls for the "possession of the motivational structure of virtue to be independent of factors outside of oneself, such as particular social relationships and settings."[41]Aristotelian virtue theory advances a very strong ideal of MSC, something Merritt finds problematic because it is unrealistic to what human beings are really like. While aspiration to realizing a strong ideal of MSC might make you more vigilant and less dependent on social networks, it might simply be an ideal that is out of reach for most humans.

Merritt proposes that since the Humean approach to virtue theory requires a much weaker ideal of MSC, and there appears to be no real need to resist dependence on social networks (so long as one exercises care in the choice of social settings and relationships), the Humean approach to virtue is better and more realistic.[42] According to Merritt, what is important for the Humean approach is merely that one possesses the virtues (characterized as socially or personally beneficial qualities of mind) somewhat stably over time without any

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[39] Maria Merritt, "Virtue Ethics and Situationist Personality Psychology," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 4 (2000): 374.

[40] Merritt, "Virtue Ethics and Situationist Personality Psychology," 365.

[41] Merritt, "Virtue Ethics and Situationist Personality Psychology," 365.

[42] Merritt, "Virtue Ethics and Situationist Personality Psychology," 375-381.

special significance on stability having to be self-sufficiently sustained. An agent can have a "structure of motivation" that is stable largely because it is socially sustained and still be considered to have genuine virtue. Merritt argues that instead of trying to make our character "as independent as possible of all particular social settings or relationships," we should exercises care in our choice of our social settings and relationships and how far we allow them to affect us.[43]

Adams is another philosopher who agrees that virtue is dependent on social environments, not only in its acquisition but also in its persistence.[44] That is not to say we do not contribute to the acquisition or persistence of virtue, but merely that its acquisition and persistence are also partly dependent on our social environment. For example, whether or not I acquire virtue depends partly on whether I am raised by people who inculcate me with virtuous ideals. This does not mean that I cannot acquire virtuous dispositions without having any virtuous people to teach me (or to imitate), but merely that having someone that can teach me how to be virtuous will make it likelier that I acquire virtue.[45] Moreover, if I live and move within a social environment (which includes relationships with other people) that encourages virtuous actions, or at least does not discourage them or encourage vices instead, then I am likelier to maintain my virtue.

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[43] Merritt, "Virtue Ethics and Situationist Personality Psychology," 378.
Solomon, "What's Character Got to Do with It?" 650-651. Solomon also argues that "there is good reason to be suspicious of a notion of character that is supposed to stand up to overwhelming pressures without peer or institutional support." Like Merritt, Solomon does not feel that virtue ethics requires a strong sense of autonomy or ability to cut oneself off from the influences and pressures of other people.

[44] See Adams, *A Theory of Virtue,* 155-161.

[45] This argument is perfectly in line with Aristotle's idea that the moral virtues were acquired by habitual training in one's youth under the instruction of a teacher or mentor. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics, 1*998, 28-30, 1103a11-1103b26.

Problems with virtue as socially dependent

However, there are problems for conceptions of virtue that require merely a weak MSC. Merritt herself alludes to the first problem when she states that we need to exercise care in the choice of our social settings and relationships. If virtue is partially socially sustained, then the wrong social settings or relationships can be damaging to our virtue. As both Blum and Merritt acknowledge, being dependent on social networks for virtue can be risky if one happens to be in the wrong situation or among the wrong people.

In Chapter 3, I argued that what we could learn from the historical cases sometimes cited as evidence for situationism was that an individual's environment played a large role in the development and maintenance of virtue. These cases seem to be further evidence for the arguments made above. However, the historical cases show the problem with virtue being socially dependent. If an individual's virtue is socially dependent, and that individual happens to be in the wrong type of environment, then he is more likely not to develop virtue (or fail to maintain his virtue). Adams argues that if virtue is socially dependent then it is "frail," or dependent on our luck of ending up in one type of situation versus another.[46] This does not mean that everyone will fail to do the right thing in strong situations, as evidenced by test results and history itself, but that perhaps many of us, or even most of us, will fail to do so.

Would accepting that virtue is subject to moral luck and dependent on social networks simply prove the situationist point? If for many people, acting virtuously in a situation depends on their social environment, are they really virtuous? Is virtue something properly theirs or merely a consequence of their

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[46] Adams, *A Theory of Virtue,* 157.

environment? This would depend on what one takes the virtues to be. If being able to rely quite heavily on one's own moral perceptions and motivations with no regard for the particular situation in which one finds themselves (what Merritt refers to as a strong MSC) is part of the conception of virtue, then socially dependent "virtues" are not really virtues of the agent. However, if one has a conception of version with a weak MSC, then one might still be considered to have virtue even if the environment played a part in one's behavior.

One way to respond to this question would be to argue that virtue comes in degrees and that there is a minimum requirement for having any type of virtue. In later chapters, I argue that, at minimum, an agent needs to value and care about his moral commitments in order to have any kind of virtue. He may lack the ability to deliberate on how to behave consistently with those moral commitments and so behave inconsistently with his moral commitments in his absence of his social networks but he genuinely wants to behave consistently with his moral commitments. Perhaps, an agent's ability to maintain his virtue in absence of, perhaps even opposition to, his social networks is an indicator of the degree of his virtue. However, at minimum, the agent must at least care enough about his social commitments to want to behave consistently with them.

We can imagine two agents: one that cares about his moral commitments and values but lacks the ability to behave consistently with those moral values and commitments in absence of his social networks and one whose values and commitments rely entirely on his social network, shifting and changing along with those of his social network. The second agent does not really seem to care about or identify with those values and commitments. The agent may not even be able to give a reason for endorsing those values and commitments other than that

his social network has those same values. In absence of his social network, the agent may have no values or commitments, or his values and commitments may shift in a radically different direction. Both types of agents may display similar behaviors, often failing to behave virtuously in the absence of guidance from their social network. However, only the first type of agent has virtue. An agent whose values and commitments shift along with those of his social network does not really seem to care about his virtue, merely about conforming to the group whereas the second type of agent genuinely cares about virtue but may lack certain abilities to help him behave consistently with his moral commitments.

For example, suppose that Alan is usually a compassionate person, he is very strongly against inflicting harm of any kind on innocent people. However, Alan turns out to be one of the subjects in Milgram's obedience experiment, and overwhelmed by strong situational influences in that experiment, Alan shocks the victim all the way to the end. Contrast this example with Nina. Nina usually acts very compassionately because she mimics the behavior of those around her. Nina is fortunate enough to be around people who act compassionately, but she does not really have particular reasons for acting compassionately other than to fit in with those around her. She has never really thought about why she should be compassionate. If people in her social network stopped behaving compassionately and instead began behaving callously, Nina would also stop behaving compassionately and begin to behave callously. Nina values fitting in, she does not value being compassionate. Even if Nina always behaved

compassionately within her social network, it seems counterintuitive to say that she has the virtue of compassion.[47]

However, even if an agent cares about his moral values and commitments, relying too heavily on his social networks to behave consistently with those values and commitments can be risky. Because our environment can influence us positively or negatively and the sort of environment we are in often depends on moral luck, virtue that is too dependent on environment is also dependent on moral luck. Relying too much on our social environments for moral guidance and judgment can lead us to make bad judgments and/or have bad character if we are unlucky enough to end up in bad situations or around bad people.

Perhaps a temptation to succumb to pressures to conform socially is a temptation that we have overlooked, but nevertheless a temptation that is as overwhelming and as commonly occurring as better-known temptations. Adams argues that perhaps we should see social conformity as akin to the temptations of passion or desire or those that work through fear. When see an individual overcome by fear or desire on a single occasion, we do not immediately conclude from that one failure that the individual lacks courage or strong will. Similarly, because an individual is overcome by the temptation to conform socially on a single occasion, we should not assume that individual lacks a particular virtue.

Just as there are cardinal virtues to contend with temptations like fear and passion, perhaps the problem of the frailty of virtue in the face of social temptations necessitates a new cardinal virtue like moral autonomy, or the

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[47] However, in later chapters, I argue that if Alan really values compassion but has no idea how to act consistently with compassion, and so in absence of his social network is completely at a loss as to how to behave, he has merely a very low degree of compassion. He may have a desire to be compassionate, but if he really values compassion, he should make an effort to deliberate on how to behave compassionately and avoid behaving inconsistently with compassion.

"ability to interpret situations accordingly and confidently" and stand one's

ground even when one is in disagreement with others.[48]

At minimum, an agent needs to exercise some care in his choice of

situations and social networks so that he can avoid the temptation to conform to

social pressures. However, sometimes doing even this requires some kind of

practical wisdom. An agent with some practical wisdom might recognize when his

social environment is not conducive to fulfilling his goals or to his staying

consistent with his previous values or commitments.

Practical Wisdom

Responding to the problem of the frailty of virtue in the face of unlucky

circumstances brings us to the second general response using the argument from

deficiency. Some virtue theorists argue that dependence on social networks to

maintain virtue is due to our lack of ethical knowledge or practical wisdom; when

we lack practical wisdom situations of people can influence our behavior, for

better *or* worse.[49] According to the argument from practical wisdom, the reason

many of the subjects failed to act consistently compassionately or helpfully is that

they lacked practical wisdom. Since practical wisdom is a necessary part of virtue

that helps agents identify the correct action for each situation, those agents that

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[48] Adams, *A Theory of Virtue,* 155.
    See also: Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 33-34. Adams's idea of moral autonomy According to Adams, structural virtues are "structural features of the way one organizes and manages whatever motives one has." Adams never actually refers to the virtue of moral autonomy as a structural virtue. Adams argues that the excellence of structural virtues is the ability and willingness to govern one's behavior in accordance with values, commitments and ends one is for. He contrasts this with "motivational virtues," which are defined by "motives which in turn are defined by goods that one is for in having them, as benevolence, for example, is defined by the motive of desiring or willing the good of others."

[49] Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Ethics," 483.

did not perform the correct actions were deficient in practical wisdom and thus lacked a truly virtuous character.

In order to give a clear account of the argument from practical wisdom, I first give a brief overview of the traditional Aristotelian conception of virtue and the role that practical wisdom plays in that conception of virtue.

One of the fundamental suppositions of Aristotelian virtue theory is that virtue is a state or disposition of a person.[50] If Smith has the character trait or virtue of generosity, then he has a character of a certain sort; he is "habitually and reliably" generous. [51] Julia Annas describes virtue as a disposition to act in certain ways and not others. Quite importantly, she makes the further claim that a virtue is a disposition to act *for reasons* and so must be exercised through the agent's practical reasoning or practical wisdom.[52]

Virtue is not just a disposition to do the right thing; it is a disposition to do the right thing for the right reason in the appropriate way.[53] That is, in order to count as having a particular virtue one must meet all three criteria: 1) one must perform the correct action, 2) one must perform it for the right reasons, and 3) one must do the action from some preexisting disposition (or if the disposition is not preexisting, at least lasting in some way). Together these criteria are both

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[50] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1998, 36, 1106a10. Interestingly enough in some translations of Aristotle (see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1962), "state" is translated as "characteristic." In others, (see Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1996) "moral virtue" is translated as "virtues of character."

[51] Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics," in *The Oxford Companion to Ethical Theory*, ed. David Copp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), 1.

[52] Annas, "Virtue Ethics, 1. Practical reasoning is also called practical knowledge, practical wisdom and practical deliberation at other times by Annas (see Annas, Comments on John Doris's *Lack of Character"*; Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Ethics.")

[53] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1998, 38, 1106b20.

necessary and sufficient for virtue and are supposed to eliminate cases of people accidentally doing the correct action and/or people who perform one virtuous action but generally perform unvirtuous ones.

Importantly, it is not just about determining a "correct" action in a specified situation but also the "right reason" for performing that action. There are presumably objective facts about what action is correct and why it is correct; practical wisdom helps the agent learn these objective facts.

Doing the right thing for the right reason requires that an agent not have internal opposition to the action he is doing but also that he understands and accepts the correct reasons for performing that action. He must know not only what the right thing to do in some particular situation is but also *why* it is the right thing to do in that situation.[54] It is not enough that one merely *know that* a certain action is the right one in a certain situation, one must also know why that is the case.

For example, if you know that you should help someone who has fallen in the subway but you do not know why you should help, then you are not really virtuous (in this case, you do not really have the virtue of compassion). Having acted compassionately is not enough to make you a compassionate person even if you *always* help people up who have tripped or fallen down in front of you. The mere fact that you do not know the reason why you should help them up is enough to keep you from having true compassion. This may seem counterintuitive at first, but Aristotle added practical wisdom into his theory of virtue because he hypothesized that an agent who did not know the reasons for acting compassionately or bravely (or in some other way virtuously) would be an

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[54] Annas, "Virtue Ethics, 2.

agent who would not be *reliable* in his virtue. If the reason you help someone who has fallen is because you were taught to do so as a child without knowing the reasoning behind it, perhaps with no understanding that it is what compassion requires (and the further understanding of *why* compassion requires it), then you have only learned a sort of unthinking habit. While you may be on your way to virtue, you are not fully there.

There are two important parts to virtue: moral virtue and practical wisdom.[55] Moral virtue is attained by habit, by training our emotions to want what is best. Moral virtue is the desire to do the right sorts of things but by itself cannot tell us what the right action is in new situations that we have not encountered before. Practical wisdom is necessary in order to help us put our moral desires into action.[56] It is what helps us deliberate well and choose the best action in a certain situation; it also helps us understand *why* a correct choice is the correct choice in that situation. A virtuous agent must have both practical wisdom and moral virtue. An agent who has the correct desires will be able to perform the right moral action in a number of situations with which s/he is already familiar, but in unfamiliar situations, s/he will have to guess without any good process of deliberation to guide her and may choose incorrectly. As such, her behavior could be inconsistent even with her own desires (such as her desire to be compassionate).

The main thrust of Aristotle's idea of practical wisdom is that an actor's reasons for acting are just as important as the action itself. In the end, it is not just how frequently certain actions are performed, the actions must be in some

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[55] See Aristotle's, discussion of moral virtue in *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1998, 28-47, 1103a11-1109b26.

[56] See Aristotle's discussion of practical wisdom in *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1998, pp. 142-143, 1140a25-, pp. 1140b30; 154-158, 1143b18-1145a11.

way connected to the agent's reasons for acting. Not only must the virtuous agent act out of a desire to be helpful or compassionate, he must understand the reasons behind his action. Assuming the agents in the Milgram experiment, for example, were "normally moral" people, "normally moral" may simply refer to people who have the right desire (the desire to be compassionate) without necessarily having the practical wisdom necessary to understand how to put that desire into action.

Sometimes we may know that a compassionate response is the correct one, but we don't know what acting compassionately requires in a specific situation. For example, if a friend with a drug habit asks you for money and you know he is going to spend it to support his habit, does compassion require you to give him money, withhold money, try to convince him to go to rehab, etc. To take an example from the psychological literature, if you see someone drop his papers on the street in front of you, what does real compassion require of you?[57] Should you stop and help him, or would that just embarrass him?

Developing the moral virtues through habit will ensure that one has the correct desires in place, and practical wisdom and experience ensure that the virtuous agent makes decisions about the morally correct thing in some specific situation.[58] The virtuous agent will be able to notice the relevant factors of that situation and not be swayed by non-relevant factors

Kamtekar and Annas both argue that the virtues properly understood require practical wisdom, and that one possible reason for the majority of the

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[57] See Isen and Levin, "Effect of Feeling Good on Helping," 1972.

[58] Experience is something that Aristotle points out as an important part of virtue especially the practical wisdom part of virtue, making ethical theory and practice not a young man's game. Aristotle (1998), p. 148, 1148a13-28.

subjects in experiments like Milgram or the Stanford Prison Experiment—or to

an extent, in some of the historical situations—having acted the way they did was

that they had not developed the kind of practical intelligence needed to deal with

unforeseen circumstances and pressures.[59] In order to have practical wisdom or

intelligence one must understand which principles are important and the

virtuous action must have value for us.[60] We need to reflect on what makes our

responses appropriate to situations we find them appropriate for and how

similarities in new situations or circumstances will make that same response

more or less appropriate in those new situations or circumstances.[61] For example,

true virtue requires having the practical wisdom to know what compassion is,

what it demands, and when it is required. It is ultimately developed through

intelligent decisions, resulting in more intelligent deliberation and decision. This

includes a flexibility and complexity of reasoning that allows one to think more

clearly about the appropriate actions in new or innovative situations.[62]

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[59] See Annas, "Comments on John Doris's *Lack of Character,"* 637-639 and Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Character, 480-484.

See also Annas, "Comments on John Doris's *Lack of Character,"* 639.

[60] See Annas, "Comments on John Doris's *Lack of Character,".*637.
See also Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Character," 481. Kamtekar says that learning to do what is virtuous requires taking appropriate pleasure in doing that action.

[61] Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue character," 481-482. Kamtekar adds that that sometimes people have strategies on when to express a certain trait, thus not expressing it every time but that even though this may result in their behavior being viewed as inconsistent, the other extreme "absolute behavioral consistency" (485) would be maladaptive.

[62] Annas, "Comments on John Doris's *Lack of Character*," 637-38. Annas adds that the subjects in the experiments referred to by situationists (see Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*; Darley and Batson, "From Jerusalem to Jericho"; Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect*)) had not developed the kind of practical wisdom that would have dealt appropriately with unforeseen kinds of circumstances and pressure.

Related to the issue of practical wisdom is Kamtekar's suggestion that perhaps trait names like "honesty" capture a whole range of behaviors that we group together under one word. For example, we may group two seemingly different behaviors like "not cheating on a test" and "not lying to your friends" as both being consistent with the trait of "honesty" because both cheating and lying are types of deceptive behavior.[63] However, it might require practical intelligence or wisdom to notice that both cheating and lying and even more contextualized behaviors like "not cheating at cards" or "not cheating on one's significant other" are types of the same kind of behavior; thus, if one really values not deceiving people, one should not cheat *or* lie in any situation. Lack of practical intelligence might result in behavior inconsistent with a single trait term.

Analysis

Developing practical wisdom would be a possible solution to the problems of unwanted social influence and strong situations.[64] The common thread among many of the situational features that have the most power to influence our behavior is social influence, which can influence people to act inconsistently with their goals or values. Practical wisdom would help to counteract the influence of potentially dangerous social influences.

As I argued above, many of the underlying factors that make strong situations have such powerful psychological effects on agents are social factors. In unfamiliar situations, agents look to others in that situation to determine the

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[63] Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Character," 468-469.

[64] Philosophers and social psychologists have suggested different skills and abilities to help us repel the power of situational influences on our behavior. These skills may be useful in the development of practical wisdom. We will look at these suggestions in greater detail in the next chapter.

correct action. In many situations, agents perceive others in that situation as an audience to their actions, and in an attempt not to look foolish, may modify their behavior according to what they think the audience believes they should do. Moreover, agents feel great pressure to conform their opinions to the opinions of those around them.

Social influences are especially problematic because looking to others for information is completely natural and social networks are actually valuable in helping to produce and maintain virtue. However, dependence on social networks alone for the maintenance of virtue is potentially dangerous. If an agent's virtue is dependent on his social environment for his virtue and he is unlucky enough to be in an environment that is not conducive to virtue, he may behave in ways that are contrary to virtue.

Practical wisdom is knowing how to act on one's moral virtues (or, speaking more generally, one's commitment to certain values or goals) in specific situations, so having practical wisdom may help to identify when one's social environment is not conducive to virtue. An agent with practical wisdom knows what the right thing to do is in a particular situation, as well as why it is the right thing to do. In strong situations, where unfamiliar settings, social pressures, or other situational influences might lead an agent to believe action x is consistent with having a certain virtue (say, compassion) when it is actually not, an agent with practical wisdom should be able recognize the action that is actually consistent with compassion.

One consideration we must keep in mind is that the development of practical wisdom is subject to moral luck in various ways. Aristotle argued that

practical wisdom was developed through experience and good deliberation. Lacking either of these, an agent might also lack practical wisdom.

Agents develop practical wisdom over time and with experience so the types of life experiences that an agent has had will partly determine the areas of his life in which he has practical wisdom. For example, in Milgram's experiment, one of the subjects that stopped the experiment was Jan Rensaleen, a man who emigrated from Holland after World War II.[65] Jan was one of the 25 subjects who stopped the experiment early despite assurances from the experimenter that he was responsible for anything that happened to the victim and the experimenter's insistence that subjects "must continue with the experiment" because subjects "had no choice." Jan refused to let the experimenter confuse him into believing that legal responsibility was the same as moral responsibility, insisting that he alone was responsible for what happened to the victim. Moreover, Jan showed surprise that psychologists had made such low estimates of the number of subjects that would comply with the experiments, citing his experience in Nazi-occupied Europe as evidence for people's obedience. Having lived through a "strong situation" that had overwhelmed millions of people into obedience and compliance, Jan appeared to have learned from his experience and refused to let the experimenter define the situation for him. Another example is a subject named Gretchen Brandt, a woman who had lived in Hitler's Germany in her youth and had been exposed to Hitler's propaganda.[66] She also refused to let the experimenter define the situation for her, insisting instead that she did in fact have a choice and that the victim's life was in possible peril, whatever the

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[65] Milgram, *Obedience to Authority,* p. 50-52.

[66] Milgram, *Obedience to Authority,* 84-85.

experimenter might say. Both subjects had learned from their own experiences of the disastrous consequences of obeying authority unquestioningly and had applied this lesson to this particular situation.

Other subjects, on the other hand, apparently did not have the practical wisdom necessary to help them see that the authority figure was basically telling them to inflict harm, perhaps even death, on the victim. These subjects did not seem to realize they could question claims made by an authority figure. Perhaps these subjects had been fortunate enough to always have dealt with authority figures who did not steer them wrong. They had not had bad experiences with authority figures, or they had not learned from previous bad experiences.

One important consideration that has not been widely discussed is that having practical wisdom alone does not ensure that an agent will have virtue; virtue requires both practical wisdom and the moral virtues and developing the moral virtues is also somewhat dependent on luck. Developing virtue isn't just dependent on the sorts of experiences we have (in order to develop practical wisdom) but also on having already developed the moral virtues, or the right sorts of values and beliefs. We can only develop virtue if we have developed the right sorts of commitments and values, namely, a commitment to the virtues; this ensures we have the right sort of motivation in the first place. The development of virtue is dependent on luck because it is dependent on an agent having been inculcated with the right commitments, values, and goals in his youth.

For example, Rosalind Hursthouse argues that our emotions are in a sense "trained" when we are very young. She gives the example of someone who has racist ideas taught to him at a very young age. This person might come to have certain negative emotions in response to people from different races, along

with certain negative judgments of those people. An agent might be capable of changing his judgments by engaging in rational deliberation and re-evaluating his beliefs, but it will be harder for that agent to re-educate his emotions. So for example, for someone raised with racist beliefs, it might be possible for him to change his beliefs about other races, but the original negative emotions might remain, making him less than fully virtuous. [67] An agent usually does not control what ideas he is raised with (as well as the emotions that attach to those ideas), so the degree of virtue that one can acquire may just be dependent on luck.

Similarly, an agent raised by parents or guardians who taught him the wrong sorts of beliefs or values will not even have the right sort of motivation to begin with. Moreover, if an agent does not have the right kind of beliefs or values, unless that agent undergoes a life changing experience or sudden insight, he may never even want to change his beliefs or goals, or even realize that a change is necessary. We do not always have a choice about what social environments we end up in, what types of situations we find ourselves in (strong situations for example), what environment we were brought up in, or even what natural dispositions we are born with.

It may seem like an unsavory conclusion that both practical wisdom and the moral virtues are subject to moral luck in various ways, but it is not really an extraordinary conclusion. We are aware that people are not born equally advantaged in wealth, opportunity, or even family. Similarly, some people grow up in homes where they are fortunate to receive an inculcation of the moral virtues from their parents or guardians, while others are not so lucky. Some people are fortunate enough never to end up in strong situations where their

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[67] Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics,* 108-120.

actions lead to disastrous consequences, and thus perhaps they never learn about the influence of strong situations at all; if one day they found themselves in a strong situation, they might be unable to resist the powerful psychological forces of strong situations.

Conclusion

The argument from social influence can account for much of the powerful psychological influence of strong situations. Human beings are social creatures that often look to others to guide their own behavior. Unfortunately, social influences are often at the heart of strong situations that can influence people to behave in cruel or terrible ways. Although the argument from social influences can help us to know what types of situations can have powerful, unwanted influence over us, we still have the problematic effects of social influences on behavioral consistency.

Social influence can have both positive and negative effects on our behavior. Social networks may help us sustain our virtue, but they can also influence us to act in harmful ways, so we must have a way to tell the difference. The problem with relying too heavily on social networks alone to sustain our virtue is that, depending on our luck, we might end up in the wrong kind of social network. An agent that wishes to act consistently with his virtues would have to have a way to counteract (or at least recognize) potentially harmful situations and situational features.

Although a virtue theory need not advance a need for strong motivational self-sufficiency of character, a virtue theory that allows an agent to rely too heavily on social networks to help him maintain his virtue, depends too much on

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moral luck. An agent who is too dependent on social networks to maintain his virtue is not truly virtuous. The virtuous agent must strike some sort of balance. He must at least attempt to develop some practical wisdom, enough so that he can deliberate about how act consistently with his values and commitments in some situations, an can learn from his experiences, and form some idea of what certain virtues require, even in the absence of his social networks. Developing practical wisdom may help agents counteract the powerful psychological effects of social influences when these induce the agent to act in ways inconsistent with his previous values or commitments.

Chapter 6

CONSTRUCTING AN EMPIRICALLY ADEQUATE THEORY OF CHARACTER: A REVIEW OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

In Chapter 4, I maintained the strongest argument against the situationist critique was the argument from psychological factors (PF). Once we understand how the psychological factors that are part of character affect our behavior, we have a greater ability to explain and predict behavior. I also claimed that PF could point us toward a more empirically adequate theory of character, specifically, a theory of character that emphasized construal and other psychological factors. In this chapter, I look at the social cognitive approach to personality that can ground an empirically adequate theory of character. In the next, I set forth an actual theory of character based on the social cognitive approach.

According to the social cognitive approach to personality, we can find personality consistency not in direct behavioral dispositions but rather in the interaction between individual psychological factors and situational features. Depending on an individual's history, goals, beliefs, values, etc., that individual will come to form distinct but predictable ways of interpreting situations that will in turn lead to distinct but predictable patterns of behavior

In this chapter, I posit the social cognitive approach as a possible framework of personality that both epitomizes the main contention of PF and grounds a more realistic conception of character. Specifically, I review psychologist Walter Mischel's social-cognitive theory of personality as a possible framework for a philosophical theory of character.

However, since Mischel's theory only provides a framework for character in general without specifying the necessary components of *moral* character, I also review a theory of moral character by psychologist Augusto Blasi compatible with the social-cognitive view of personality. Blasi's theory specifies the four components he believes are necessary for moral character, namely, moral desires, a moral will, willpower, and integrity. According to Blasi's theory, an individual's self-identity as a whole includes a number of different self-concepts (or ideas and beliefs about the self) including a self-concept about one's role as a moral person, which Blasi termed a "moral identity." Blasi proposed that moral identity is more important for some agents than it is for others. Agents for whom moral identity is central to their self-identity are more likely to be motivated to act based on moral considerations or commitments. Agents with low centrality of moral identity are less likely to be motivated by moral considerations or commitments in the face of other non-moral considerations. As evidence for Blasi's theory, I also look at some studies on the role of moral identity in motivating moral behavior.

According to Blasi's theory, an agent with a moral identity will be motivated to behave morally, so supporting Blasi's theory requires us to have some explanation for how his theory can be consistent with our experience of people behaving in immoral ways. Accepting Blasi's theory of moral identity would seem to require one to either accept the claim that few agents actually have a moral identity or explain how agents with a moral identity can behave in ways opposed to their previous moral commitments. In the second part of the chapter, I argue in favor of the latter claim and review a study on a number of psychological mechanisms that agents with a moral identity might use in order to behave in ways opposed to their moral identity.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive versus Traditional Trait Approach to Personality

Psychological situationists have criticized theories of personality grounded in what psychologists call the "trait approach" to personality (which some psychologists have compared to the "virtue" approach to moral character).[1] Psychologists Daniel Lapsley and Darcia Narvaez write that the distinction between the traditional trait approach and the social-cognitive approach to personality is that the trait approach is a "having" as opposed to a "doing" approach.[2] They explain that trait theory understands personality as a sum of traits that one has, with different individuals having different distributions of each trait. For example, the classic Five Factor Model of traits rates people on five different personality dimensions: neuroticism, agreeableness, open-mindedness, extraversion, and conscientiousness.[3] The underlying assumption of the Five Factor model is that everyone has these traits to some degree and the degrees to which the individual has each of the traits collectively make up his personality.

While traditional trait theory illustrates the "having" side of personality, social-cognitive theory illustrates the "doing" side of personality. The social-cognitive approach "emphasizes what people do when they construe their social landscape and how they transform and interpret it."[4] Lapsley and Narvaez argue

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[1] Daniel Lapsley and Darcia Narvaez, *Moral Development, Self, and Identity* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 193.

[2] For full discussion see: Lapsley and Narvaez, *Moral Development,* 189.

[3] See Rebecca Shiner and Avshalom Caspi, "Personality Development," in *Child and Adolescent Development,* eds. William Damon and Richard Lerner (New York: Wiley, 2008): 181-215.

[4] Shiner and Caspi, "Personality Development," 195.

that one of the problems of traditional trait theory is that it overlooks the "complex pattern of coherence that individuals display in response to changing contextual circumstances."[5] According to social-cognitive theorists, "coherence is evident in the dynamic, reciprocal interaction among the dispositions, interests, capacities, and potentialities of the agent."[6] Behavioral consistency is not measured by merely observing whether an agent behaves similarly across different types of situations, but rather by taking into account the interaction of the psychological factors of an agent with features of his situation.

The idea behind social cognitive theory is similar to the idea from PF that how an individual responds to a situation is dependent on his construal of that situation. The agent may be behaving consistently with his particular character traits from his own point of view, even if not from ours. We may still be able to observe a pattern in the interaction between particular situational features and the agent's individual psychological factors that is stable over time, even if this pattern would not show up as strict behavioral consistency across different types of situations. Instead, behavioral consistency would be dependent on the pairing of certain situational factors with an agent's particular psychological factors so that "changes on one side of the interaction invariably induce a cascade of consequences on the other side."[7]

According to psychologists Daniel Cervone and Ritu Tripathi, the reason that certain personality structures like the Five Factor Model seem to be based on unreasonable assumptions about the consistency of traits is that these kinds of

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[5] Shiner and Caspi, "Personality Development," 194.

[6] Ibid., 194

[7] Lapsley and Narvaez, *Moral Development,* 193.

personality frameworks are useful for finding personality differences between individuals, not for finding an enduring personal framework of a single individual.[8] Cervone and Tripathi define two types of personality structures: one is "a mental entity possessed enduringly by an individual" that takes on form, content, or functioning and varies from individual to individual, while the other is a model of interindividual differences in a population.[9] The latter structure is a conceptual system for organizing differences *between* people. The Five-Factor model is the latter kind of personality structure.[10]

According to Cervone and Tripathi, for each of the personality structures there is a class of research: one class charts "interindividual differences in typical behavioral dispositions," the other class is an "exploration of intrapsychic cognitive and affective systems that underlie the coherence of psychological experience and social behavior."[11] The first type of research seeks to find "dispositional variables that function to describe between person differences in typical behavioral tendencies," while the second is after "intrapsychic variables that serve to model features of mental life or "personality architecture."[12] In other words, personality researchers are conducting two different types of personality research to meet two different purposes. One type of personality research seeks to chart the actual psychological factors of a particular individual, while the other is

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[8] Daniel Cervone and Ritu Tripathi, *Personality, Identity, and Character: Explorations in Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009: 30-51.

[9] Cervone and Tripathi, *Personality, Identity, and Character,* 32.

[10] Cervone and Tripathi, *Personality, Identity, and Character,* 32.

[11] Cervone and Tripathi, *Personality, Identity, and Character,* 33.

[12] Cervone and Tripathi, *Personality, Identity, and Character,* 33.

concerned with finding differences in psychological factors among different individuals.

Personality research that is merely charting the personality differences between individuals provides data for trait theory. Personality structures modeled after the trait model are not suited for the explanation or prediction of individual behavior as that is not the primary purpose of these sorts of frameworks. For example, in a sample of five people, it is likely that among the five of them there will be variance on the degree to which each of them is compassionate. Even if two or more of them have a similar degree of compassion, this only indicates one variable or trait in a larger personality structure. Merely knowing a person's average rating on a trait like compassion does not give us any information on when that person is likely to act compassionately. A personality structure like the Five Factor model might merely tell us that *compared with his peers* Smith is compassionate. However, that tells us nothing about when Smith will act compassionately. If social-cognitive theory and the argument from psychological factors are correct, then we would have to map out Smith's beliefs, values, and goals in order to be able to predict on what particular occasions Smith will act compassionately. A personality structure like the Five Factor model is simply not useful for predicting or explaining Smith's behavior. In order to explain or attempt to predict when Smith will behave compassionately, one would have to look at the second kind of personality structure, the kind that studies the interaction of psychological variables responsible for human behavior.

Social-cognitive theory is the latter sort of personality structure and is thus better suited for the explanation and prediction of behavior than traditional trait theory. Moreover, social-cognitive theory provides a framework for the type

of character traits described by proponents of the argument from psychological factors because social-cognitive theorists also maintain that "having" a certain trait, like compassion for example, does not necessarily result in uniform compassionate behavior across all situations. Rather, whether an agent displays certain behavior relevant to a particular trait depends on the interaction of an agent's individual psychological structure with his environment.

If the traditional conception of character in philosophical discourse has a framework akin to trait theories like the Five Factor Model, then it has a type of personality structure that is not useful for the explanation or prediction of behavior. If the traditional conception of character is similar to trait theory, then it is useful for picking out differences between individuals on a particular trait but not for being able to predict or explain a single instance of a behavior in a particular situation.

Social Cognitive Theory

A conception of character based in social-cognitive theory is better suited to help predict and explain individual behaviors because research using the social cognitive approach charts the interaction of situational features and the individual psychological factors of an agent. Neither personality frameworks like the Five-Factor Model nor merely looking at the situation alone can help us explain and predict human behavior.[13] Instead, PF, the strongest argument against the situationist critique, points us toward the intersection of the person and the situation. That is, it points us toward taking into consideration how certain variables like the psychological dispositions mentioned in Chapter 4

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[13] See my argument for this in the previous chapter.

interact with a situation to produce certain behaviors. This is also the view of social-cognitive theorists in social psychology.[14]

According to the social cognitive view of personality, if different situations acquire different meanings for the same individual, then the kinds of expectations, beliefs, goals, and behavioral scripts that are likely to become activated in relation to particular situations will vary. Therefore, there is no theoretical reason to expect the individual to display similar behavior in different psychological situations unless the situations are functionally equivalent in meaning to that individual.[15] Expecting an individual to display similar behavior in two different situations because they have trait x is not taking into account some variables internal to the individual that might affect what he interprets the correct response to be in that situation.

For example, suppose that Smith is very friendly to the people in his office. He has worked at that office for many years and he knows and talks to everyone there. When he arrives there in the morning, he greets everyone and often converses with his co-workers throughout the day. He is easy to talk to and approachable and shows no signs of shyness or introversion. Should we expect him to behave in a friendly manner no matter what situation he encounters? According to social-cognitive theory, we should not. We should only predict that

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[14] See Walter Mischel, "The Interaction of Person and Situation," in *Personality at the Crossroads: Current Issues in Interactional Psychology,* ed. David Magnusson and Norman Endler (Hillsdale: Erlbaum, 1977): 333-352; Walter Mischel, "Toward an Integrative Science of the Person," *Annual Reviews in Psychology 55* (2004): 1-22; Cervone and Tripathi, *Personality, Identity, and Character*, 30-51; Darcia Narvaez and Daniel K. Lapsley, eds., *Personality, Identity, and Character: Explorations in Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009); and Albert Bandura, "Social Cognitive Theory of Moral Thought and Action," in *Handbook of Moral Behavior and Development*, eds. William Kurtines, Jacob Gewirtz, and Jacob Lamb (Hillsdale: Erlbaum, 1991): 45-103.

[15] Mischel, "Toward an Integrative Science of the Person," 5.

Smith will behave similarly in situations that have a "functionally equivalent" meaning for him (i.e., situations that *Smith* perceives as very similar). Outside of that, we can make no predictions and expect no behavioral consistency because Smith's response to a situation depends largely on how he interprets that situation, and his interpretation of the situation will depend in part on the interaction of the features of that situation with his construal, goals, beliefs and other features of his psychology.

As noted in Chapter 4, the observation that individuals adapt their behavior to the situation seems obviously true. If on his way home, Smith cuts through an alley and a mugger holds him up at gunpoint for his wallet, we would not expect Smith to act in a friendly manner toward his assailant. However, we might be a bit surprised if we saw Smith at a party and noticed that he failed to display his characteristic friendliness, instead being introverted and shy.

Using the social-cognitive approach to personality, we might figure out why Smith behaves shyly at parties and friendly at the office. Perhaps Smith is naturally introverted as well as friendly. Since he already knows everyone at the office and feels comfortable there, he acts friendly toward his coworkers whereas at a party where he doesn't know many people, he might feel too shy to speak to anyone. If we knew the cause of Smith's shyness at the party versus his friendliness at the office, we could probably generalize some of Smith's traits and make some predictions about Smith's behavior in situations where he is acquainted with everyone versus situations in which he does not know people very well.

As I argued in Chapter 4, if we were to use the situationist model of local traits to describe Smith all we would learn is that Smith has two apparently

unconnected traits "shy at parties" and "friendly at the office" without any explanation as to why Smith behaves this way. On the other hand, if we merely assigned a trait like "shy" or "friendly" to Smith, not only would neither of these traits fully capture Smith's character we would also be at a loss to explain his shy or friendly behavior in one situation versus another.

Walter Mischel and the CAPS model

Psychologist Walter Mischel was one of the first people to endorse a move to the social-cognitive model of traits after his survey of theoretical approaches in personality psychology revealed a startling lack of cross-situational behavioral consistency. Rather than concluding that individuals showed no behavioral consistency, Mischel argued that "behavioral consistency is found by incorporating the situation into the search of invariance rather than removing it."[16] Mischel also disagrees with the situationist move to local traits, arguing that we cannot look to the situation alone in order to find behavioral consistency anymore than we can look to the agent's behavior alone without reference to the context in which the behavior is enacted.

Instead of focusing on either overt behavior or situational features as behavioral determinants, Mischel proposes a model that focuses on "the underlying psychological processes that might lead people to interpret the meanings of situations in their characteristic ways, and that could link their resulting specific, distinctive patterns of behavior to particular types of conditions and situations in potentially predictable ways."[17] Mischel contends

[16] Mischel, "Toward an Integrative Science of the Person," 13.

[17] Mischel, "Toward an Integrative Science of the Person," 4.

that "the route to finding the invariance in personality requires taking account of the situation and its meaning for the individual, and may be seen in the stable interactions and interplay between them."[18]

Once we understand the psychological processes underlying the agent's behavior we are able to make a much more educated guess about that agent's behavior in the future. Thus, a focus on the psychological factors of the agent could lead to greater understanding of that agent's behavior as well as a heightened ability to predict that agent's behavior in future circumstances. If, for example, we are to understand why Smith is shy at parties but friendly at the office we need not look merely at the situation and how it appears to *us* but need to try to understand the situation from Smith's point of view. What is Smith's construal of the situation? Just as importantly, why does Smith construe the situation this way? What are the factors of the situation that lead to Smith construing it one way versus another? Mischel calls factors of situations that lead agents to perceive a situation in a particular way the "psychologically active ingredients" of a situation. Psychologically active ingredients are "features of a situation that have significant meaning for a given individual or type, and that are related to the experienced psychological situation—the thoughts and affects and goals that become activated within the personality system."[19]

Mischel points out that other people, or our relationships with other people are also considered "situations." For example, according to Mischel "in close relationships, one person's behavioral output becomes the other person's situational input, and vice versa, forming a dyadic system. To the degree that each partner's personality is characterized by a stable if…then…behavioral signature, it becomes possible to model the interactions between them, and to predict the "personality" of the interpersonal system they form, characterized by its own distinctive relationship signature and dynamics."

[18] Mischel, "Toward an Integrative Science of the Person," 5.

[19] Mischel, "Toward an Integrative Science of the Person," 15.

Mischel called his social cognitive framework of personality the "Cognitive-Affective Processing System" (or CAPS). CAPS is supposed to help with the explanation and prediction of individual behaviors of a single agent. According to Mischel's CAPS theory, patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behavior are all part of personality, as well as "how the person construes (encodes, and appraises) situations (including people and the self) and the beliefs, expectancies, goals, and self-regulatory competencies that became activated within the individual in the continuous stream of interactions with situations."[20] Mischel refers to all of these psychological processes under the collective title of cognitive affective units (CAU's).

Mischel argues that there are essentially five types of CAU's: encodings, expectancies and beliefs, affects, goals and values, and competencies and self-regulatory competencies. Different individuals will have different CAU's. According to Mischel, as an agent experiences situations that contain different psychological features, different "CAU's and their characteristic interrelationships become activated in relation to these features," so the activation of CAU's changes from one situation to another.[21]

Encodings refers to categories or schemas for the self, people, events, and psychological and external situations. As discussed in previous chapters, depending on the type of experiences that a particular agent has had, he will

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[20] Mischel, "Toward an Integrative Science of the Person," 4. Self-regulatory competencies refer to control mechanisms that operate in response to social sanctions or self-reactive influence. The major self-regulatory mechanism operates through self-monitoring of conduct, judgment of conduct in relation to personal standards and environmental circumstances and affective self-reaction (the emotion an individual feels in response his own conduct). (See Albert Bandura, "Social Cognitive Theory of Moral Thought and Action" in *Handbook of Moral Behavior and Development*, eds. William Kurtines and Jacob Gewirtz *(*Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1991), 68.

[21] Mischel, "Toward an Integrative Science of the Person," 11.

develop different types of schemas. An agent will often construe future situations according to the particular schemas he has formed in the past and this may lead to his having a different construal of a situation from other agents who have formed different schemas.

Expectancies and beliefs refer to what an individual expects will be the consequences of a particular action. For example, a young child may decide on whether to lie to his mother or not depending on what he expects will be the outcome. If he expects that she will catch him lying and will make him go without dessert that night, he may decide against lying. If for some reason the child did not want dessert that night, he may decide to go ahead and lie. Two children with similar expectancies (if I lie to my mother, I will not get dessert tonight) may act differently if the outcomes they expect have different values for them.

Affects refers to feelings, emotions, and affective responses (including physiological responses). Mischel argues that emotions influence social information processing and coping behavior as well as self-regulation and the pursuit of long-term goals. Beliefs about the self and one's personal future are emotional as is anything that implies important consequences, harmful or beneficial, for the individual. Moreover, affective-evaluative reactions to situational features can occur immediately and automatically and these reactions may trigger cognitions and behaviors associated with those emotions. The particular emotions an agent feels in response to a situation may reflect individual differences related to temperamental or biological variables.[22]

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[22] Walter Mischel and Yuichi Shoda, "A Cognitive-Affective System Theory of Personality: Reconceptualizing Situations, Dispositions, Dynamics, and Invariance in Personality Structure," *Psychological Review 102,* no. 2 (1995): 246-268.

Self-regulatory mechanisms help individuals to regulate their own behavior by self-imposed standards and self-produced consequences (e.g., guilt, remorse, etc.). Self-regulatory mechanisms can also help guide behavior in absence of (or opposition to) situational pressures through use of rules and plans.[23] Rules specify "the kinds of behavior appropriate (or expected) under particular conditions" and plans specify the "sequence and organization of behavior patterns" that can best help the individual achieve his goals or expected outcomes.[24]

Using Mischel's approach, let's look at my example of Smith who is sometimes friendly, sometimes introverted, and try to assess Smith's character. In order to assess his character, we do not merely look at Smith's behavior in different situations and simply make up a laundry list of different local traits that Smith possesses. In order to be able to successfully explain and predict Smith's behavior, we have to understand the psychological factors responsible for those local traits, such as his construal, beliefs, and goals. We also have to identify the "psychological features of situations that play a functional role in the generation of behaviors, and that are contained in a wide range of nominal situations" for Smith in particular.[25] What features of the situation of the office party is Smith reacting to when he responds with shyness rather than friendliness? What other situations hold these features, thus making it likely that Smith will display similar behavior in these situations? The features of situations that a particular agent

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[23] Walter Mischel, "The Interaction of Person and Situation" in *Personality at the Crossroads: Current Issues in Interactional Psychology*, eds. David Magnusson and Norman S. Endler (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1977): 333-352.

[24] Mischel, "The Interaction of Person and Situation," 345.

[25] Mischel, "Toward an Integrative Science of the Person," 15.

reacts to, as well as how the agent actually reacts to those features, will be different from person to person. Two agents in the same situation may experience that situation completely differently from one another because of different psychological factors.

If we come to learn that Smith is introverted and that he is only friendly when he perceives himself to be in a "safe" situation, where he knows everyone and feels less likely to have his friendly overtures rebuffed by individuals in that situation, we can predict how Smith will act in other similar situations. Once we understand a little more about how Smith interprets situations (his interpretations being based on his beliefs, goals, abilities, and other psychological factors), then we can expect to be able to predict Smith's behavior with greater accuracy as well as explain his actions in different types of situations of varying similarity. Smith's behavior will show consistency across situations that he perceives as having similar situational features.

Mischel believes that we should phrase character traits as conditionals or, as he calls them, "if…then…" situations.[26] Trait conditionals are not limited to one or two particular situations, but can instead be expanded to refer to a wide array of situations. For example, we could state a trait conditional limited to only one type of situation (i.e. parties) as, "If Smith is at an office party, then he will be friendly" or "if Smith is at a friend's party, then he will be introverted and shy." However, Mischel is interested in generalizing conditional traits to cover a number of different situations in order to show behavioral consistency. For example, we might say, "if Smith is in a situation with a group of people he does not know, then he will be shy and not say very much," however, "if Smith is in a

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[26] Mischel, "Toward an Integrative Science of the Person," 8.

situation with a group of people he knows very well, he will be friendly and talkative." These trait conditionals cover a number of different situations, all of which include similar situational features from Smith's point of view. Trait conditionals are limited by "psychological situations" or situations as they are construed and appraised by a particular person (which depends on his individual CAU's). If we understand how an agent interprets and appraises situations, we may widen the scope of a conditional trait to all situations that the agent perceives to have similar features; then, we will see high levels of behavioral consistency.

Mischel believes a collection of "if…then…" conditionals provide a sort of "behavioral signature of personality" that identifies an individual and "maps onto the impressions that other people have of that person" in the same way that a traditional character trait would. For example, two of Smith's character traits would be something like "introverted around strangers" and "friendly and talkative with familiars." Assessing character within a CAPS framework leads to the "construction of typologies based on distinctive processing dynamics and personality signatures that are linked to the types of situations in which they are likely to be expressed."[27] That is, assessing character using the CAPS framework, we may begin to notice a number of different individuals with similar trait conditionals sharing personality types. For example, individuals who are "introverted around strangers but talkative around people they know" or, more generally, people who are "anxious in response to social situations" would all belong to one personality type. All individuals sharing this personality type would have similar CAU's, thus leading to similar interactions between their CAU's and

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[27] Mischel, "Toward an Integrative Science of the Person," 12.

particular situational features, resulting in similar behavior. An agent can belong to more than one personality type depending on his CAU's. So for example, Smith may belong to the personality type of people who are "anxious in response to social situations" but also the personality type of "kind to strangers" or "generous with his friends and loved ones," etc.

Conditional traits as postulated by Mischel's social-cognitive framework for personality are similar to local traits in that they are contextualized by situation; however, unlike local traits, they are not based in the assumption that behavior is purely situationally driven. The reason that an agent's personality is made up of these kinds of conditional traits is not situational factors alone drive behavior, but rather because situational factors interact with a person's goals, beliefs, desires, values, and construal to elicit certain behaviors.[28] The pattern of behavioral variability from one type of situation to another is not entirely random. According to Mischel, "if behaviors are stable within each type of situation but varied from one type to another" the pattern of the variation should be stable and characteristic for each individual.[29] Other things being equal then, if Smith is friendly and talkative with people he is familiar with but shy and introverted with strangers, we should expect him to act accordingly in each type of situation in the future.[30]

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[28] Mischel, "Toward an Integrative Science of the Person," 8.

[29] Mischel, "Toward an Integrative Science of the Person," 6.

[30] See Nancy Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010). One philosopher that argues in favor of the social-cognitivist tradition in psychology is Nancy Snow, who argues that perhaps the reason that cross-situational consistency in behavior is so hard to come by is that we are expecting the wrong sort of consistency. Snow argues in favor Walter Mischel and Michael Shoda's conceptualization of personality as a cognitive-affective processing system (CAPS) which consists of social-cognitive units like beliefs, desires, feelings, goals, expectations, values, and self-regulatory plans.

Chronically Accessible Schemas

Schemas (also known as knowledge structures) are another important part of personality structure. As mentioned in Chapter 4, a schema "summarizes generic knowledge and previous experience with respect to a given class of stimuli and events and, at the same time, gives meaning and guides anticipation with respect to similar stimuli and events in the future."[31] An agent can have schemas about himself (self-schemas), other people (person schemas), and events and situations (scripts). Schemas are a product of an individual's personal history, temperament, and his individual goals and beliefs.

Psychologists Daniel Lapsley and Darcia Narvaez maintain that since schemas are a product of an individual's CAU's, and different individuals have different schemas, schemas also "demarcate regions of social life and domains of personal experience to which the person is especially tuned, and about which he or she is likely to become a virtual 'expert'."[32] Lapsley and Narvaez argue that

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Snow also believes that there is a possibility for "global" character," what Doris terms "robust" character, or traits that are cross-situationally consistent. She believes that the way this is possible is essentially what Robert Adams had hypothesized, that a collection of local traits can be aggregated together to form more robust traits. Although Snow points out that some local traits may just stay local, if there is nothing to make the agent perceive that other situations are similar and call for the same sorts of behavioral responses.They will still probably not be so robust as to satisfy Doris's definition of a robust trait, but they will show much more consistency in behavior than taken alone. What will bind these traits together will be an agent's construal of the situations as similar, thus calling for similar behavioral responses. Snow argues that what the factors that will motivate an agent's construal are things like the agent's beliefs or desires, and more importantly, their goals.

[31] Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation,* 12.
See also Darcia Narvaez and Daniel K. Lapsley Eds., *Personality, Identity, and Character: Explorations in Moral Psychology.* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2009) Narvaez and Lapsley define schemas as organized schemas that channel and filter social perceptions and memory, p. 195.

[32] Lapsley and Narvaez, "Social Cognitive Approach" in *Moral Development, Self, and Identity,* 198-200.

chronic accessibility of schemas is another "source of individual differences in moral functioning." Accessibility is basically the "activation potential of available knowledge;" the more a certain schema is activated or the more recently it is primed, the more accessible it should be for "processing social information."[33] "Chronically accessible" schemas are those schemas that have been activated more often and, as a result, they are more easily accessible for activation in future cases to the point where activation sometimes even approaches automaticity. Lapsley and Narvaez cite a personality structure model by Nancy Cantor in support of their theory.

According to the model of personality by psychologist Nancy Cantor, two of the critical functions of schemas in behavior are to serve "as chronically accessible constructs [that] repeatedly direct individuals' attention selectively to certain aspects of life" and to help "individuals develop highly practiced procedural routines for doing those tasks in schema-relevant contexts."[34] Individuals can quickly retrieve "facts" in their domains of expertise and organize new information in terms of their schemas. Their familiar schemas provide a ready, even automatic plan of action in the life contexts with which they are familiar.

For example, suppose that I have been a student at a university for a few years. I have probably formed a schema about classroom experiences at that university; I have an idea of what is expected of me, what I should expect from others, what my responsibilities are, how to act, how others act, etc. The longer I

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[33] Lapsley and Narvaez, "Social-Cognitive Approach," 200.

[34] Nancy Cantor, "From thought to behavior: "Having" and "doing" in the study of personality and cognition." *American Psychologist 45* (1990): 735-750.

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am in school, the more experience I gain about this particular type of situation.

Eventually I have a great amount of expertise in this type of situation and can

know what to expect and how to behave immediately upon entering another

classroom because my "classroom schema" is chronically accessible and thus

easily activated. Since being a student is a big part of my life, I have developed

schemas that revolve around that aspect of my life and those schemas in turn

guide my behavior in future situations relevant to that schema.

Lapsley and Narvaez argue that a moral person, or a person who has a

moral character, would be "one for whom moral constructs are chronically

accessible and easily activated for social information processing."[35] Moral

categories (which include schemas) that are important for an individual's self-

identity are more chronically accessible for interpreting situational factors. These

categories would either be constantly on line or easily primed and easily

activated. Once activated, these constructs would dispose the individual to

interpret his situation according to his or her moral commitments. Thus, an

individual for whom moral commitments are central to his self-identity would be

more likely to construe his situation using moral schemas and scripts that reflect

his moral commitments.

This argument by Lapsley and Narvaez complements a model of moral

character proposed by psychologist Augusto Blasi. Blasi theorizes that willpower,

a moral will, responsibility, and integrity are the necessary requirements of moral

character.

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[35] Lapsley and Narvaez, "Social-Cognitive Approach," *Moral Development, Self, and Identity,* 200.

Moral Identity and Moral Behavior

Augusto Blasi's Model of Moral Identity

According to psychologist Augusto Blasi, an individual's global self-identity (i.e. how an individual views his own identity as a whole) includes a number of different self-concepts (also referred to as identities by Blasi) or beliefs and ideas about the self.[36] An individual can have a number of self-concepts corresponding to different domains or goals and values in his life. For example, I may have a self-concept about my role as a sister, another about my role as a friend, another about my role as a moral person, or as a compassionate or just person, etc.

Blasi reiterates that one's global self-identity is "not just a collection of traits, attitudes, or percepts, but refers to the way these characteristics are ordered and organized and to that narrow area of functioning that is apprehended as "deep, " "central," and essential."[37] Some self-concepts are more central or important in an individual's view of his identity as a whole, and behaving opposed to a self-concept that is central to one's global self-identity can result in feelings of betrayal of one's self or feelings of loss of identity. So for example, if I feel that being a moral person is important to my global self-identity, behaving in a way that is opposed to morality can result in feelings of betrayal or feelings loss of identity. If being moral is an important part of who I am but I do not behave like a moral person, then who am I?

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[36] To make things a bit clearer, I will use the term "self-concept" to refer to one facet of a global self-identity, "moral identity" or "moral self-concept" to refer to a moral facet of a global self-identity, and "global self-identity" to refer to the more global construct.

[37] Augusto Blasi, "Moral Cognition and Moral Action: A Theoretical Perspective." *Developmental Review 3,* no. 2 (1983): 200.

Blasi called a self-concept about one's view of oneself as a moral person a "moral identity." There are different types of moral identities and different individuals may value their moral identity as either more or less important than other self-concepts. Blasi argues that agents that exhibit cross-situational behavioral consistency usually value their moral identity as an important part of their global self-identity and have developed a moral will, willpower, responsibility, and integrity. In order to distinguish the general self-concept of a moral identity from a moral identity that is central to the agent's self-identity, I will refer to the general self-concept of one's morality as a "moral identity" and will refer to agents whose moral identity has become central his global self-identity as having "high centrality of moral identity." According to Blasi's theory of moral identity, an agent that has an undivided moral will, responsibility, and integrity will have a higher centrality of moral identity and if the agent has also developed willpower, he will be more likely to display greater behavioral consistency across situations requiring moral behavior.

Moral will refers to a "deep, central, affective and motivational orientation toward morality."[38] According to Blasi, the will brings an agent's desires under the domain of his agency, including both first and second-order desires. Following philosopher Harry G. Frankfurt, Blasi defined second order desires as a desire "that a desire one already has be effective in producing action," for example, a desire that one's desire to behave consistently with one's commitment to compassion is actualized. Developing a *moral* will means that an agent has

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[38] Augusto Blasi, "Moral Character: A Psychological Approach," in *Character Psychology and Character Education,* eds. Daniel Lapsley and Clark Power (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 67-100.

made moral desires especially his own because he identifies his self-identity with moral desires.

Blasi argues that the will is often fragmented, depending on the desires that an agent has. The will is structured around desires, so if an agent does not have a "wholehearted commitment" to the moral good, the will may be divided. For example, if an agent has desires to get ahead in his career as well as desires to be just and fair and those desires at some point come into conflict, that agent's will is divided. Depending on which desires are more important to the agent, or even just which desires become salient in a particular situation (which can be affected by situational features), the agent may behave morally or self-interestedly. Only an agent with a fully (undivided) moral will has a wholehearted commitment to the moral good and has no conflicting desires (or conflicting desires strong enough to overwhelm moral desires). Moreover, an agent with an undivided moral will "so identifies with his or her [moral] commitments, cherished values and ideals" that he or she will construct around them the sense of a central, essential self.[39] Since the agent has an undivided commitment to the moral good, the agent's moral self-concept then becomes central for that agent's self-identity.

Different individuals may choose different moral values around which to structure their will and center their sense of self. For example, some agents may structure their will around the values of justice and equality, while others may structure it around compassion and empathy. For this reason, moral identity can vary in content; that is, whereas one person may see being compassionate as central to his moral identity, another may feel that being just or fair is what is

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[39] Blasi, "Moral Character," 92.

important to his moral identity. The moral identity of each agent can be unique depending on the moral traits emphasized by the agent.

Blasi discusses two different forms of integrity: integrity of identity and integrity of responsibility. Blasi refers to both components as "integrity" but I refer to these two components as "integrity" and "responsibility" respectively in order to distinguish them.

Integrity is not specifically a moral virtue; it is a result of conscious concern and intentional care to avoid contradictions between things we say and do and those commitments on which our sense of self was constructed, no matter what those commitments.[40] Integrity refers to a person's serious concern for "the unity of his or her subjective sense of self, as manifested in consistency with one's chosen commitments."[41] Agents with moral commitments are not the only agents that can have integrity. An agent who cherishes misanthropic values and commitments and who has constructed his self-identity around these values can also have integrity as long as he is concerned about avoiding contradictions between his behavior and his values. For example, if he believes in harming people, then he will intentionally avoid helping people.

An agent with *moral* integrity is an agent that has structured his will and sense of self around moral values and has serious concern for behaving consistently with his moral will. If an agent has invested and identified himself with particular desires and he cares about behaving consistently with those desires, he is motivated to behave consistently with those desires not only for the sake of the desire itself, but because going against the desire would feel like a

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[40] Blasi, "Moral Character," 90.

[41] Augusto Blasi, "Moral Character: A Psychological Approach," in *Character Psychology and Character Education,* eds. Daniel Lapsley and Clark Power (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 67-100.

betrayal or even a loss of identity. According to Blasi, integrity provides the agent with extra moral motivation in case the agent's moral will on its own is not enough to motivate the agent to behave morally.

According to Blasi, responsibility is when an agent makes himself (as opposed to others or outside circumstances) responsible for ensuring that his moral commitments and his behavior are consistent. An agent that has developed responsibility feels that he is personally responsible for maintaining his moral integrity. Responsibility is often expressed through "notions of obligation and necessity: I must, I have to."[42] For example, if a responsible agent sees a person in need of food or water he will not assume that someone else can provide the person with food and water, he will provide the food and water himself. After all, even if one formulates a judgment that a particular action in the correct one in a certain situation, it is a different matter whether one feels that it is up to them to undertake that action. Blasi writes that when a "person cares about morality to the point of wanting that his or her moral desires be effective not only in the present situation, but also in the future, the person makes himself or herself responsible for actualizing his or her moral desires." [43]

Responsibility and integrity are very closely linked. If an agent has constructed his sense of self around certain values and behaving inconsistently with those values will result in feelings of loss of identity or betrayal, then it is likely that the agent will make himself responsible for ensuring that he behaves consistently with those values. Moral integrity provides extra motivation to behave consistently with one's moral will and responsibility provides the agent

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[42] Blasi, "Moral Character," 92.

[43] Blasi, "Moral Functioning," 342.

with the belief that it is up to him to ensure that he behave consistently with his moral commitments. Like integrity, responsibility is not necessarily a moral virtue as it can be felt about all types of commitments.

Willpower is essentially a type of self-control, a result of "interlocking skills, mainly cognitive in nature."[44] Willpower is "composed of those dispositions that play an instrumental role in sustaining effective behavior."[45] Some of these dispositions are the ability to break down goals into plans, delay gratification, exercise impulse control, keep one's attention focused, distance oneself from the concrete present, persevere in the face of adversity, keep distant goals in mind, monitor one's action and its outcomes, and engage in effective role taking and information processing (among others). Will power can be used for both moral and non-moral purposes but Blasi argues that it is necessary in order for an agent to behave consistently with his moral commitments. It is debatable whether an agent with an undivided moral will actually needs willpower in order to behave consistently with his desires (as he has no competing desires) but an agent with a fragmented moral will does need to have willpower to behave consistently with his commitments and resist temptation from situational features or other goals or values.

Blasi refers to these components as separate components because an agent can have willpower, integrity, and responsibility without necessarily caring about morality. An agent may have a moral identity that includes moral will, integrity, and responsibility yet he may lack the willpower to make his behavior consistent with his moral commitments. An agent may also have moral desires

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44 Blasi, "Moral Character," 74.

45 Daniel Lapsley, *Moral Psychology* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 229.

that are not as central to his sense of self as other desires and so may have a fragmented moral will with only partial integrity and responsibility for those moral commitments. For example, an agent may desire to be compassionate but perhaps does not see being compassionate as an essential part of himself (or has a competing desire that prevents him from exercising compassion) so he lacks integrity and only occasionally feels responsible for ensuring that he behaves compassionately. However, it is unlikely that an agent with a moral will that is undivided will lack moral integrity and it is unlikely that an agent who has moral integrity will lack moral responsibility. Having an undivided moral will seems to make it more likely than an agent will develop at least some integrity and responsibility, making his moral identity central to his sense of self. If that agent also develops willpower, he is morel likely to display cross-situational behavioral consistency.

Moral understanding also plays a large role in Blasi's model of global self-identity. According to Blasi, moral actions are "responses to situations as interpreted according to moral reasoning."[46] That is, one responds to a moral situation in part depending on one's moral knowledge or understanding. Blasi does not believe that agents necessarily consciously deliberate their moral actions, instead moral understanding can be a "nature-like part of one's personality, affecting action, especially in more common instances, directly and habitually."[47] An agent can employ his moral knowledge or understanding when making a decision about how to behave without doing so consciously, particularly when the situation is one with which the agent is familiar. Blasi also argues that

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[46] Blasi, "Moral Cognition and Moral Action," 196.

[47] Blasi, "Moral Cognition and Moral Action," 196.

moral understanding plays a part when one is determining whether one is responsible for performing a particular action, specifically in relation to one's global self-identity. This will depend on what self-concepts are central to the self. Agents with moral character or whose moral identity is central to their sense of self will probably feel greater responsibility for behaving morally (consistently with their moral values and commitments) than others whose moral identity is not as important in their global self-identity.

Blasi's Model and Social-Cognitive Theory

According to social-cognitive theory, how an agent reacts in a situation depends in part on the psychological features of that particular agent, (following Mischel) specifically the agent's encodings, expectancies and beliefs, affects, goals and values, and self-regulatory competencies and plans. Different agents will react differently to the same situation depending on the interaction of the situational factors in that situation and the agent's CAU's.

According to Blasi's theory, in order for an agent to behave consistently with moral values, some of the goals and values that an agent must have are moral goals and values. Moreover, an agent must have the belief that those moral values and goals are central (to some extent) to his concept of self-identity. The agent must also have a goal of behaving consistently with those goals and values and must believe he is responsible for behaving consistently with those goals and values. Finally, he has to develop some skills (necessary for willpower) to ensure that he is effective at behaving consistently with his goals and values.

Mapped out according to Mischel's social-cognitive theory, a moral agent must have certain encodings, expectancies and beliefs, affects, goals and values,

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and self-regulatory competencies. An agent with a moral will has emotions, goals, and values consistent with the moral good. An agent with an undivided moral will, will also come believe that his moral identity is central to his sense of self. If he develops integrity (as it is likely if he has an undivided moral will) and the expectancy that if he behaves inconsistently with his moral will, if he does behave inconsistently, he will feel as if he has betrayed his self-identity or even lost some part of his identity. He must also have the belief that he is personally responsible for ensuring that he behaves consistently with his moral will. An agent with high centrality of moral identity that develops certain self-regulatory competencies, or willpower, will be more likely to behave consistently with his moral will across situations.

Blasi does not mention the role of emotion in his model of moral identity except to mention that the moral will is a deep affective and motivational orientation toward morality. According to Mischel, emotions influence social information processing and reactions can occur immediately and automatically, triggering cognitions and behaviors associated with those emotions. The emotions of an agent with a moral will are already oriented toward morality so the emotions that influence social information processing and reactions should be emotions oriented toward morality.

This brings us back to chronically accessible schemas. Agents with moral commitments will also be more likely to concern themselves with moral behavior in different types of situations and thus form chronically accessible moral schemas. Agents with a high centrality of moral identity will be more likely to notice the morally relevant details of a situation because moral schemas are more chronically accessible (or easily primed) for them. Having chronically accessible

moral schemas will in turn affect how an agent will construe situations in which he finds himself in the future, reinforcing the moral schemas the agent has already developed.

Mischel also mentions that emotions can affect coping behavior, self-regulation, and the pursuit of long-term goals. This seems to refer to both positive and negatively valenced emotions. For example, fear of embarrassment or confrontation may keep Jones from standing up for a cause he believes in. Although Blasi does not address this problem directly, following his theory, an agent with a divided moral will may succumb to temptation or other motives generated by other self-concepts the agent has. However, an agent with an undivided moral will is likelier to have developed integrity and responsibility, which should give the agent extra motivation (beyond being motivated by his beliefs, goals and values, and moral will) to behave morally. Agents also need to develop willpower to help them be more likely to behave consistently to their moral commitments even in the face of competing pressures.

Evidence for Blasi's Theory of Moral Identity

Moral Exemplars

According to Blasi, individuals who have high centrality of moral identity are more likely to behave consistently with their moral commitments. Moral exemplars might be an example of individuals with high centrality of moral identity. Kyle Matsuba and Lawrence Walker's study in 2005 might be a case in point. Matsuba and Walker defined a moral exemplar as "a person who has shown extraordinary moral commitment" and conducted a study on young moral exemplars between the ages of 18-30 with the purpose of determining what

motivated these individuals. They contacted a diverse number of organizations ranging from health, to social, to human and animal rights organizations and asked them to nominate people who fit the description of a moral exemplar. They then interviewed 40 moral exemplars and 40 comparison individuals in a 2hr life narrative interview.[48]

The life narratives of the moral exemplars revealed both a higher centrality of moral identity (measured by the degree to which a person adopts a particular identity as a basis for his or her self-definition) and a greater sense of personal responsibility than the 40 "comparison" individuals. Moral exemplars' life narratives had greater awareness of the suffering of others in childhood, more empowerment themes, more sacrificial redemptive experiences (experiences where they had had to make sacrifices so that others could benefit), and greater ideological depth and emphasis on future goals that focused on the betterment of society. Matsuba and Walker found that not only were moral exemplars currently more involved in prosocial activities, they planned on continued involvement in prosocial activities in their community.

Having greater ideological depth means that personal beliefs and values are more central to their self-identity, and moral exemplars value the betterment of society and have the belief that it is a worthy cause. For moral exemplars, the beliefs and values central to their self-identity are moral beliefs and values; this seems to imply that their moral identity is an important part of their self-identity. According to Blasi, agents with high centrality of moral identity often develop the belief that they have to behave consistently with the values and commitments important to their self-identity (what Blasi termed "integrity") and this in turn

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[48] Differences were most evident in life-narrative data, suggesting greater sensitivity of life-story approach for this type of study.

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often leads to the development of feelings of personal responsibility. The moral exemplars in Matsuba and Walker's study exhibited a greater sense of personal responsibility for trying to better society. Once the exemplars had constructed their self-identity around moral values, they developed feelings of integrity and responsibility.

This was not an isolated study. In 2007, psychologists Lawrence Walker and Jeremy Frimer did a study on adult moral exemplars typifying either brave or caring personalities. The participants in this study were recipients of a national award in Canada for either the Medal of Bravery or Caring Canadian Award (both civilian awards). Walker and Frimer interviewed 25 brave exemplars, 25 caring exemplars, and a matched comparison group of 50 who matched the exemplars on gender, ethnicity, education and age and who were drawn from the general community. The participants filled out a number of questionnaires and interviewed with the experimenters for 2 hours.[49] Using a typology developed by psychologist Dan McAdams, Walker and Frimer focused on themes of agency and communion.[50] According to McAdams, agency encompasses a "wide range of motivational ideas, including the concepts of strength, power, expansion, mastery, control, dominance, achievement, autonomy, separation, and independence."[51] Self-mastery refers to the individual striving to master or control the self. Communion refers to motivational ideas concerning

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[49] Participants responded to the Revised Interpersonal Adjective Scales and Personal Strivings List questionnaire, as well as the two-hour interview adapted from a life-review protocol developed by McAdams.

[50] See Dan McAdams, "What Do We Know When We Know a Person?" *Journal of Personality 63* (1995): 365-396.

[51] Dan McAdams, Barry Hoffman, Elizabeth Mansfield, and Rodney Day. "Themes of agency and communion in significant autobiographical scenes," *Journal of Personality 64* (1996): 339-377. See p. 346.

interpersonal connections such as "love, friendship, intimacy, sharing, belonging, affiliation, merger, union, care, and nurturance." McAdams wrote that at its heart, communion involved "different people coming together in warm, close, caring, and communicative relationships."[52]

Walker and Frimer found that as a group, moral exemplars tended to have stronger motivational themes of both agency and communion. Walker and Frimer concluded that the agency themes probably reflected the fact that their actions required control (willpower), awareness of the self as agent, and a willingness to assume responsibility in the pursuit of one's goals, reflecting a greater sense of personal responsibility. The communal aspects on the other hand, may have indicated the exemplars' focus on helping others, reflecting the importance of moral desires for the exemplars. While both groups of exemplars scored high on these motivational themes in their life-narratives, the caring exemplars scored higher in communal themes than did the brave exemplars.

Centrality of Moral Identity and Moral Motivation

Psychologists Karl Aquino, Americus Reed, Dan Freeman, and Vivien Lim conducted a number of studies created to test the relationship between moral identity, situational factors, and moral behavior and to explain how situational factors and high centrality of moral identity can jointly influence moral behavior.[53] Aquino et al. argue that the claim that situational factors influence behavior is one of the "foundational assumptions of social psychology."[54]

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[52] McAdams et al., "Themes of Agency and Communion," 346.

[53] Karl Aquino, Americus Reed II, Dan Freeman, and Vivien K. G. Lim, "Testing a Social-Cognitive Model of Moral Behavior: the Interactive Influence of Situations and Moral Identity Centrality," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 97,* no.1

Aquino et al. based their studies around Blasi's moral identity model. Since centrality of moral identity is measured by the degree to which a person sees his moral identity as a basis for his or her self-definition, the greater the centrality of the identity, the higher the extent to which a knowledge structure tends to be readily accessible for processing and acting on information. Aquino et al. argue that their studies can show how centrality of moral identity can moderate the influence of situational factors on moral behavior.

Aquino et al. base their studies on three assumptions. The first assumption is that moral identity is a powerful source of moral motivation because people generally desire to maintain self-consistency; thus, someone whose self-identity is organized around moral traits or characteristics should be motivated to behave in a moral manner to maintain this self-identity.[55] The second assumption is that people balance multiple facets of their identities of which only a subset, known as the "working self-identity," can be held in consciousness at any given time. Consequently, the influence of any single facet of identity, including an individual's moral identity, will be a function of how accessible that facet of identity is in any given situation. The third and final assumption is that situational factors may active a person's moral identity, just as they may also activate alternative facets of identity.

Aquino et al. define moral identity as the cognitive schema a person holds about his or her moral character that is stored in memory as a complex knowledge structure consisting of moral values, goals, traits, and behavioral

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(2009): 123-141. Aquino et al., 2009, p. 124, define moral behavior as "actions that demonstrate social responsiveness to the needs and interests of others."

[54] Aquino et al., "Testing a Social-Cognitive Model," 123.

[55] Aquino et al., "Testing a Social-Cognitive Model," 124.

scripts. Since agents acquire knowledge structures through life experiences, and experiences vary from person to person, the centrality or importance of moral identity for an agent's overall self-identity also differs from person to person. Following Blasi's model, Aquino et al. also postulate that for individuals for whom moral identity occupies greater centrality within the global self-identity, being a moral person is perceived as more self-definitional relative to other self-concepts and so is activated more strongly and more frequently than other self-concepts. Aquino et al.'s model assumes that when moral identity is activated it is likelier to influence moral behavior. However, situational factors can affect which self-concept is activated and thus which self-concept will have more influence on moral behavior.

In order to test this hypothesis, Aquino et al. decided to examine the joint influence of 1) situational factors that activate or prime moral identity and 2) centrality of moral identity on the intentions of participants to perform a moral behavior. A major assumption of Aquino et al.'s model is the idea that prosocial or benevolent goals are incompatible with self-interested or financial achievement goals. This suggests that the simultaneous activation of the moral identity and a self-interested facet of identity within the working self-identity might produce conflict in the individual. In order to alleviate this state, people could deactivate one of the incompatible facets of identity.

Moreover, because for people with high centrality of moral identity, moral identity is already active within the working self-identity, Aquino et al. hypothesized that the effects of situational factors priming moral identity (i.e. situational factors that activate moral identity by making it salient in the working

self-concept) should be stronger for individuals for whom moral identity has low centrality.

Aquino et al. examined how trying to recall and then review a list of the Ten Commandments (the moral prime) would influence participants' willingness to initiate a cause-related marketing program that would benefit others at personal cost. The participants were ninety-two undergraduate business students from the University of Delaware who participated for course credit. The study consisted of two parts: an online survey containing a measure of centrality of moral identity (among other demographic measures) taken at least twenty-four hours prior to participation in the experiment, and an in-lab priming experiment. For the in-lab priming experiment the participants had to complete the following study tasks: (a) general knowledge items, (b) measures of the current accessibility of moral identity within the working self-identity, (c) measures of intention to enact a moral behavior, and (d) demographic items. [56] The only difference between the control condition and the prime condition was that participants in the control condition just had to list the five largest cities in the United States, while the ones in the moral prime condition also had to list as many of the Ten Commandments as they could remember.[57]

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[56] Aquino et al., "Testing a Social-Cognitive Model," 124. In order to measure moral identity, Aquino et al. used Aquino and Reed's Internalization subscale. This subscale consists of a list of characteristics that are supposed to capture lay construals of a moral prototype. The participants are asked to think about someone who possesses these traits and then are asked how they feel about those characteristics in relation to themselves. The participants were then asked to rank five items listed in terms of how closely those items were descriptive of them at the time that they were filling out the survey. These items consisted of a variety of identities that might be relevant to a student sample and included "a moral person," "a student," "a successful person," "a family member," and "an independent person" with the item of interest being "a moral person."

[57] Aquino et al., "Testing a Social-Cognitive Model," 127, write that "the use of the Ten Commandments as a moral prime was based on the notion that thinking about the moral principles associated with the commandments should activate morally relevant

Finally, experimenters presented the participants with the following

scenario:

> Please imagine that you are the brand manager for a breakfast cereal company. Recently, you were approached by the American Cancer Society (ACS) to initiate a cause-related marketing program. Specifically, ACS would like you to donate 25 cents to a special fund for cancer prevention each time one of your products is purchased. According to your research department, adoption of the program is likely to cost more than it earns through an incremental sales increase. Consequently, if you choose to initiate the program, you would be less likely to earn a year-end bonus.[58]

The scenario is set up with two competing motives: one moral and the other self-interested. If the brand manager initiates the program, he will be doing the moral thing because his company will be donating 25 cents every time a product is purchased to a worthy cause. On the self-interested side, perhaps it would be wise to initiate the program because other companies that have initiated cause-related marketing have sold more products, thus making more profit (or at least breaking even). However, the research department has discovered that there are likely to be more sales of the product in the future, which means your company will be donating more money over time (since the agreement is that the company will donate money every time a product is purchased). If the company continues to sell more products, eventually the company will be paying out more money than it is earning in profits. You may keep this from the head of the company in order to initiate the cause-related marketing and do a good deed, but eventually when it is noticed that the program costs more than it earns you will feel the consequences of this bad business decision by not receiving a year-end bonus.

knowledge structures in memory, including the moral self-schema, thereby increasing the accessibility of moral identity within the working self-identity."

[58] Aquino et al., "Testing a Social-Cognitive Model," 128.

Participants were asked how likely they would be to choose to initiate the marketing program and how likely they would be to initiate cause-related programs in general.

The effect of the moral prime was stronger on people who had reported having a moral identity that was relatively low in centrality than it was for people whose moral identities were high in centrality. Aquino et al. explain that this is because for the former group, their moral identities were less likely to be accessible within their working self-identity *in absence* of moral primes.

The reverse also held true in Aquino et al.'s second study, where they used the financial incentive of $100 (a self-interest prime) to entice the participants to act in a deceptive manner in order to receive the money. Aquino et al. believe these primes work by making different identities (moral or self-interested) more salient and thus more likely to influence behavior.[59] Aquino et al. found that consistent with their predictions, all participants in the financial incentive condition exhibited a lower level of current accessibility of moral identity than did participants in the control condition. This held true for both participants with low and high centrality of moral identity. The decreased accessibility of moral identity appeared to have resulted from an increase in the accessibility of self-interested facets of identity as, "the average ranking of the clever and pragmatic options provided by [financial] incentive participants was significantly higher than the average ranking provided by [control] participants." Thus, the presence of a financial incentive appears to have increased the accessibility of self-

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[59] Aquino et al., "Testing a Social-Cognitive Model," 138.

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interested facets of identity while also decreasing the accessibility of moral identity.[60]

Whereas in the second study subjects were merely asked about their intention to behave deceptively in order to receive money, in the third study the subjects actually had to negotiate a job salary and engage (or not) in deceptive behavior in order to earn from 50 to 150 dollars. In the third study, the manipulation varied depending on the amount of money the subject could earn. The experimenters randomly assigned two subjects to the role of either job candidate or manager. To create a situation in which participants playing the manager's role would have an opportunity to lie, the instructions for the candidate's role explicitly stated that job stability was an important issue for the candidate and that they should not accept any salary offer from the manager unless they received a verbal guarantee from the manager that they would remain at the same job for at least 2 years. The instructions for the candidate also indicated that the candidate should ask the manager a question regarding job stability at the beginning of the negotiation prior to discussing starting salary. This feature of the simulation forced managers to decide whether to lie about the fact that the job the candidate was applying for would be definitely eliminated in 6 months.[61]

The results of Study 3 were similar to the results of Study 2. The presence of a self-interest-promoting situational factor like a financial incentive increased people's willingness to lie to another person during an actual negotiation, i.e., it decreased the current accessibility of moral identity within the working self-

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[60] Aquino et al., "Testing a Social-Cognitive Model," 130.

[61] Aquino et al., "Testing a Social-Cognitive Model," 132.

concept. Moreover, this effect was more pronounced for participants with higher

as opposed to lower centrality of moral identity (see Figure 2) even though their

moral performance was better than those with low-centrality of identity. For

subjects with lower centrality of moral identity, the financial incentive made little

difference. The number of subjects who engaged in deceptive behavior in the

control condition versus the financial incentive condition was similar whereas for

the subjects with high centrality of moral identity there was a larger variation in

the numbers between the control condition versus the financial incentive
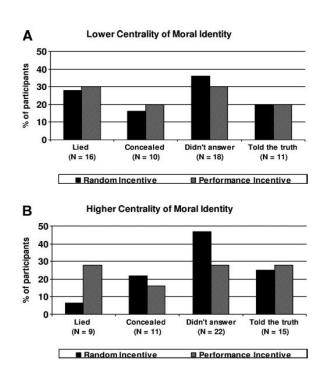
condition.[62]

Figure 2 Number of subjects who lied in experimental versus control condition.
Source: Aquino et al., "Testing a Social-Cognitive Model," 132.

In Aquino et al.'s final study, the subjects were thirty-three undergraduate

business students from the University of Washington. At least 24 hours before

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[62] Aquino et al., "Testing a Social-Cognitive Model," 134 coded concealing the truth and
not answering as somewhat better than lying although not as good as telling the truth.

their experimental session, the subjects had to fill out an online survey including measures of centrality of identity. For the second part of the session, experimenters randomly assigned participants to either the moral prime or control group. Both groups completed what experimenters claimed was a writing task. Experimenters gave the participants a matrix that contained nine words (each of which subjects had to write four times) listed in the first column; in the moral prime condition, the words reflected moral traits whereas in the control condition, the words denoted household items. Afterwards, subjects had to complete a task that included making a series of investment decisions. On each decision trial, every member in a single condition would have to decide whether to allocate 10 points to either a "joint" account or a "personal" account. The points in the personal account would earn no interest but would not be shared, while the points in the joint account would earn interest but would be distributed equally among all members in the condition. Participants had to make 20 decisions divided into five trial blocks. After participants had made decisions during the first trial block, they were informed that most of the other members in their group had opted to invest in the personal account. Subjects were told that this was the case after each trial block.

Results showed that subjects with lower centrality of moral identity who completed the moral priming task initially cooperated more often compared to participants in the control condition. However, as subjects continued to receive feedback about the sustained selfish behavior of other group members, only participants with higher centrality of moral identity reacted to the moral prime in a way that sustained their cooperation in the face of others defection, whereas the moral prime did not have a significant impact on continued cooperation in the

face of others defection for subjects with a lower centrality of moral identity (see
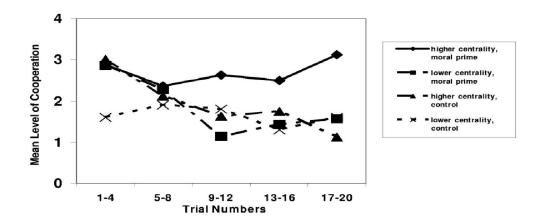Figure 3).

Figure 3 Mean levels of cooperation across trials. Source: Aquino et al., "Testing a
Social-Cognitive Model," 137.

Subjects with high centrality of moral identity initially exhibited higher
levels of cooperative behavior but feedback about the selfish behavior of others
quickly reduced their level of cooperation. Subjects with lower centrality of moral
identity exposed to the moral prime exhibited a similar pattern. Only subjects
with a high centrality of moral identity exposed to a moral prime sustained
cooperative behavior in the face of selfish behavior from others.

Aquino et al.'s study shows a clear relationship between moral identity
and moral behavior. Subjects with higher centrality of moral identity were more
likely to behave morally than were subjects with lower centrality of moral
identity. Moreover, through the use of moral priming, moral identity (or other
self-concepts) can be made salient in the working self-concept and thus more
likely to influence behavior. Finally, Aquino et al.'s fourth study is evidence for
the claim from social-cognitive theory that psychological factors and situational
features interact to motivate and produce behavior. In this case, the self-concept

of moral identity interacted with the situational feature of feedback about the selfishness of others in one's group to produce a particular behavioral response.

Moral Identity and Behavioral Inconsistency

How can someone endorsing Blasi's model explain the lack of cross-situational behavioral consistency exhibited by most individuals? Is endorsing Blasi's model tantamount to asserting that few people care about morality?

Blasi argued that agents with high centrality of moral identity were more likely to display behavioral consistency. Having high centrality of moral identity is correlated with having an undivided moral will, integrity, and responsibility. An agent also needs to have developed willpower and have some kind of moral knowledge. Each of these components requires a number of skills and/or psychological features. Lacking any of these, an agent may fail to behave consistently morally across a number of different situations. Some agents may have low-centrality of moral identity, valuing other things over moral values and defining their self-identity according to those things they value. An agent might lack a strong sense of integrity of responsibility and not feel responsible for making his behavior consistent with his moral values or he may lack any of the skills necessary for willpower. Even some agents that care about behaving consistently with their moral commitments may deceive themselves into believing they are behaving consistently with their moral values if they lack moral knowledge.

One of the components of Blasi's model is integrity, the need for self-consistency, a powerful motivator for most people. Failing to act in accordance with one's values is to act opposed to one's self-identity; the more important

those values are, the more an action opposed to those values will result in having

to update one's self-identity, resulting in feelings of loss of identity.[63]

Psychologists William Swann, Christine Chang-Schneider, and Katie McClarty

point out that individuals are more apt to resist changing beliefs about the

elements of their self-identity that they perceive as highly important to their self-

identity. Moreover, most individuals seek evaluations that confirm their self-

identity (even if the self-identity is negative) and resist challenging feedback that

tells them they are not the kind of persons they believe themselves to be.[64]

Individuals can be motivated to maintain their self-identity by external as well as

[63] Blasi, "Moral functioning." See also Albert Bandura, Claudio Barbaranelli, Gian Vittorio Caprara, and Concetta Pastorelli, "Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement in the Exercise of Moral Agency," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 71,* no. 2 (1996): 364-374; Daniel Batson, Diane Kobrynowicz, Jessica Dinnerstein, Hannah Kampf, and Angela Wilson, "In a Very Different Voice: Unmasking Moral Hypocrisy," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 72,* no. 6 (1997): 1335-1348; William Swann Jr., Christine Chang-Schneider, and Katie Larsen McClarty, "Do People's Self-Views matter? Self-identity and self-esteem in everyday life. *American Psychologist 62,* no. 2 (2007): 84-94; Kristen Monroe Renwick, "Morality and a Sense of Self: the Importance of Identity and Categorization for Moral Action," *Journal of Political Science 45,* no. 3 (2001): 491-507; and James Detert, Linda Klebe Trevino, and Vicki L. Sweitzer, "Moral disengagement in Ethical Decision Making: a Study of Antecedents and Outcomes," *Journal of Applied Psychology 93*, no. 2 (2008): 374-391.

See also David Bersoff, "Why Good People Sometimes Do Bad Things: Motivated Reasoning and Unethical Behavior," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 25,* (1999): 28-39.

David Bersoff postulated that failure to live up to one's self-identity (or at least one aspect of one's self-identity), either in the eyes of others or in one's own eyes leads to diminished self-esteem particularly if that self-identity is highly important. This would mean that for someone with high moral identity centrality, maintaining a view of oneself as a moral person would not only be very important, it would be vital to the maintenance of one's self-esteem. According to Bersoff, "maintenance of self-esteem or self-worth has been characterized as being among the strongest and most persistent of human goals" (p. 28).

While this has clear implications for people whose moral identity is of central importance, Bersoff believes that maintenance of self-esteem includes "sustaining a phenomenal experience of oneself as being moral, good, and stable" not just in the case of people with high moral identity centrality but in general. Although presumably it would be of higher importance to people whose moral identity is more central to their self-identity. (Bersoff, "Why Good People," 24).

[64]Swann Jr. et al., "Do People's Self-view's Matter?" 86.

internal sanctions.[65] Individuals are motivated to maintain their self-identity not only in the eyes of others but also in their own eyes.

However, if self-identity is so important to people and a moral identity is at least of *some* importance to most people, how do we explain how some people freely choose to adopt unethical courses of action because of small situational influences, many times without any apparent resulting guilt or remorse?

Below, I argue that we do not have to accept the claim that most people simply do not care about morality at all because there are a number of psychological mechanisms that may explain how an individual can fail to exhibit cross-situational behavioral consistency in regards to various moral values while still valuing moral values to some extent.

Derailing Moral Identity

Motivated Cognition

One way that an agent can deceive himself into thinking he is not behaving contrary to his moral identity is through motivated cognition. According to psychologist David Bersoff, "a redefinition or distorted construal of an unethical action as being morally acceptable often precedes and fosters decisions to act in an unethical manner among people."[66] This is known as "motivated reasoning" or "motivated cognition." There are a number of mechanisms that can explain how an averagely moral individual (or even an

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[65] See Bersoff, "Why Good People"; David Bersoff, "Explaining Unethical Behavior Among People Motivated to Act Prosocially. *Journal of Moral Education 28,* no. 4 (1999): 414-428; Batson et al., "In a Very Different Voice"; Swann et al., "Do People's Self-Views Matter?"

[66] Bersoff, "Explaining Unethical Behavior," 414. The definition that Bersoff gives of construal is: "the process in which general moral values are brought to bear on specific situations," e.g. self-interest vs. moral values.

individual with somewhat high centrality of moral identity) can use motivated

cognition to commit unethical actions without updating his self-identity.

Neutralization

One type of motivated cognition is "neutralization," or rationalizing one's

unethical behavior as situationally appropriate.[67] An agent erroneously

characterizes his actions as being in accord with his moral identity. There are a

number of different strategies that an agent can use to neutralize an unethical

action such as denying personal responsibility, denying that any harm has been

done, or denying that there is even a victim.

Bersoff conducted a study to see whether people could be "vaccinated"

against neutralization-like reasoning by making moral features of the situation

more salient. The study consisted of 120 college age participants who were

promised a fee of $6.25 for their participation in a psychology experiment

purportedly about cognition. However, when the participants went to receive

their money, the individual handing out the money gave them $8.25 instead.

Bersoff was interested in seeing how many people would return the money and

under what conditions.

In the control condition, the subjects did a number of tasks measuring

memory and learning. In the other five conditions, subjects received what Bersoff

termed "antineutralization manipulations." In one condition, participants were

encouraged to criticize someone else for using neutralizations to justify a

completely unrelated action outside the moral domain. This was to induce the

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[67] He takes this terminology from studies on delinquent youths such as Gresham Sykes and David Matza's, "Techniques of Neutralization," *American Sociological Review 41*, no. 5 (1957): 664-670.

"would-be neutralizers to judge and criticize arguments similar to those they might have been tempted to use themselves, [so that] they should have had a more difficult time using versions of these same neutralizations to justify their own action." In this condition, between the tasks measuring memory and learning the experimenters claimed a distraction task was needed to see if the subjects' memory and learning was increased in the second round versus the first round. The distraction task consisted of a short vignette about a man and woman who worked in the same office. The woman had a crush on a man who obviously had no interest in her. Participants had to evaluate five rationalizations the woman used to justify her belief in the man's interest in her despite the evidence to the contrary. In the second condition, experimenters told subjects that the money they were receiving was being paid out of pocket by a graduate student conducting the research. In the third condition, the individual handing out the money asked the subject if they had received the correct amount instead of just laying out the money on the counter.

Bersoff found that as experimenters increased the antineutralization manipulations one at time, the more likely were people to point out the overpayment. Bersoff proposed that this was because the participants were free to use motivated cognition in the control condition, but each of the manipulations made it harder to construct and accept biased moral acceptable characterizations of keeping the money.[68]

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[68] Bersoff, "Why Good People," 50. Bersoff also points out at the end of the article that another possible for the participants being less and less likely to not point out the overpayment might be that the antineutralizations themselves made the act of not pointing out the overpayment more objectively unethical. However, he points out this could be evidence of motivated cognition. Perhaps it is harder to perform motivated cognition the more objectively unethical an act becomes.

Categorization

      Nina Mazar, On Amir, and Dan Ariely conducted another study on motivated reasoning that showed similar results. Mazar et al. referred to the type of motivated reasoning they were studying as "categorization." According to Mazar et al., categorization works when people categorize their actions into more compatible terms (often non-moral terms) in order to find rationalizations for their actions. For example, if I behave in a way that goes against my moral commitments, I may categorize that action as falling under the social domain (social rules) instead of under the moral domain. Using categorization, people can perform actions they wouldn't ordinarily consider moral, such as cheating, while avoiding any negative self-signals that might affect their self-identity negatively.[69]

      According to Mazar et al., two aspects of categorization determine when an individual can and cannot use it to rationalize their action: its malleability and its limit. Behaviors that have malleable categorization are those that allow people to reinterpret them in a self-serving manner. How malleable the categorization for a certain behavior is depends on the context. Mazar et al. give the example of stealing a pencil worth $.10 from a friend, versus stealing $.10 out of a friend's wallet. The former offers more possibilities to categorize the action in non-moral terms such as terms of friendship like, "He's my friend, this is something friends do," whereas the latter does not. Mazar et al. argue that the higher the malleability, the easier it is to be dishonest without updating the self-identity. Moreover, some actions may be inherently less malleable than others are and

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[69] Because Bersoff's definition of neutralization is so broad (rationalizing one's behavior as situationally appropriate) categorization may in fact be the same mechanism as neutralization, or one of many possible mechanisms an individual can use to achieve neutralization.

cannot be easily categorized, while others still cannot be categorized at all. This is where the idea that categorization has an inherent limit comes in, the idea that one can only "stretch the truth" so far. While this mechanism may help in categorizing minor transgressions of morality, it probably would not be useful for larger transgressions.[70]

Mazar et al. also postulated there is another mechanism that might counteract agents categorizing their non-moral actions into more acceptable terms: how much attention people pay to their own standards of conduct. If people are attentive to their own moral standards, their moral identity is more likely to be salient in their working self-identity (as defined by Aquino and Reed above, this is the subset of self-concepts held in consciousness at any one time) than if they are inattentive to their moral standards. When their moral identity is salient in their working self-concept, people are more likely to update their global self-identity (particularly their moral identity) in response to their actions.

If people are reminded of their own standards of morality (activating the moral identity), then they are less likely to act out of self-interested or other motives because their self-interested identity is not salient. Individuals whose will includes both moral and self-interested desires may be more susceptible to this type of reasoning as there are competing desires within their will. Self-interested self-concepts may be activated and self-interested motives made salient over moral motives. However, perhaps people with high centrality of moral identity may be less likely simply to categorize actions inconsistent with their moral commitments into more acceptable terms than the general

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[70] See Nina Mazar, On Amir, and Dan Ariely, "The Dishonesty of Honest People: a Theory of Self-Concept Maintenance," *American Marketing Association 45,* (2008): 633-644.

population because they have an undivided moral will that includes less (or no) competing desires and a moral identity that is more often salient in their working self-identity.

Moral Disengagement

Psychologist Albert Bandura agrees with the idea that people get themselves to behave according to their moral standards by anticipating positive or negative self-reactions but also argues that these reactions do not influence behavior if not they are not activated in the first place. If acting callously towards someone usually results in a negative self-reaction, the negative self-reaction provides the agent with some motivation not to behave callously. However, if there is a psychological mechanism that can help me behave callously toward someone without generating a negative-self reaction, I may behave callously after all. Moreover, the processes Bandura cites by which self-sanctions can be disengaged can result in unethical behavior ranging from the mundane bad behavior to very injurious behavior including the murder or torture of others.

Bandura describes seven different mechanisms through which disengagement from negative self-reactions can be achieved: moral justification, euphemistic labeling, advantageous comparison, attribution of blame, dehumanization, disregarding or distorting of consequences and displacement or diffusion of responsibility. Moral justification is a process of reconstruing harm to others in ways that make it appear morally justifiable, while euphemistic or morally neutral language is used to make reprehensible conduct seem less harmful or even benign; for example, killing civilians in a war being referred to as "collateral damage" or lying to business competitors being called "strategic

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misrepresentation." Using advantageous comparison, an individual will compare an unethical behavior to even more harmful conduct, thus making the original behavior seem acceptable. With displacement of responsibility, people view their actions as springing from social pressures or the dictates of others rather than something for which they are personally responsible. When individuals disregard or distort consequences or harmful effects of actions, they avoid facing the harm they cause or simply minimize it. Dehumanization involves making victims seem bestial or less than human and attribution of blame means blaming victims for harm that befalls them.[71]

Bandura assumes that all of these mechanisms of moral disengagement work by disengaging self-sanctions. It is possible that processes of moral disengagement work by making other aspects of identity (such as self-interested aspects of identity) salient while suppressing moral identity. The mechanisms themselves can sometimes be triggered or, at least, their use facilitated by various situational factors.

It is not clear whether some individuals are more likely to use moral disengagement mechanisms than others, however, it is possible that individuals that lack personal responsibility, integrity, or an undivided moral will may be more likely to use moral disengagement. Lacking personal responsibility, an agent may blame others for his failure to behave consistent with his moral commitments. An agent may also act out of other competing motives (instead of moral motives) if he has a fragmented moral will that includes competing self-concepts. Finally, an agent may lack the schemas to tell him how to behave consistently with his moral commitments in a particular situation. This may be

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[71] See Bandura et al., "Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement," and Detert et al., "Moral Disengagement in Ethical Decision Making."

due to lack of experience with a particular situation or simply a failure to realize

that he is engaging in self-denial and not behaving consistently with his moral

commitments, which may be due to a failure to reason about how to behave

consistently with one's moral commitments, a failure in moral understanding.

Moral Hypocrisy

According to Blasi's theory, an individual can care somewhat about

morality without necessarily caring too deeply about it. Blasi claimed that

depending on an agent's values, goals, beliefs, etc., moral values might be more or

less important to that agent's self-identity. Not all agents that care about morality

care deeply about it and have a high centrality of moral identity. Some agents

may value moral goals less than others do and may not believe that morality is as

central to their self-identity as others do. How much one cares about morality,

and thus centrality of identity, comes in degrees.

Some agents may only care about appearing moral (in their own eyes and

the eyes of others) without really being so. This may be because their moral

commitments are not central to their global self-identity and so they are merely

preoccupied with keeping up the appearance of being moral for other reasons.

Psychologist Daniel Batson and a group of his colleagues were interested

in discovering how often people were motivated to act morally because of moral

considerations. They wanted to discover whether it was moral hypocrisy or moral

integrity that was really motivating moral behavior. Moral hypocrisy occurs when

an agent convinces himself and others that he is serving principle while actually

serving himself.[72] Moral hypocrisy sometimes involves only the deception of others, while in other cases it involves self-deception as well.

For this study, 80 female general psychology students at University of Kansas were divided across three studies. After filling out questionnaires with measures on justice and relationship-care perspectives and measures of personal responsibility, the subjects were assigned to three studies. In all three studies, the subjects received a written statement telling them to assign a task for themselves and one other person in the study whom they would never actually meet.

In the control task, the subjects were not given any instructions on how to assign the tasks. Most subjects assigned a positive consequences task to themselves and a neutral consequences task to the other person despite only one person saying that this was the most moral way to assign the tasks. For the positive consequences task, the subject would receive a raffle ticket for each correct response while for the neutral consequences task they would not. Moreover, the experimenters told the subjects that most people found the neutral consequences task boring.

In the first variation, experimenters included a coin and an explicit statement that most participants believe that flipping a coin was the most moral/fair way to give each person an equal chance at the positive consequences task. This measure was supposed to bring out the moral nature of the situation and provide participants the opportunity to appear moral without necessarily being so. Experimenters found that ten flipped the coin and ten did not. Of the ten that flipped, only one assigned the positive consequences task to the other person, suggesting people's self-interest still won out. Despite this, six of the

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[72] Batson et al., "In a Very Different Voice," 1336.

people who did not flip said flipping the coin was most morally right and only one person said assigning oneself the positive consequences task was most moral.

In the last variation, another paragraph was added to the statement, informing participants that they could also choose to accept the experimenter's assignment of the tasks. Experimenters randomly assigned some participants the positive consequences task (assigned positive condition), and others the neutral consequences task (assigned neutral condition). The subjects could accept or reject the experimenter's assignment. If the subject rejected the assignment, he could assign himself and the other subject whatever he wanted or flip a coin in order to decide how to assign the tasks. Again, this was to bring out the moral nature of the situation and provide an opportunity to appear moral without being so. In the assigned positive condition, seventeen of the twenty subjects accepted the experimenter's assignment. In the assigned neutral condition, eleven of the twenty subjects accepted the assignment, while the other nine subjects rejected the assignment. Of those nine subjects, six flipped a coin but still assigned themselves the positive consequences task (considering this is more than chance, some of them appear to have done so for the sake of continuing to appear moral) and three just assigned themselves the positive consequences task. This was despite none of the subjects having said that assigning the positive consequences task to oneself was the most moral.

Batson et al. concluded that if one's ultimate goal is to uphold moral principle, then having the opportunity to appear moral without having to incur any cost should not affect one's behavior because the appearance of morality without the costly outcome does not reach the goal of upholding moral principle. However, if one's ultimate goal is merely to gain the self-benefit of appearing

moral while, if possible, not incurring any personal cost (i.e. moral hypocrisy) then having this opportunity should affect one's behavior. Batson et al. concluded that many people may engage in moral hypocrisy (at least, for situations where the consequences of not doing the moral thing are trivial).

Batson et al.'s results may show that many individuals are in fact only interested in merely appearing to behave morally while failing to do so (at least in situations where the consequences of not behaving morally are minimal). However, it is unclear whether the subjects in this study engaged in self-deception or merely in deceiving others.

Conclusion

I have argued that social cognitive theory provides a better personality structure for grounding a normative theory of character that meets the requirements of psychological realism because unlike trait theory, social cognitive theory is useful for mapping out the psychological structure of particular individuals. Walter Mischel's framework depicts a more realistic conception of personality that can help ground such a theory. Mischel proposed a theory of personality that incorporates patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behavior, construal, and the beliefs, expectancies, goals, and self-regulatory competencies that become "activated within the individual in the continuous stream of interactions with situations" into the personality framework.[73] Rather than trying to determine whether the situation or the psychological factors of a particular

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[73] Mischel, "Toward an Integrative Science of the Person," 4. Self-regulatory competencies refer to control mechanisms that operate in response to social sanctions or self-reactive influence. The major self-regulatory mechanism operates through self-monitoring of conduct, judgment of conduct in relation to personal standards and environmental circumstances and affective self-reaction (the emotion an individual feels in response his own conduct). (See Bandura,"Social Cognitive Theory of Moral Thought," 68.)

individual determined behavior, Mischel's framework assumes that behavior stems from both, particularly the interaction of individual psychological factors with particular situational features. In the next chapter, I outline a theory of character grounded in Mischel's framework for personality.

Moreover, I also argued that Blasi's theory of moral identity provides the possible necessary components for moral character. Blasi theorized that moral identity was just one possible self-concept (among many others) that can become activated by situational features. According to Blasi, moral identity requires integrity, moral desires, and moral will and a number of skills and psychological features make up each of these components. Blasi argues that moral identity helps motivate moral behavior. There is evidence for Blasi's theory in studies on moral exemplars, studies on the influence of moral identity on moral behavior, and even studies on psychological mechanisms for self-deception. In the next chapter, I specify the necessary components of a specifically moral character based in Blasi's theory of moral identity.

Finally, I argued that in order to support Blasi's theory of moral identity we need not accept the conclusion that few people care about morality although we may have to accept the conclusion that few people care *deeply* about morality. There are several psychological mechanisms that agents with lower degrees of centrality of moral identity can use to avoid updating their global self-identity after behaving in a way opposed to their moral commitments. Moreover, as Blasi argued, moral identity is less central to the global self-concept of some individuals than it is in others so that moral concerns and commitments are simply less likely to motivate the behavior of some individuals compared to others.

Chapter 7

NON-IDEAL VIRTUE AND A SCALAR THEORY OF CHARACTER

In this chapter, I formulate a theory of character and a non-ideal theory of virtue based mostly in social cognitive conceptions of character. In Chapter 5, I argued that the strongest response to the situationist critique comes from the argument from psychological factors. However, the argument from psychological factors describes a conception of virtue that is no longer quite Aristotelian. In Chapter 6, I argued that social cognitive theory provides a better personality structure for grounding a normative theory of character that meets the requirements of psychological realism. I also argued that Augusto Blasi's theory of moral identity provides us with some of the possible necessary components for a theory of virtue.

In this chapter, I formulate a scalar conception of character grounded in social-cognitive theory (particularly Mischel's CAPS theory) and traditional trait theory. I argue that because there are multiple aims in character attribution, a theory of character that meets those multiple goals has a place for both trait theory and social-cognitive theory.

I also formulate a theory of virtue grounded in a scalar conception of character and based partially on Aristotelian trait theory and partially on Blasi's theory of moral identity. I argue that virtue comes in degrees and that when we talk about virtue, we are usually talking about one of two things: virtue that is normatively but not empirically adequate and virtue that is both normatively and empirically adequate. The first type, ideal virtue, is a description of perfect virtue at the highest end of the virtue scale and thus cannot describe the type of virtue

that imperfect agents actually have. The second type, non-ideal virtue, is a description of virtue somewhere between the high and low end of the virtue scale that is imperfect and somewhat frail to circumstance and luck but is a more accurate description of the type of virtue that agents actually have.

A Scalar Conception of Character

Social-cognitive theory and Trait Theory

Psychologists have lately contrasted the social-cognitive model of personality to the trait model of personality. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the trait model of personality measures individuals on different personality dimensions, usually as compared to other people, while the social-cognitive model of personality charts the particular personality structures of an individual as defined by the interaction of the individual's psychological factors with his environment.

However, psychologists Daniel Lapsley and Patrick Hill argue that these two approaches might be complementary and mutually informative, as well as capable of integration.[1] Each approach to personality seems best suited for a different goal. Trait theory seems useful for studying the differences in traits between individuals. For example, trait theory would be useful for determining how compassionate Matt is when compared to Alan. This might tell me whether Matt or Alan is more likely to act compassionately in any given situation, although my estimation of which of the two men is more likely to display compassion is based on mere probability. If I find that Alan is generally more

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[1] Daniel Lapsley and Patrick Hill, "The Development of the Moral Personality," in *Personality, Identity, and Character: Explorations in Moral Psychology*, eds. Darcia Narvaez and Daniel Lapsley (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 185-213.

compassionate, I might guess that Alan is more likely than Matt to act

compassionately in a particular situation. However, if I am interested in making

an accurate prediction about Alan's compassionate behavior in a particular

situation, I have to know more about his particular personality structure, not just

how he compares to others. Following social-cognitive theory, I would have to

know a little about Alan's CAU's. Why does Alan construe situations the way he

does? What sort of situational factors usually activate his sense of compassion?

Trait theory is not useful for accurate prediction of behavior or even for

understanding the particular behavior of an individual. Trait theory gives us a

general picture of the personality of an individual, while social-cognitive theory

maps out the particular details of an individual's personality.

The Goals of Character Attribution

Just as there are multiple aims in personality theory, if we reflect on the

goals of character attribution, we realize there are multiple aims in character

attribution. Some of the traditional aims of character attribution are the

explanation and prediction of behavior, communication and collection of

information, and moral appraisal and judgment.

One of the aims of character attribution is explanation and prediction of

behavior. For example, if I want to explain why Matt acts the way he does, I may

turn to his character for an explanation. Suppose I notice that Matt never goes

out to lunch with his coworkers. Perhaps, I have also noticed that Matt speaks

very quietly and seems to embarrass quickly. He rarely speaks to his coworkers

unless spoken to yet he generally seems considerate and kind. I conclude that

Matt is not arrogant or antisocial but merely shy. If one of Matt's coworkers were

to ask me why Matt never eats lunch with anyone, I may cite one of Matt's character traits as an explanation. Moreover, if I have known Matt a long time and know that he is somewhat shy, I may be able to make some predictions about his behavior in future situations.

We also use character attribution to divulge and collect information about others. In the previous example, I communicated Matt's shyness to one of his coworkers as an explanation of his behavior. His coworker in turn is collecting information from me about Matt, perhaps not just in order to understand him better, but also so that she can decide how to act towards Matt in the future. Perhaps Matt's coworker in interested in pursuing a friendship with Matt but will decide whether to do so based on the information she learns about Matt.

Finally, we also use character attribution for the purposes of moral appraisal and judgment. If I say of Alan that he is kind, then I am attributing a certain type of moral character trait to him that entails certain expectations about how Alan will think and behave. Character traits are generally defined and restricted by a particular set of beliefs, values, and behaviors. The range of acceptable behavioral or psychological dispositions may widen or narrow depending on the particular trait in question, but for every trait there are psychological dispositions and behaviors that fall outside the acceptable range. For example, if I have attributed a character trait of kindness to Alan, I do not expect that he would kick small animals or refrain from giving someone thirsty something to drink for his own amusement.

Considering we use character attributions to satisfy a number of different aims, the structure of character should reflect the different aims of character attribution. Above I named three different aims that fit roughly into two

categories, prescriptive and descriptive. The primary intent of explanation, prediction, and communication and collection of information is to give or receive a description of someone's character. Meanwhile, limitations on the types of psychological and behavioral dispositions that characterize a particular trait are implied in evaluation and judgment.

I propose a scalar structure of character that satisfies both the descriptive and prescriptive aims of character attribution by including both conditional and Aristotelian (or robust) traits that reflect the social-cognitive and trait approaches from personality theory.[2] Conditional traits are mostly useful for fulfilling the descriptive aims of character attribution. Robust traits are useful for fulfilling prescriptive aims of character attribution as well as some cases of communication and collection of information.

Robust traits

Robust traits track the trait theory approach in personality theory and are useful for defining and limiting the types of behaviors, beliefs, values, goals, motivations, etc., that fall within the purview of a particular trait for the purposes of moral appraisal and judgment or when making broad character descriptions in conversation.

Robust traits provide a paradigmatic framework against which to evaluate conditional traits. A robust trait is cross-situationally consistent and includes all the definitive characteristics of a particular trait. So for example, the definition of a robust trait of compassion might be something like: the psychological and behavioral disposition to perform beneficent actions in *each and every* situation

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[2] Although I am borrowing John Doris's term "robust traits," my definition of robust traits is not exactly the same as Doris's.

in which beneficent actions should be performed. This description includes having CAU's consistent with compassion, moral understanding, an undivided moral will, integrity, and responsibility. So for example, a person possessing a robust trait of compassion would have goals and values consistent with compassion, would have emotions and affective responses consistent with compassion (likely sympathy and/or empathy), would understand what compassion required of him in each and every situation, would believe and expect that his actions would be effectual and would benefit other people, would have the self-regulatory mechanisms necessary to go through with his decision to behave compassionate, etc. The robust trait of compassion sets the standard for the *ideal* psychological and behavioral dispositions of an agent possessing that particular trait to the highest degree. A robust trait of compassion is a model of the psychological and behavioral dispositions of an agent possessing a *perfect* trait of compassion. An agent possessing a robust trait would never fail to act compassionately (and/or would never fail to have the right sort of psychological dispositions relevant to compassion) in all situations in which compassion was required. Obviously, the consistency requirements of psychological and behavioral dispositions relevant to compassion are extremely high, improbable for most agents.

However, robust traits are merely ideal models setting a standard for the perfect possession of a trait, not an accurate description of the character traits of actual agents. For comparison, in trait theory in psychology, trait theorists do not expect that subjects will score one hundred percent in any of the traits that are usually measured. As mentioned earlier, the assumption of trait theory is that everyone has every (or most) trait(s) and an individual personality is made up of

the degrees to which an individual has each of the traits. Robust traits merely set the high standard against which actual performance is measured.

There is a difference between what robust traits actually are and the way in which we use the language of robust traits. Although robust traits refer to the highest degree possible of a particular trait, in common parlance, we also use the language of robust traits when communicating appraisal or judgment of character. For example, I may claim that my friend Alan is compassionate, making a judgment about his character. I am saying that Alan has the type of psychological or behavioral dispositions that characterize the trait of compassion.

Considering the definition given above of robust traits and the fact that we often seem to use robust character traits to describe people, does that mean that when we attribute a certain character trait to an agent we are claiming that the agent possesses a robust character trait? When I attribute a particular trait to an agent, do I believe they will never fail to have the correct psychological and behavioral dispositions that characterize that trait? If I call Matt "friendly," do I mean that he is friendly on every occasion and would *never* fail to be friendly? Surely not. As it is often said, humans are not perfect. Instead, I am making a sort of judgment about the likelihood of that Matt will be friendly or that Alan will be compassionate. I am claiming that they are more likely than not to behave according to the trait I use to describe them. Perhaps I make this judgment as a sort of comparison such as "Alan is compassionate when compared to other people" or "on the whole, Alan is more compassionate than others."[3]

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[3] Moreover, when I make a general character appraisal such as "Alan has a good character," I would usually justify that appraisal in terms of the types of traits that Alan possesses (and whether those traits are positively or negatively valenced). For example, if I say of an agent that he has "good character" or is a "good person," I may justify this general appraisal of the agent's character by giving a list of positively valenced traits such as compassion, kindness, bravery, etc. If I were to describe Alan as lazy, mean, or petty, I

The language of robust traits provides us with a way to give a broader description about the behavioral dispositions of a particular agent. Robust traits are useful when trying to describe how *likely* an agent is to display behavior relevant to some trait *x* in a situation that elicits *x* relevant behavior or, alternately, how likely that agent is to display *x* relevant behavior in any given situation *as compared to others in a population*. When I describe Matt as being "friendly," I may merely mean that Matt is friendly when compared to other people or that he is more likely to be friendly than not. I may be evaluating Matt's possession of the behavioral and psychological dispositions that characterize friendliness and making the judgment based on this information of the degree to which Matt has the trait of friendliness. Even if I know that Matt is not very friendly when in a large group of strangers, I may mean merely that Matt is friendlier than others are or that he is friendly most of the time. Perhaps I am merely comparing the degree to which Matt possesses the trait when compared to other people. Matt seems to possess the trait to a higher degree when compared to his peers because he values friendliness and seems to act friendly in a greater number of circumstances than his peers do. I may also describe him as such merely to save time in my description or even out of a sense of discretion for his sake.[4]

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would seem to be implying that Alan has a bad character. I rarely describe someone as "friendly but only in situations of x, y, and z types." I merely say of someone that he is "friendly" or "compassionate" or "brave."

[4] Philosophers Rachana Kamtekar and Owen Flanagan have argued that trait terms like "helpful" or "honest" are economical from the point of view of communication and information processing and storage.. See Rachana Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of our Character." *Ethics* 114, no. 3 (April 2004): 468-9, 478; Owen Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological Realism* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991), 299.

The language of robust traits is economical for communication and useful for information processing in day-to-day contexts when extra information will not be useful. For example, suppose my friend Matt is supposed to come to my office to pick me for lunch. While I am waiting for him in the lobby, I run into one of my coworkers, Mary, and ask her how she's doing. When Matt shows up, I introduce the two before going off to lunch with Matt. Later, in talking about Mary to Matt, I describe her as "helpful" despite being aware that Mary is helpful to people she knows but is also rather shy around strangers and not quite as helpful in situations with them. When I say, "Mary is helpful," I am fully aware that Mary is not *always* helpful. I do not suddenly expect that Mary will be helpful in situations involving strangers. However, since Mary is helpful for the most part, and since it is likely Matt will never see Mary again anyway, there seems to be no reason to mention how Mary's shyness overcomes her helpfulness around strangers. Calling Mary helpful is an economical way to communicate that Mary is *often* helpful and has certainly been helpful to me in the past. I do not have to go into elaborate details about when Mary acts helpfully and when she does not. Moreover, perhaps I feel it unnecessary and indiscreet to tell Matt about Mary's shyness. Since the information will be of no use to him and may be embarrassing to Mary, I may withhold that information out of a sense of discretion.

However, since Matt lacks any personal or contextual information, he will probably understand "helpful" to mean that Mary is helpful all or most of the time. This is the default meaning of the concept. We assume this minimal or "default" meaning of trait terms is implied when we lack other information. Since Matt understood helpful to mean possessing the robust trait of helpfulness,

lacking other information that I withheld, he might be surprised at Mary's behavior if he ever runs into Mary in a situation where her shyness overcomes her helpfulness. Matt does not know that Mary is not helpful when she feels shy and that she feels shy in particular situations. My robust trait description does not help Matt understand why Mary is not helpful in a particular situation. Nor would it help him to predict how Mary would act in any single situation where helpfulness was required. Because robust trait descriptions are not highly specific or accurate, they are not as useful in helping to understand a particular individual's behavioral or psychological dispositions or in helping with the prediction of future behavior.

Conditional Traits

Conditional traits track the social-cognitive approach and are useful for compiling (or communicating) a more accurate description of the character of a particular agent. Conditional traits can help us explain and predict individual behaviors with greater accuracy. Moreover, conditional traits provide us with a more accurate description about the behavioral dispositions of a particular agent. Whereas robust traits indicate the highest degree of a possible trait that an agent can develop, conditional traits indicate that an agent has only developed a particular trait to a lesser degree than a robust trait because he has only developed part of the components of that trait.

This approach to character increases our accuracy in predicting the behavior of an individual, even in a particular circumstance, by providing us with a richer understanding of the goals, beliefs, values, and motivation of that particular individual. By understanding the psychological factors and history that

contributed to that individual's particular construal of different situations, we can truly come to understand his character. If we understand how an individual construes specific situations and what kinds of situational factors activate different psychological factors, we can be more successful in predicting how that individual will act in a particular situation.

However, actually acquiring all the information necessary for this level of accuracy in every situation requires a great amount of knowledge of the psychological factors of the individual, including how he perceives the world and why he perceives the world that way, and this sort of knowledge could take years to discover. One could only gain this sort of information about another agent through years of friendship or some other close relationship with that agent. At the very least, one would need to do a longitudinal study of the individual's behavior to detect patterns in his behavior from situation to situation. While it is not impossible to acquire this information, it is more information than one is likely to acquire from merely observing the individual's behavior in one or two cases.

If we want to map the particular character of a single individual, we would use the social-cognitive approach to do so, parceling out conditional traits for a particular individual according to psychological situations. So for example, we might note that Jones is friendly in situations that he finds familiar (in Jones's case, "familiar" situations are those that he has had experience with before) but also withdrawn and unresponsive in situations that he finds unfamiliar. Jones is also friendly in situations with small groups of people but not in situations with large groups of people. Perhaps Jones lacks courage or social skills, or he only believes in being friendly with people he is familiar with, and this hinders him

from being friendly in some situations. The more we know about Jones's beliefs, values, goals, motivations, etc., the more we can understand his character.

Conditional traits are also useful for communication and collection of more accurate information about character and behavior. As I mentioned in the previous section, robust traits are useful for broad descriptions of character in a variety of situations where detailed descriptions are either not possible, not necessary, or are simply indiscreet. Conditional traits describe specific pairings of an agent's psychological factors with specific situational influences, so conditional traits are useful for determining the cause of an agent's behavior and predicting future behavior. If I wanted to communicate information about an agent's character that was specific to a certain type of situation (e.g. at office parties), then I would use conditional traits to do so. I could say for example, "Jones is distant and unapproachable at parties." If I knew Jones well enough to have discovered the cause of his behavior I might add, "Jones doesn't feel comfortable being around that many people at once, so he gets irritable and/or disoriented" or something more general like, "Jones is uncomfortable around large groups of people." If I want to be able to understand and predict Jones's future behavior at office parties, I could pay special attention to his behavior at office parties and perhaps even ask Jones about past experiences at office parties in order to gain a deeper understanding of his behavior and character.

In the next section, I formulate a theory of virtue grounded in a scalar conception of character that is both normatively and empirically adequate. I argue for a theory of virtue by degrees and maintain that social responsibility, moral identity, and practical wisdom are crucial in the development of stronger forms of virtue.

A Non-Ideal Theory of Virtue

The premise that grounds the situationist critique of virtue theory is the assumption that if traditional virtue theory is grounded in a particular conception of character, character traits according to that theory must resemble the structure of a virtue, being cross-situationally consistent and displayed even in diagnostic situations (what Doris termed a robust trait). If virtues are just a type of robust character trait and people do not generally have robust character traits, then they also cannot have the virtues. This assumes that robust character traits are descriptive; that they are an accurate description of the types of character traits that individuals can and do have. However, I have argued that robust traits are not descriptive, but rather prescriptive. Robust traits are only used descriptively as a sort of shorthand way of stating that a particular individual is more or less likely than his peers to show behavior relevant to that particular trait but we generally do not assume that most people actually have robust traits.

Just as there are two types of traits to satisfy different goals, there are two different ways that we talk about virtue that meets two different purposes. I begin from the claim that virtue comes in degrees. I argue that this is so because agents generally develop virtue slowly over the course of time and experience and since virtue requires a variety of components, an agent may have developed a few (but not all) of these and thus still have *some* virtue.

There are two basic "types" of virtue that track the ways in which we talk about virtue: ideal virtue and non-ideal virtue. Ideal virtue is a description of the highest degree of virtue, while non-ideal virtue is a description of any type of virtue that is not ideal virtue. Ideal virtue is primarily normative and prescriptive but not empirically adequate. An agent with ideal virtue will have all of the goals,

beliefs, and values consistent with each virtue (i.e., he will have developed all of the virtues robustly) and will exhibit cross-situationally consistent behavior. Moreover, an agent with ideal virtue will not be dependent on his social networks in order to maintain his virtue, as he will have developed the cognitive abilities necessary to make his behavior consistent with his moral commitments. Non-ideal virtue is both empirically and normatively adequate, although flawed and not ideal. Non-ideal virtue is supposed to describe the type of virtue that agents actually have. An agent with non-ideal virtue might have fully developed some virtues but not others (some virtues may be robust while others are merely conditional or even non-existent) or he may have developed only *some* of the goals, beliefs, and values consistent with each virtue. He is not likely to exhibit cross-situationally consistent behavior, especially for all of the virtues. Agents with non-ideal virtue may be more dependent on their social networks to help them maintain their virtue. For this reason, non-ideal virtue is frail, susceptible to circumstance and luck.

<div align="center">Developing Virtue</div>

One of the reasons I argue that virtue comes in degrees and that there are two distinct types of virtues is because of the way people actually develop virtue and character in general. Most people begin by acquiring conditional traits, or conditional virtues, and displaying trait-relevant behavior in only some situations where such behavior is called for without displaying it in all situations.

Conditional virtues are similar to what Robert Adams refers to as "modules of virtue."[5]

Conditional virtues have only been developed in reference to certain situations but not others, so an agent may display a particular virtue in only some situations but not others because of the way that he construes those situations. An agent may construe situations x and y in a similar way while construing situation z to be markedly different and so requiring different behavior from what he would display in x and y. The agent may have a different perception of the three situations merely because he has not had enough experience with situation z to notice how the situational features that make it similar to situations x and y or he may lack the goals, beliefs, values, or critical thinking skills to attempt to generalize from situations x and y to other situations.

For example, suppose that Jones had a rough childhood that taught him to be distrustful of both his parents and his peers. Consequently, Jones has a hard time feeling empathy for others and this keeps him from feeling or acting kindly toward others. Jones is deeply distrustful of others and is rude and disrespectful towards most people. However, Jones is surprisingly polite and respectful towards individuals working in supermarkets. This is only so, however, because after having worked at a supermarket himself and having the good fortune of being treated with dignity and respect by his superiors and his peers there, he comes to have the belief that people who work in supermarkets are "good people" and "worthy of trust."

Jones has learned to be genuinely respectful of workers at supermarkets. Unfortunately, he has not learned to generalize his behavior to include other

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[5] Robert Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being **for** the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 125-130.

people in other sorts of situations. Jones may still be blameworthy for having failed to generalize across situations, but he at least has a module of the virtue of respect in his respect toward workers in supermarkets.

Suppose that Jones later acquires another module of the virtue of respect by learning to respect those that work at other types of shops, even if he is still distrustful and disrespectful of others in other situations. Jones may eventually learn to respect people in all kinds of contexts by slowly acquiring modules of virtues contextualized by types of situation. The more modules pertaining to the virtue of respect that Jones acquires, the more likely he is to display that virtue in any particular situation and so acquire a more robust virtue of respect.

Agents acquire various traits or virtues over time depending on factors like their upbringing, their environment, their social networks and influences, and the goals, beliefs, and values that they develop. Moreover, as I argue below, in order to develop and maintain virtue, agents require a variety of skills that enable them to learn from their experiences (or the experiences of others) and deliberate on how to behave consistently with their moral commitments as well as other abilities that help them to behave consistently with their moral commitments.

Ideal Virtue

Just as robust traits set the ideal standard for particular traits, ideal virtue sets the ideal standard for virtue. Ideal virtue is a standard against which to measure lesser degrees of virtue. Agents with ideal virtue are not dependent on their social networks in order to maintain their virtue, exhibit behavioral

consistency across all (or at least most) situations, and have the ability to behave consistently with virtue even in psychologically strong situations.

I have argued that virtue comes in degrees and that ideal virtue sets the standard against which we can measure lesser degrees of virtue. Ideal virtue requires that an agent has fully developed all of the virtues. An agent must develop all of the virtues and he must develop all of them robustly.[6] An agent that has developed half (or even most) of the virtues robustly does not have ideal virtue, nor does an agent who has developed all of the virtues if the virtues are not robust. Rather than ideal virtue being on a single scale, we might measure the degree to which an agent has developed each of the virtues on one scale for each virtue, and how many of the virtues he has developed on a separate scale. An agent will have ideal virtue only if he has developed each of the virtues to the highest degree. If the agent lacks one of the virtues, then he has non-ideal virtue to some degree.

Structural and Motivational Virtues

First, I need to discuss an important distinction made by some philosophers and psychologists: the distinction between structural and motivational virtues.[7]

According to philosopher Robert Roberts, there are essentially two types of virtues: substantive virtues and virtues of willpower. According to Roberts,

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[6] As I mentioned in the previous section, robust virtues are fully developed virtues. In order for an agent to have a robust virtue he must have developed all of the psychological and behavioral dispositions consistent with that virtue to the highest degree.

[7] See Robert Roberts, "Willpower and the Virtues," *Philosophical Review 93*, no. 2 (1984): 227-47; Augusto Blasi "Moral Character" in *Character Psychology and Character Education,* eds. Daniel Lapsley and Clark Power (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 67-100; and Robert Adams, A theory of Virtue, 33-4.

substantive virtues are "the psychological embodiment of ethical rules—the substance of the ethical patterns of behavior and judgment and emotion" while virtues of willpower are "the capacities by which a person copes with…trials in the interest of the moral and prudential life."[8] Roberts argued that courage, patience, and self-control were virtues of willpower because they could be used in the service of good as well as evil ends.

Robert Adams makes a similar distinction. Adams defines structural virtues as "structural features of the way one organizes and manages whatever motives one has," along similar lines as Roberts's virtues of willpower.[9] Adams argues that the excellence of structural virtues is the ability and willingness to govern one's behavior in accordance with one's values, commitments, and ends. He contrasts this with "motivational virtues" (similar to Roberts's substantive virtues), which are defined by "motives which in turn are defined by goods that one is for in having them, as benevolence, for example, is defined by the motive of desiring or willing the good of others."[10]

Augusto Blasi makes a distinction between "specific traits," or "lower-order virtues," and "general traits," or "higher-order virtues," corresponding with the distinctions between motivational and structural virtues above. Higher-order virtues provide the "motivational underpinning, the stability and generality of character traits" while lower-order virtues provide "the moral meanings" (see Figure 1 below).[11] To explain what he means, Blasi gives the example of the

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[8] Roberts, "Will Power and the Virtues," 227.

[9] Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 33.

[10] Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 33-37, 133, 136-8.

[11] Blasi, "Moral Character," 70.

exercise of truthfulness (lower-order virtue), particularly in situations of conflict. According to Blasi, exercising truthfulness in situations of conflict may require determination, willpower, self-control, independence from social pressure, or integrity (higher-order virtues) as well as the motivation to be truthful (a lower order virtue). Lower-order virtues seem to require at least one or another of the higher-order virtues in order to have stability and motivational strength. Blasi presents the following list (see Table 3):

Table 3 Higher-order versus lower-order virtues.

Lower-order virtues		Higher-order virtues	
		Will Cluster	*Integrity cluster*
Empathy	Obedience	Perseverance	Responsibility
Compassion	Law-abidingness	Determination	Accountability
Politeness	Civic-mindedness	Self-discipline	Self-consistency
Respectfulness	Honesty	Self-control	Sincerity
Thoughtfulness	Conscientiousness	Willpower	Integrity
Kindness	Truthfulness		Principledness
Generosity	Fairness		Transparency of
Altruism	Justice		Oneself
Friendship	Courage		Honesty with
Loyalty	Humility		Oneself
			Autonomy

Source: Blasi, "Moral Character," 71.

He then divides the higher order virtues into two categories, those that form a network around the concept of willpower (such as determination, self-control, resistance to temptation, and perseverance) and those that form a network around the concept of integrity, or the tendency to maintain a high degree of internal self-consistency. In this category, he places self-consistency, being a person of one's word, autonomy of thinking, and independence in action and thought (autonomy).[12]

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[12] Blasi actually includes responsibility as a part of integrity. I list it as a separate component of virtue because of its importance to behaving consistently with virtue and

As mentioned in Chapter 6, Blasi notes that willpower and integrity are not necessarily moral traits on their own. Willpower is a system of self-regulation and as such is not inherently moral, although it is necessary to maintain behavioral consistency. However, willpower can also be used to carry out pragmatic or evil goals. As for integrity, Blasi defines it as a "person's serious concern for the unity of his or her subjective sense of self, as manifested in consistency with one's chosen commitments."[13] It is a result of a conscious concern about and intentional care to avoid contradictions between what we say and do and those commitments on which we have constructed our self-identity. Integrity, like willpower can be used for good as well as evil purposes, depending on the will of the agent.

Although the terminology and definitions differ somewhat, the basic idea is the same: some virtues are inherently moral while some are not. Motivational virtues are inherently moral, providing moral meanings, motivation, and the substance of the moral good, while structural virtues are not inherently moral but are necessary to help ensure that the agent behaves consistently with the motivational virtues.

The Structure of Ideal Virtue

I argue for a structure of ideal virtue grounded in a scalar theory of character, and borrows from both Blasi's theory of moral identity and the traditional conception of character.

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because I believe it includes a number of abilities and skills related, but not identical to, those necessary for integrity.

[13] Blasi, "Moral Character," 90.

Ideal virtue requires that an agent has developed: 1) an undivided moral will (beliefs, values, emotions, and goals consistent with all of the virtues), 2) high centrality of moral identity, 3) practical deliberation (or the ability to deliberate well about what certain traits or virtues require and how to make one's actions consistent with one's moral commitments, 4) integrity, 5) autonomy in thought and behavior, 6) self-transparency, 7) willpower (self-regulatory mechanisms), and 8) a strong sense of personal responsibility (this includes expectancies or beliefs about one's self-efficacy). An agent with ideal virtue will also need a lifetime of experiences in order to have formed the schemas (or encodings in Mischel's terms) that would help him know how to behave consistently with his moral commitments across different situations. The components of ideal virtue can be broken up roughly into 1) motivational virtues: including the goals, values, feelings, and desires that motivate the moral will, high centrality of moral identity, and 2) structural virtues: including practical deliberation, integrity, willpower, autonomy, self-transparency, and personal responsibility.

Moral will

An agent with ideal virtue must have a will that includes beliefs, emotions, goals, and values consistent with the virtues.[14] He must have both first and second order desires consistent with the virtues while lacking competing desires (or competing desires important enough to his self-identity that they can overwhelm moral desires). This first component tracks Augusto Blasi's idea of an undivided moral will and, to a lesser extent, Aristotle's idea of the moral virtues (training our desires to want what is morally good). The goals, values, beliefs, and

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[14] I will not speculate on which motivational virtues belong in this category.

emotions that make up the moral will motivate the agent to behave consistently with the moral good. For example, an agent that believes compassion is good, values compassion, has emotions consistent with compassion (such as sympathy or empathy), and desires to behave compassionately is motivated to behave compassionately. Moreover, having a moral will motivates the agent to behave consistently with the virtues *for the right reasons*. Even if an agent behaves consistently with all of the virtues, if he does so for his own selfish reasons or other reasons not consistent with the virtues, then he is not actually virtuous at all.

High centrality of moral identity

An agent with ideal virtue will also feel that those goals, beliefs, values, and desires are an important part of his self-identity. This second component tracks Augusto Blasi's idea of centrality of moral identity. An agent with an undivided moral will is likely to have high centrality of moral identity because moral desires are very important to him. High centrality of moral identity provides the agent with some additional motivation to behave consistently with his moral desires because developing high centrality of moral identity usually is correlated with the development of integrity and responsibility.

High centrality of moral identity is an important part of ideal virtue because, according to Blasi, when an agent's moral identity has high centrality in his global self-identity, that agent's *moral* values, beliefs, and desires are central to that individual's concept of self-identity so his moral values, beliefs, etc., are more likely to motivate him than other competing desires. If the agent's moral identity is not as important to him as other self-concepts (such as self-interested

self-concepts), then he may be motivated to behave in ways inconsistent with his moral will because his moral identity is not salient in his working self-identity when necessary (or because it is deactivated by the presence of a self-interested self-concept). According to Aquino and Reed's experiments, subjects with higher centrality of moral identity were more likely to exhibit behavior consistent with moral commitments than were subjects with lower centrality of moral identity.

Integrity

If certain values are central to an agent's self-identity, the agent is also likely to develop integrity, or serious concern for behaving consistently with his moral will. A betrayal of those moral desires would be like a betrayal of the self. The purpose of this component is to give the agent extra motivation to behave consistently with his moral will. According to Blasi, integrity is not necessarily a moral virtue because an agent need not have a moral will at all to have integrity. An agent with a will that is not moral can also have serious concern for behaving consistently with his will. Integrity is a structural virtue and is part of moral character only when an agent's will is fully (or partially) moral.

According to Blasi, integrity actually includes a number of different smaller virtues, including autonomy (of thought and behavior) and the ability to be honest with oneself about one's motives. These two virtues are especially important considering some of the social-psychology literature I have discussed in previous chapters. Due to their importance in maintaining virtue, I list these two as individual virtues separate from integrity.

Autonomy

If an agent has beliefs, goals, emotions, and values consistent with a certain virtue, then he needs to develop autonomy in thought and behavior to ensure that he behaves consistently with those beliefs, goals, etc., instead of giving in to the temptation to conform socially. Autonomy is important because of the problem of social influences I discussed in Chapter 5. I argued that succumbing to social influences was a weakness that many agents appear to share. This is especially problematic because social influences can be disastrous in certain situations, influencing agents to behave inconsistently with their previous moral commitments. We are used to looking to others around us for information about how we should behave, especially in unfamiliar situations. We perceive others in our environment as a sort of audience to our actions and are used to trying to keep our opinions in line with those of others in our group. While we may be able to depend on our social networks for the development and maintenance of our virtue (as some philosophers have argued), this is not an ideal solution. Depending on others to help us develop or maintain our virtue leaves us at the mercy of moral luck, vulnerable to negative social influences. The wrong kind of social settings or relationships can easily damage our virtue. If social influences are especially problematic for many agents, then it seems necessary to develop autonomy in thought and behavior to help counteract this problem.

Self-transparency

The ability to be honest with oneself about one's motives is also important considering the psychological mechanisms that can help an agent engage in self-

deceptive behaviors in order to allow the agent to behave inconsistently with his moral commitments without updating his self-identity. As I discussed in the last chapter, even agents with a moral will may behave inconsistently with their moral commitments by deceiving themselves into believing that they are not actually behaving contrary to their moral identity at all. In order to counteract the use of these psychological mechanisms, an agent needs to be able to reflect honestly on his own motives and discern what is truly motivating him.

Personal responsibility

An agent with high centrality of moral will needs to have made himself responsible for acting consistently with his moral values, beliefs, and desires. The agent must feel personally responsible for making sure he behaves according to his will. Personal responsibility is not specifically a moral virtue either since, for example, an agent with a will including only self-serving desires can feel personally responsible for making sure he behaves according to those desires. Responsibility is a structural virtue; it is only when responsibility is used in the service of a moral will that it becomes part of moral character.

This purpose of this component is twofold: first, an agent who feels personally responsible for behaving consistently with his moral will be less likely to shirk his responsibility as a moral agent in the face of competing demands, and second, an agent that feels responsible for his own actions will be less likely to place moral responsibility for his actions on the shoulders of others.

An agent that feels personally responsible for actualizing his moral desires will feel a greater sense of responsibility in ensuring that he makes the world around him consistent with those desires. For example, suppose that Alan values

helping and has the desire that the world is a place where individuals who need help receive help. Without feelings of personal responsibility, he may walk by a person struggling to lug heavy groceries into a car and merely think to himself, "That's awful, that poor person needs help. I hope someone helps him with those groceries." If on the other hand, he feels personally responsible for ensuring that his moral desires are actualized he will be less likely to place that responsibility onto the shoulders of others and help the person himself. This is important to virtue considering that psychologists have documented diffusion of responsibility as being largely responsible for bystander effects.

Moreover, an agent who feels personally responsible for his actions will be less likely to behave in ways inconsistent with his moral commitments by assuming that someone else is responsible for the consequences of his actions. For example, some psychologists like Maury Silver and John Sabini, one of the reasons that subjects complied in the Milgram experiment was that people didn't feel fully responsible for what happened to the victims. Subjects in the Milgram experiment seemed to feel that as long as the experimenter claimed responsibility for any consequences to the victim, they were absolved of any responsibility for whatever happened to the victim.[15] However, if the subjects had felt personally responsible for ensuring that the victim was not harmed, they would not have assumed that having the experimenter claim responsibility automatically absolved them of any responsibility.

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[15] See Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority (*New York: Harper and Row, 1974*)*, 7-8, 145-147. Milgram himself actually comments on how feelings of loss of responsibility are in part responsible for the behavior of compliant subjects.

Willpower

An agent with ideal virtue will not only feel personally responsible for avoiding contradiction between his moral will and his behavior, he will also have the willpower necessary to avoid contradiction and maintain his moral character. This component tracks Blasi's definition of willpower and Mischel's definition of self-regulatory mechanisms.[16] Blasi includes perseverance, determination, self-control, and self-discipline as all related to willpower. Willpower is an important part of moral character because it helps agents cope with temptations from fear, pleasure, perhaps even social influences.

Willpower is not necessarily a moral virtue either, since an agent need not have a moral will to develop self-regulatory mechanisms. It is debatable whether an agent that has developed an undivided moral will need to exercise willpower considering that he has no conflicting desires (specifically desires conflicting with his moral desires), but the agent will need willpower in order to develop ideal virtue in the first place.

Practical deliberation

The component of practical deliberation closely resembles Aristotle's account of practical wisdom. However, practical deliberation is not necessarily a moral trait as it is merely the ability to deliberate or on what certain traits or virtues require and how best to behave consistently with those traits and virtues. An agent can develop the cognitive skills and abilities necessary to behave

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[16] Augusto Blasi, "Moral Character," in *Character Psychology and Character Education,* ed. Daniel Lapsley and Clark Power (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 74-5.

consistently with his traits, even if those traits are non-moral or even opposed to morality.

However, in conjunction with a moral will, practical deliberation takes the form of something like Aristotle's idea of practical wisdom. According to Aristotle, practical wisdom is the ability to deliberate well in order to be able to behave consistently with the moral virtues in particular situations. In other words, practical wisdom is necessary to help us put our moral desires into action in a variety of situations, including unfamiliar situations. According to Aristotle, practical wisdom was characterized by the ability to reflect on virtue and what virtue really required of agents in general and in specific situations. However, Aristotle's definition of practical wisdom does not specify the type of cognitive abilities necessary to maintain virtue. Augusto Blasi, on the other hand, hypothesized on some specific abilities necessary to ensure behavioral consistency with ones moral commitments. Some of these abilities are: 1) understanding of the common good and how it is related to individual interests, 2) holding universal principles beyond the mere laws of society, and 3) monitoring one's beliefs and the processes by which they were acquired and accepted, and (this includes having the ability to bracket one's trusting attitude and instead questioning one's (and others) motives so as to not allow for unfair justifications or self-deception).[17] However, the general idea behind Aristotle's definition of practical wisdom and Blasi's list of cognitive abilities is the same: a

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[17] Augusto Blasi, "The Moral Functioning of Mature Adults," in *Personality, Identity, and Character*, eds. Darcia Narvaez and Daniel Lapsley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 431.

The last set of abilities sound like Blasi's idea that an agent needs to be honest with himself about his motives (part of integrity). Blasi states a fourth set of abilities as well, the ability to control fear and anxiety, to resist social pressure, to be autonomous in thinking and action, to be courageous when courage is needed. This set seems to include autonomy (part of integrity), and several abilities necessary for willpower.

virtuous agent requires some particular cognitive abilities, some type of reasoning skills, in order to understand what morality requires and behave consistently with his or her moral commitments across different situations.

Practical deliberation is necessary in order to help the agent deliberate on what each of the virtue truly requires and how best to put his goals, beliefs, desires, etc., into action in particular situations. Furthermore, an agent with practical deliberation can learn how to generalize his actions from one situation to another. For example, as I mentioned in Chapter 5, some of the subjects who stopped the Milgram experiment were people who had lived in Europe during the Nazi occupation and had apparently learned about obedience and compliance from their experiences. Both subjects appear to have learned about the potentially terrible consequences of unquestioningly obeying authority and applied what they had learned to this particular case.

Moreover, as I argued in Chapter 5, practical wisdom may be helpful in curbing unwanted social influence. Social influence is one of the situational features with the most power to influence our behavior; individuals can even be influenced to behave inconsistently with their goals or values. The problem of social influences is especially pernicious because we naturally look to others for information, support, or help. Moreover, social networks can be beneficial in producing and maintaining virtue. An agent with practical deliberation knows what the right thing to do is in a particular situation, as well as why it is the right thing to do. In strong situations, where unfamiliar settings, social pressures, or other situational influences might lead an agent to believe action x is consistent with having a certain virtue like justice or compassion when it is actually not, an agent with practical wisdom should be able recognize the action that is actually

consistent with those virtues. Practical deliberation would help to counteract the influence of potentially dangerous social influences.

Finally, an agent with ideal virtue will be a virtual expert in the moral domain of life since he will have formed chronically accessible schemas in the moral domain over time and experience. Because agents with an undivided moral will have made their moral identity central to their self-identity, their moral identity is more often salient and so they are more likely to notice the morally relevant details of a situation. Agents who have moral commitments that are an important part of their self-identity, feelings of integrity and personal responsibility toward fulfilling those commitments, and the cognitive abilities necessary to ensure that they behave consistently with those commitments may in time develop a kind of expertise in regards to behaving consistently with their moral commitments.[18]

Psychologists Nancy Cantor and John Kihlstrom theorize that different individuals differ in the "elaborateness and accessibility of their knowledge in task-relevant domains" including the moral domain.[19] The more often an agent deliberates about his moral commitments and how best to behave consistently with his moral commitments, the more likely that he is to become an expert in that domain of his life. An agent that is an 'expert' in some domain of his life can

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[18] Philosopher Nancy Snow makes a similar claim in *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory*. Snow argues that the virtuous person that seems to be able to behave virtuously effortlessly and almost automatically is simply a type of 'expert' in the moral domain. His actions seem effortless because they have become somewhat habitual to him. His actions are still a result of moral motivation and practical wisdom, but he has become familiarized with moral situational cues (since they are salient to him) and determined the correct responses (defined as "responses consistent with virtues") to different situational cues over time.

[19] Nancy Cantor and John F. Kihlstrom, *Personality and Social Intelligence* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1987), 5.

come up with strategies to reach his goals more easily than an agent who is a 'novice' in that domain of his life. Experts in the moral domain will have "considered alternative goals and strategies and can arrive at a pragmatic solution to the life task more easily than non-experts."[20] According to Cantor and Kihlstrom, "to the extent that individuals have elaborate, well-integrated, relatively consensually-validated and self-relevant expertise in a life-task domain, they should be able to find creative ways to pursue their goals with ease."[21] If an agent is an expert in a particular domain, then he has greater resources available to him to make his behavior consistent with his moral commitments.

To sum up, an agent with ideal virtue will have the psychological factors consistent with the virtues and will value moral commitments as an important part of his life and self-concept. An agent with ideal virtue will also have a strong concern for behaving consistently with his moral will and will make himself responsible for behaving according to those values. Finally, an agent with ideal virtue will self-regulatory mechanisms to help him cope with temptations of various sorts and cognitive abilities to deliberate on how best to make his behavior consistent with his goals, affects, values, and desires.

Ideal virtue is very similar to Aristotelian virtue. According to Aristotelian virtue theory, a virtue is a disposition to perform the right action, for the right reason, from a firm and unchanging character. An agent requires both practical wisdom (the ability to deliberate well) and the moral virtues in order to be virtuous. For ideal virtue, an agent needs practical deliberation (defined roughly similar to Aristotle's version of practical wisdom) and a moral will (or beliefs,

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[20] Cantor and Kihlstrom, *Personality and Social Intelligence,* 6. This sounds similar to descriptions of an agent who possesses Aristotelian practical wisdom.

[21] Cantor and Kihlstrom, *Personality and Social Intelligence,* 239.

goals, affects, and values consistent with the virtues). Moreover, since an agent with ideal virtue requires high centrality of moral identity and moral identity requires a moral will, an agent with high centrality of moral identity will perform a moral action for the right reason from a firm and unchanging character.

Features of Ideal Virtue

Robust

An agent with ideal virtue exhibits robust virtues. He values morality as an important part of his self-identity and has cognitive and affective factors consistent with each of the virtues, as well as autonomy, self-transparency, integrity and a sense of personal responsibility for making certain his behavior is consistent with his moral commitments and the cognitive skills necessary to help him behave consistently with his moral commitments. Cantor and Kihlstrom argue that experts in a particular domain are more likely to maintain "intentional consistency," exhibited by behaving consistently with their goals and commitments. Together these components ensure that the agent will behave consistently with his moral commitments across different situations, resulting in cross-situationally consistent (robust) virtues.

Autonomous

Since an agent with ideal virtue has the cognitive skills necessary to help him deliberate well about how to behave consistently with his moral commitments, the agent will have the skills necessary to discern what behavior will be consistent with his moral commitments even in psychologically strong situations. An agent with ideal virtue has the ability to deliberate well about a

situation and weigh costs and consequences correctly and so he is less likely to be baffled into behaving inconsistently with his moral commitments by unfamiliar or ambiguous situations or circumstances. Moreover, an agent with ideal virtue has a strong sense of personal responsibility and will be less susceptible to assuming else is responsible for their actions. This is also in part because an agent with ideal virtue need not rely on social influences to help him discover the action consistent with virtue in any particular situation.

Agents with ideal virtue are not dependent on their social networks for information on how to behave consistently with their moral commitments and this helps to counteract the possibly negative effects of social influences. Agents with ideal virtue have a commitment to behave consistently with their moral commitments and the cognitive skills necessary to ensure that commitment. They can deliberate on how to behave consistently with their moral commitments in a specific situation without having to rely on information from others. Moreover, they are autonomous, determined, and self-disciplined, not easily swayed by the temptation to conform to social-influences. Experience and practical deliberation have made them virtual experts in the moral domain and so they do not need to rely on information from others to know how to behave morally in any particular situation.

The Normative and Empirical Adequacy of Ideal Virtue

Ideal virtue is normatively but not empirically adequate. The robust traits required for ideal virtue set the paradigmatic framework against which conditional traits are measured. However, robust traits are not accurate descriptions of the kinds of traits agents actually have (or, perhaps, are even

capable of having). Ideal virtue then is difficult or even impossible to acquire.

This is consistent with both the situationist critique and traditional virtue theory.

Ideal virtue is difficult to acquire and comes only with a lifetime of experience

and learning from one's mistakes. As I argued in Chapter 5, the development of

moral virtue and practical wisdom is subject to moral luck in various ways. Even

Aristotle maintained that young people could not be virtuous because they lacked

the life experience necessary to develop practical wisdom. Aristotle argued that

practical wisdom was developed through habit, experience, and good

deliberation, as well as a commitment to the virtues. Lacking any of these, an

agent might also lack practical wisdom. The types of life experiences, upbringing,

social environments, or moral luck that an agent has had in her life will in part

determine whether she will develop practical wisdom or not. If an agent has had a

limited amount of life experiences, then she may have only learned how to behave

consistently with her values in a limited number of circumstances. As I argued in

Chapter 6, unfamiliar or psychologically powerful situations can confuse or baffle

agents and lead them to act in ways that are inconsistent with various beliefs,

values, or commitments they have. Some of the main factors in psychologically

powerful situations are ambiguity, social influences, and a subject's unfamiliarity

with the situation.

Even if an agent values and desires to display a particular virtue, the agent

also needs to have developed structural virtues like practical deliberation and

willpower to behave consistently with her values and desires. However, some

structural virtues, like practical deliberation, are developed through time and

experience. Consequently, an agent that has not experienced situations of type *A,*

for example, may be unprepared to deal with them. He may not know how to

behave consistently with his values, goals, and beliefs in those situations. Once he has experienced one or two situations of type *A*, he may be able to deliberate on the types of situational factors present in type *A* situations as well as the proper response in those situations (proper being defined here as consistent with the agent's moral goals, beliefs, and values). If this agent were to come across another situation of type *A*, he would know how to behave consistently with his goals, values, and beliefs. However, upon first encountering a situation of type *A*, the agent may not know how to behave and this may lead him to behave inconsistently with his previous desires or commitments. An agent who is unsure of how to behave in a situation may also succumb to social pressures and behave inconsistently with his previous commitments and desires, only feeling regret for having done so when he has had time to reflect on the consequences of his actions.

For example, suppose that Alan is generally a compassionate person. In most types of situations, Alan behaves compassionately. Moreover, he believes compassion is a good thing, holds it in high value, and has a commitment to behaving compassionately. However, Alan has never encountered a situation of type *A* before, for example, a situation that is unfamiliar and ambiguous. To take an example from the social-psychological literature, let's say that one day, while riding the subway, Alan sees a somewhat shabbily dressed man that smells of alcohol and is holding a bottle wrapped in a paper bag. He watches as the man stumbles and falls down. Seconds go by and the man neither gets up nor asks for help. No one moves to help him. Alan deliberates on whether compassion requires him to help or not. He looks to his companions in the subway car but no one gets up to assist the fallen man and most people even seem to be ignoring

him. Following their cues, and perhaps subconsciously assuming that other people are at least averagely moral, Alan decides not to help.

If later Alan found out that the man was having a stroke and died as a result of not receiving aid in a timely fashion, Alan may be more likely to offer help in a similar situation in the future. If Alan reflects on why he didn't help (ambiguity of the situation), he may learn to be more cautious in situations in the future that are ambiguous or be less likely to assume that people around him have any more idea of how to act in those types of situations than he does. On the other hand, if Alan never hears about the man again, he may come to conclusion that his decision to help was the correct one and may continue not to help in similar situations in the future.

Suppose that Alan recounts his experience on the subway to you and you see his failure to help the fallen man as a failure in compassion. Does Alan's failure to help the fallen man in the subway mean that Alan is not really compassionate? Can Alan have a robust virtue of compassion even if he fails to behave compassionately in ambiguous or unfamiliar situations? If ideal virtue requires practical deliberation and an agent with a high centrality of moral identity, then an agent with ideal virtue would have helped the fallen man (and would behave compassionately in a number of situations). Therefore, Alan does not have ideal virtue. Does that mean Alan does not have the virtue of compassion at all even if he behaves compassionately in every other type of situation?

I claimed that virtue is a matter of degree, either because an agent needs to have developed all of the virtues robustly. If an agent has only developed the right moral values, goals, beliefs, etc., in some aspects of his life but not others or

if an agent hasn't developed some of the structural virtues necessary to make his actions consistent with his values, goals, and beliefs across different situations, then he lacks ideal virtue. Since developing virtue depends in part on the type of situations and people to which an agent is exposed, some agents may never develop ideal virtue because they are only exposed to a limited number of situations and never have a chance to develop virtue specific to particular situations. What can we say about an individual like Alan who has developed modules of virtue relevant to his specific life circumstances?

If robust or perfect virtues are merely ideals setting normative parameters and most people merely have partial virtue, does this mean that it is impossible to be truly virtuous? In the next section, I argue this is not the case by discussing virtue that is only cross-situationally behaviorally consistent within the confines of predictable life circumstances.

Non-Ideal Virtue

Non-ideal virtue refers to any type of virtue that is not ideal, in other words, any type of virtue that fails to meet one or more of the requirements of ideal virtue. Non-ideal virtue comes in degrees and is often fragmented, socially dependent and frail. That means that non-ideal virtue is not cross-situationally consistent, requires weak motivational self-sufficiency of character, and its maintenance is susceptible to moral luck.

The Structure of Non-Ideal Virtue

Non-ideal virtue requires that at minimum an agent develop: 1) a moral will (at least some of the psychological factors consistent with some of the

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virtues), 2) a moral identity that is somewhat central to his sense of self, 3) some integrity, and 4) some personal responsibility. Agents with higher degrees of non-ideal virtue will also have developed: 5) some willpower and practical deliberation, 6) some self-transparency, and 7) some autonomy in thought and behavior in order to ensure that their actions are consistent with their moral will.

Moral will and centrality of moral identity

An agent with non-ideal virtue needs to have developed a moral will, even if his will is fragmented in some way. In other words, an agent needs to have some values, beliefs, affects, and desires consistent with the virtues. However, his will may also include competing values, beliefs, affects, and desires. An agent with non-ideal virtue needs to have a moral identity that is somewhat important to his self-identity. His moral identity need not be the most important aspect of his sense of self, but it needs to be somewhat central to his global self-identity, otherwise, it is unclear just how important his moral commitments really are for him. Some centrality of moral identity is necessary in order to ensure that moral commitments motivate the agent to some extent rather than other more personal values and commitments motivating the agent

At a minimum, in order to have non-ideal virtue, an agent must have at least some cognitive and affective factors consistent with some of the virtues (including first and second order moral desires). However, if an agent lacks goals, beliefs, affects, values, and desires consistent with the virtues, or does not value moral considerations as having any importance to his self-identity, then he does not really care or value the virtues at all.

Integrity and responsibility

An agent with non-ideal virtue also needs to have developed some integrity and sense of personal responsibility. Otherwise, it is unclear that the agent really cares about morality. If he does not have at least some concern for behaving consistently with his moral will or lacks feelings of personal responsibility for his actions, it calls into question just how much the agent really cares about virtue if he will not take responsibility for his own actions. Moreover, integrity and personal responsibility are necessary to ensure that an agent behaves consistently with his moral will.

Willpower and practical deliberation

An agent with non-ideal virtue needs to have at least attempted to develop some willpower or self-regulatory mechanisms to ensure that he does not succumb to every temptation from fear, pleasure, or social influences. An agent can also develop some deliberation in order to compensate for lack of willpower by recognizing his frailty in the face of certain temptations and avoiding temptation altogether. Agents that lack willpower or practical deliberation will be more likely to behave succumb to temptations of fear, pleasure, or social influences or other pressures from strong situations, thus behaving inconsistently with their moral commitments.

Autonomy and self-transparency

Ideally, an agent with non-ideal virtue will develop some autonomy and self-transparency. Although non-ideal virtue can be dependent on social networks for its maintenance, as I have argued elsewhere, virtue that is not autonomous is susceptible to moral luck. If an agent happens to be unlucky enough to find himself in a situation where social influences lead him astray, he may behave inconsistently with his previous moral commitments. Self-transparency, on the other hand, is necessary so that an agent does not deceive *himself* into believing that he is behaving consistently with his moral commitments by use of some psychological mechanism that allows for self-deception (as described in the previous chapter).

Features of Non-Ideal Virtue

Fragmented

An agent with non-ideal virtue has fragmented or conditional virtues and does not exhibit behavioral consistency across all situations. Fragmentation refers to two types of ways in which non-ideal virtue can be fragmented: an agent may lack one or more components necessary for a single virtue (or multiple virtues) or an agent may have fully developed some virtues but not others (or both). For any single virtue an agent may lack some (or all) of the cognitive or affective factors consistent with that virtue, some of the structural virtues necessary to make his behavior consistent with that virtue, or the practical deliberation necessary for ensuring his actions are consistent with that virtue. The agent has only partially developed that virtue and may only have partially developed all (or even just some) of the virtues. For example, if Matt has a

conditional virtue of compassion, he may behave compassionately in situations p, q, and r but not in situations x, y, and z. Alternatively, he may have fully developed the virtue of compassion, possessing the psychological factors consistent with compassion, a strong sense of personal responsibility to behave consistently with compassion, and enough cognitive abilities to behave consistently with compassion while at the same time having only partially developed the virtue of justice. He may lack the psychological factors consistent with justice and simply not care about justice at all or he may lack the cognitive skills or sense of personal responsibility to behave consistently with his commitment to justice.

The reason an agent that has non-ideal virtue may have only developed some conditional (or robust) virtues but not others is that (according to social-cognitive theory) we develop our character based partly on our experiences. An agent that has not experienced certain types of situations may not develop modules of virtue for those particular situations. Depending on our personal history and experiences, our upbringing, the particular situations we have been in, our temperament, goals, motivations and personal construal, we will be more likely to develop some virtues instead of others and some modules of virtue for some situations but not others. An agent may also fail to deliberate on what features of a situation make that situation similar to other situations.

Socially dependent

Since agents with non-ideal virtue may not have developed some of the structural virtues necessary to behave consistently with one's moral commitments across different situations, non-ideal virtue can also be socially

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dependent. If an agent lacks autonomy, willpower, or practical deliberation, he may be more likely to conform to social influences, even when doing so means behaving inconsistently with his moral commitments. Social influences can effect an agent in at least three different ways: 1) the agent might turn to those around him for guidance on how he should behave in unfamiliar situations, 2) the agent can come to perceive others in his environment as a sort of audience to his actions, and 3) situational influences can work through "tension systems" that help to keep the opinions of the individual in line with those of the group.[22] An agent that has not developed the ability to deliberate well, or has simply not developed schemas for particular types of situations (such as unfamiliar or ambiguous situations) may turn to others for information on how to behave. Lacking the schemas for unfamiliar or ambiguous situations and the cognitive skills that would enable them to discern the action(s) consistent with their moral commitments, agents with non-ideal virtue may come to depend on social networks and settings in order to maintain their virtue. Agents may also lack the autonomy in thought to be able to make up their own mind or the willpower to resist the pressures to conform to social influences. Following Maria Merritt, that means non-ideal virtue requires only weak motivational self-sufficiency of character. Ideal virtue, on the other hand, much like Aristotelian virtue, advances a very strong ideal of MSC.

Frail (susceptible to moral luck)

Finally, since agents with non-ideal virtue are often dependent on their social networks to help them maintain their virtue, or lack the cognitive abilities,

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[22] See section on "Social Influence" in Chapter 5 for more.

willpower, or strong sense integrity or personal responsibility necessary for ideal virtue, agents with non-ideal virtue have a type of virtue whose maintenance is susceptible to moral luck and circumstance in various ways. As I argued above, agents that lack practical deliberation, willpower, or strong sense of responsibility necessary for ideal virtue may come to depend on their social networks to help them maintain their virtue. As I argued in Chapter 5, this is only problematic in cases where situational factors influence agents to behave in ways that are inconsistent with their previous moral commitments.

One of the reasons agents are able to behave inconsistently with their moral commitments is agents' failure to take responsibility for their actions (or non-actions). As I discussed previously, in situations that are ambiguous or unfamiliar, diffusion of responsibility is more likely to take place and in situations like the Milgram experiment, agents are likely to conflate moral and legal responsibility.

Moreover, lack of cognitive abilities or willpower, which help maintain virtue, may also be problematic as agents that lack the ability to deliberate on how to behave consistently with their moral commitments, or the willpower to resist pressures to behave inconsistently with moral commitments, may be more easily influenced by strong situations.

The Normative and Empirical Adequacy of Non-Ideal Virtue

There are lower and higher degrees of non-ideal virtue. An agent with a very high degree of non-ideal virtue will have developed all of the virtues necessary (applicable) in his day-to-day life to some degree and will have a strong sense of personal responsibility, integrity, some self-transparency and autonomy

in thought and behavior, a fairly high centrality of moral identity, and some cognitive abilities necessary to maintain virtue. An agent with a high degree of non-ideal virtue will have developed enough virtue to be able to behave consistently with his moral commitments in (at least) normal or predictable life circumstances. He may be baffled by unfamiliar circumstances or may be led to behave inconsistently with his moral commitments by negative social influences. The agent with a high degree of non-ideal virtue may lack some cognitive abilities necessary to maintain his virtue in strong or unfamiliar situations but he will have genuine dedication toward behaving consistently with his moral commitments because his moral identity is a central part of his self-identity.

A high degree of non-ideal virtue comes closest to approximating ideal virtue. The key difference between ideal virtue and a high level of non-ideal virtue is that even a high development of non-ideal virtue does not guarantee that an agent will be able to behave consistently with the virtues in strong or unfamiliar situations. An agent with a high degree of non-ideal virtue has developed enough practical deliberation and autonomy to be able to behave consistently with the virtues in situations with which he has some experience. The agent may fail to behave consistently with virtue in strong or unfamiliar situations because he lacks the practical deliberation to make his behavior consistent with virtue in those situations.

The degree to which an agent has developed non-ideal virtue depends on the degree to which the agent has developed the six components necessary for ideal virtue as well as the life experiences of the agent. Although, non-ideal virtue requires at minimum the development of a moral will, some centrality of moral

identity, some integrity and personal responsibility, and some attempt made at developing practical deliberation and willpower, even if unsuccessful.

Further Arguments in Favor of a Scalar Approach to Character

The Scalar Approach to Character is Intuitive

Conditional traits based in a social-cognitive approach to character can account for both the complexity of factors that motivate behavior as well as how (despite this) we can often make accurate predictions about the behavior of people we know fairly well. Despite how complicated the social-cognitive approach to character seems, considering the number of factors that produce a mental representation and the sheer amount of situational features that may or may not activate that mental representation, we often *do* predict how a particular individual will behave in a particular situation using something like this model.

If I have known my friend Matt for years, have observed him in a variety of situations, and am an intuitive perceiver, I may perhaps have noted that Matt is not particularly talkative or outgoing with people he does not know well despite being extremely talkative and outgoing among our group of friends. I might then make the inference that Matt is shy in all or most social situations with strangers, while he is also outgoing when among his intimates. If I also notice particular social situations with strangers in which Matt is talkative, say at work when he is in charge of a meeting, or at meetings for the neighborhood watch group for which he was named president, I might make some further predictions about Matt's behavior based on inferences about what type of factors the different situations have in common and what effect they might have on Matt's behavior. The reason that we notice cross-situational variability in the behavior of those we

know well is because we observe the dynamic interaction of an individual's personal variables with some particular features of their environment.

An Explanation for the Fundamental Attribution Error

The social-cognitive approach to character can also explain why we commit the fundamental attribution error while also being able to predict and understand the behavior of people close to us. To recap, the fundamental attribution error is our tendency to explain an instance of the behavior of other people by reference to dispositions or traits while paying little or no attention to the context of the situation. This includes our tendency to assume consistency of behavior from one situation to the next. For example, if I observe Mary behaving rudely to the stylist at her salon, I may assume that Mary behaves rudely across a number of different situations and, furthermore, that Mary is a rude person. I attribute her behavior to a personal trait rather than taking into account situational features that may also explain her particular behavior. I may also assume that she will behave consistently with that trait across different types of situations.

The reason I might attribute Mary's action to a personal trait rather than to situational features is that I may not have any information about the particular situational features that are relevant in this situation. Perhaps Mary is having a bad day and the stylist was responding to her grumpily or in an ill-tempered manner. If I do not have this information about Mary's day or the stylist's behavior toward Mary, I can only go by the information that I have. I think to myself that the only reason I would behave rudely to a stylist in my current state (and without having the information about the stylist's behavior) would be that I

was a rude person. Therefore, observing Mary's behavior, I attribute similar motivation to Mary. When we make judgments about the behavior of others, unless we know how they perceive and construe the world, we may instead judge their action on our own perception of the world. Psychologists discussing the fundamental attribution error have pointed out that when asked to explain their own actions, agents will reference personal traits as well as situational features as motivating factors whereas when asked to explain the actions of others they reference personal traits.[23] This seems to imply that agents are aware of the influence of situational features on their behavior. However, since we lack information about the situational features affecting others, we cannot use this information when judging the behavior of others.

As for assuming that Mary will behave consistently rudely in other situations, we may be able to explain this by considering that from our own point of view we behave consistently with our values, goals, and beliefs.[24] That is not to say we actually *do* behave consistently with our values and goals across different situations. For example, in the previous chapter, I discussed a number of psychological mechanisms by which an agent can behave inconsistently with his moral commitments while believing that he is behaving consistently with his moral commitments. Perhaps we are aware of the effects of situational features on our behavior in particular situations but still lack knowledge about the general causes of human behavior, including our own.

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[23] Lee Ross and Richard Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation: Perspective of Social Psychology* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1991), 141

[24] Mischel, "Toward an Integrative Science," 12. Mischel argues that when asked about their behavioral consistency, "people may base their impressions on the inferred motivations, beliefs, values, and other mental qualities that account for and explain those behaviors" rather than on the behaviors themselves. As long as an agent feels he has been consistent in his conditional traits, he feels that he has behaved consistently. He does not measure consistency using a robust trait approach but rather a conditional trait approach.

While we may use the social-cognitive approach to character to understand our behavior and that of our intimates, we may do so without realizing the precise method by which we do so. For people whom we know well, we may have some idea about their goals, beliefs, values, and personal construal of the world and with this information make some fairly accurate predictions about their behavior in a number of situations. We may learn to recognize their different conditional traits and how those traits are related to each other. Mischel comments that, "a growing body of research suggests that intuitive perceivers seem to be more sophisticated personality theorists than most experiments in person perception have allowed them to be."[25] For example, to explain the responses of significant others in their lives "peoples' intuitive lay theories include beliefs about their *if…then…*psychological states—"*If* Bill wants to create a good impression, *then* he acts friendly."[26] As Mischel comments, people will make "inferences about the underlying stable personality system that generates and explains observed behavioral signatures when they are giving the data to do so, and the motivation for expending the effort."[27] In cases where an agent is judging the behavior of a stranger that he may not ever see again, the agent lacks the necessary information to make an accurate judgment as well as sufficient motivation for doing so.

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[25] Walter, Mischel, "Toward an Integrative Science of the Person," in *Annual Reviews in Psychology 55*, no. 1 (2004): 12.

[26] Mischel, "Toward an Integrative Science," 12.

[27] Mischel, "Toward an Integrative Science," 12.

The Role of Moral Luck

The social-cognitive approach to character also acknowledges the significant role of moral luck in the formation of character traits. Moral luck plays an important part in the development of ideal virtue and both the development and maintenance of non-ideal virtue.[28]

According to the social-cognitive framework of personality, our particular mental representations of the world depend on a multitude of factors including our construal, formed in part by our individual goals, values, and beliefs, which are in turn formed in part by our own particular life experiences and other factors like temperament, all of which are in part determined by chance. For example, suppose there are two people: Jones and Smith. Although Jones was sensitive and trusting, a series of bad experiences beginning in childhood and continuing throughout his life have taught him to be distrustful and fearful of others. Jones is highly sensitive to any kind of disrespect or aggression toward him and afraid of showing fear because it might be perceived as weakness, Jones reacts by being rude and behaving aggressively instead. Smith on the other hand, grew up in a small town surrounded by family and friends. Smith was sweet tempered, and had kind loving parents with strong moral values who taught Smith to treat others with respect and dignity. Smith was also fortunate enough to have come across good friends and peers that never betrayed his trust. Smith is respectful and highly considerate of the feelings of others. He does not see aggression or

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[28] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 15-22, 1098b10-1101a21. Aristotle also argued that moral luck played a role in virtue. However, Aristotle's idea was that some external goods were important for the development and maintenance of eudaimonia. Aristotle argued that virtue required some external goods, specifically things like, beauty, friends, family, and good birth for happiness and virtuous agents required the means and opportunity to exercise the virtues.

See also: Martha Nussbaum, *Fragility of Goodness: Luck in Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Nussbaum discusses at length the role of luck in the development and maintenance of virtue.

disrespect in the same sorts of situations that Jones does and he is usually polite and respectful across a great variety of situations, instead of just one or two like Jones.

The differences between Smith and Jones are exaggerated in the preceding example to highlight the differences in their respective lives and fortunes; however, the differences between the two men need not be as large for their character as adults to differ. For example, even with Smith's mild temperament, growing up in a disadvantaged neighborhood with careless or even callous parents would have possibly made a large difference. Perhaps if Jones had grown up in Smith's position he would have thought and behaved in a vastly different manner as an adult. Perhaps, having even one trustworthy confidant in his childhood would have helped Jones to be a different sort of person, one that believed in treating people with respect.

Of course, even if Jones was unlucky enough not to have moral models to emulate or close family in which to confide doesn't mean Jones cannot change his character for the better. Moral improvement is not impossible, even if it may be more difficult for Jones than it would be for Smith. However, the desire for moral improvement would have to arise spontaneously or because of an experience or situation that affected Jones in some significant way. Nevertheless, it is possible that Jones may never learn to be as respectful as Smith. Jones may learn to behave respectfully while still harboring a deep distrust of others. Since the virtues include both a behavioral as well as a motivational component, Jones would never fully acquire the virtue of respect unless he was able to change how he felt about others.

Moral luck plays a part not only in the development of virtue but also in its maintenance. Individuals with non-ideal virtue that have the good fortune of never encountering situations akin to the Milgram experiment or the Stanford Prison Experiment do not have their compassion really put to the test. If virtue contains both a motivational and a behavioral component, an individual who never faces such a situation may be considered to have behaved consistently compassionate as long as: (1) he acted compassionately in the situations he *did* come across and (2) had the right sort of motivation toward acting compassionately whenever it was called for, including in diagnostic situations, even if he never actually had the opportunity to act on his motivation. I may say of Jones that he is consistently compassionate because he has always acted compassionately in predictable situations requiring compassion and has the motivation to behave compassionately in any situation requiring compassion. However, from a purely practical standpoint, we cannot know whether Jones would behave compassionately in a strong situation like the Milgram experiment. If Jones tends to look to others in an unfamiliar situation to know how to behave (as most agents do), he may be influenced to behave inconsistently with compassion in strong situations.

Suppose there are two people: Jones and Smith. Jones and Smith both have values, beliefs, affects, and desires consistent with compassion. Being compassionate is somewhat important to both of them, and both feel some concern and personal responsibility for behaving consistently with their moral commitment to compassion. However, both men have an imperfect understanding of what compassion requires (they lack some part of practical deliberation or adequate feelings of personal responsibility). Let's further

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suppose that both men live in Nazi-occupied Europe. However, Smith lives in Le Chambon (the French enclave that sheltered thousands of refugees during the Nazi occupation of France) while Jones lives somewhere in Germany. Despite his lack of understanding what compassion requires, Smith, like his fellow Chambonnais, ends up aiding refugees in their escape, his commitment to compassion bolstered by seeing his fellow countrymen also giving aid to refugees. Due to his experience, Smith acquires a greater understanding of what compassion requires and perhaps even some knowledge about resisting negative social influences. Jones, on the other hand, has no such advantage. He helps no refugees, even when given a chance to do so, and sits passively by as some of his neighbors or even co-workers are taken from their homes and sent to concentration camps. His understanding of compassion and virtue in general stays the same. Smith expands his understanding of compassion with the help of his social networks, whereas Jones fails to learn anything, perhaps telling himself that it is not his responsibility to aid the refugees. Worse, perhaps Jones even buys into the Nazi propaganda that Jewish people are somehow less than human and not worthy of compassion and so his understanding of compassion is actually worsened by the war.

However, this is a rather extreme example. Doris gives the example of someone having a flirtation with a co-worker.[29] Suppose Jones has been flirting at work with one of his coworkers. Yet, because he is also married, the relationship at work has never gone past simple flirting at the office. However, Jones's wife goes out of town for a couple of weeks and Jones's coworker asks Jones to come over to her house for dinner so that he is not all alone while his

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[29] John Doris, *Lack of Character* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). 147-149.

wife is away. Jones ends up beginning an extramarital affair with his coworker, justifying the affair using a variety of psychological mechanisms that allow for self-deception. Had the circumstances never arisen, Jones would never have been unfaithful to his wife and his virtue would not have been negatively affected. However, the particular circumstances were too overwhelming for Jones, and he could not resist the temptation. Even if Jones lacked willpower, if he had practical deliberation, he may have realized that the prudent thing would be to avoid temptation altogether and refuse the offer, rather than assume that he could withstand temptation.

Conclusion

There are multiple aims to both general character attribution and virtue theory and these multiple aims and comprehensive theories of character and virtue should reflect these multiple aims.

Some of the aims of character attribution are explanation and prediction of behavior, communication and collection of information, and moral appraisal and judgment. The fundamental aim of explanation, prediction, and communication and collection of information is to give or receive a description of someone's character, while the primary goal of evaluation and judgment is to prescribe limitations on the types of psychological and behavioral dispositions that characterize a particular trait.

A scalar structure of character would satisfy both the descriptive and prescriptive aims of character attribution by including both conditional and robust traits that reflect the social-cognitive and trait approaches from personality theory. Robust traits track the trait theory approach in personality

theory and are useful for defining and limiting the types of behaviors, beliefs, values, goals, motivations, etc., that fall within the purview of a particular trait. The language of robust traits is also useful for the purposes of moral appraisal and judgment or when making broad character descriptions. Conditional traits track the social-cognitive approach and are useful for compiling a more accurate description of the character of a particular agent. Conditional traits can help us explain and predict individual behaviors with greater accuracy.

Moreover, just as there are two types of traits to satisfy different goals, there are two ways in which we talk about virtue that meets two different purposes. Virtue comes in degrees because agents generally develop virtue slowly over the course of time and experience and since virtue requires a variety of components, an agent may have developed some of the components without having developed them all and thus still have *some* virtue.

There are two basic types of virtue: ideal virtue and non-ideal virtue. Ideal virtue requires that an agent have developed all of the psychological factors consistent with all of the virtues, a moral identity that is central to his sense of self, a strong sense of personal responsibility, integrity, willpower, autonomy, self-transparency, and the ability to deliberate well about how to make one's actions consistent with one's psychological factors (like Aristotle's idea of practical wisdom). Ideal virtue is primarily normative and prescriptive but not empirically adequate. An agent with ideal virtue would have all of the goals, beliefs, and values consistent with each virtue and would exhibit cross-situationally consistent behavior. Non-ideal virtue tracks the conditional approach in personality psychology and is both empirically and normatively adequate, although flawed and not ideal. Non-ideal virtue is supposed to describe

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the type of virtue that agents actually have. An agent with non-ideal virtue might have some of the goals, beliefs, and values consistent with each virtue (or may lack certain virtues) and will probably not exhibit cross-situationally consistent behavior. However, agents with higher levels of ideal virtue will have developed the ability to behave consistently with their moral commitments, at least in situations with which they are familiar.

Some questions remain unanswered. It is still unclear exactly what cognitive abilities are necessary to help agents behave consistently with their moral commitments, especially in unfamiliar or psychologically strong situations, or what we should say about the role of moral luck in virtue. Accepting the large role that moral luck plays in the development and maintenance of both types of virtue raises further questions about moral responsibility and moral praise and blame. I comment on these questions briefly in the next chapter.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this work was to provide a response to the situationist critique of character and to formulate and defend empirically grounded theories of character and virtue. In order to do this, I gave an overview of the theory and origins of situationism, reviewed experiments and historical cases cited as evidence, analyzed a number of responses to both the situationist theory and its evidence, and finally presented my own theories of character and virtue.

I argued that we could respond to evidence from trivial helping situations using the argument from choice, a subspecies of the arguments from mood. People fail to help in some situations where helping or not helping is trivial because they see helping in those situations as morally elective or even merely as a matter of personal choice. Virtue theorists might be able to explain inconsistent helping behavior in situations of minor need by arguing that not all virtues require perfect obligation; that is, that for some virtues, one need only do enough of that virtue in order to be considered to have that virtue. However, this argument does not work in situations where the consequences of helping or not are not trivial or in situations where agents fail to help not out of choice but because they are genuinely confused or overwhelmed by situational features.

I also maintained that there a number of situational features that are problematic for many agents, confusing agents and often influencing them to behave inconsistently with their previous moral commitments. I argued that situational ambiguity, conflicting duties, social influences, and situations involving obedience to authority were all problematic for many agents for a

variety of reasons. Some agents simply lack experience and do not how to make their behavior consistent with their commitments, while others lack personal responsibility or the ability to deliberate on whether their behavior is consistent with their commitment to a specific moral value or belief. Meanwhile, historical cases seem to show that environments (especially long-term or fully immersive environments) play a role in the development and maintenance of virtues and other character traits. Moreover, behavior seems to be the result of the interaction between environment and individual dispositions. This last idea is also the main contention of the argument from psychological factors.

I argued that the argument from psychological factors provides the strongest response to the situationist claim that situational rather than dispositional features are the major driving force of human behavior. Once we understand the role of psychological factors in our behavior, we have an account of the effects of dispositional features on our behavior as well as a greater ability to explain and predict behavior. However, the argument from psychological factors is unable to provide us with a solution to the problem of strong situations, though it does point us toward a stronger conception of character, just one that is no longer quite Aristotelian.

I also maintained that social influences account for much of the powerful influence of strong situations because humans are social creatures that often look to others to guide their own behavior. Since social influences can have positive as well as extremely negative effects on the behavior of agents, agents that wish to behave consistently with their moral commitments need to have a way to counteract negative social influences. Although it is not necessarily inconsistent with virtue to depend in part on social influences to maintain virtue, I argued that

an agent who is too dependent on social influences has a type of virtue whose maintenance is vulnerable to moral luck. An agent must develop practical deliberation in order to counteract the powerful psychological effects of strong situations that can induce agents to behave inconsistently with their moral commitments.

Based on the argument from psychological factors, I claimed that social-cognitive theory provided a better structure for character than traditional trait theory. Social-cognitive theory is much more useful for mapping out the psychological structure of particular individuals, instead of merely providing a comparison with other individuals. I argued that Walter Mischel's Cognitive-Affective Processing system (CAPS) model in particular provided an excellent foundation for an empirically grounded philosophical theory of character that would meet the demands of psychological realism. I also maintained that Augusto Blasi's theory of moral identity could provide us with some of the necessary components for a theory of virtue based in social-cognitive theory.

Finally, I argued that although social-cognitive theory is better suited for providing a framework for an empirically grounded theory of character, traditional trait (based in Aristotelian virtue theory) might still have a part to play in an empirically grounded theory of character. Neither social-cognitive theory nor trait theory alone can fulfill the multiple aims of character attribution. The fundamental aim of explanation, prediction, and communication and collection of information is to give or receive a description of someone's character, while the primary goal of evaluation and judgment is to prescribe limitations on the types of psychological and behavioral dispositions that characterize a particular trait. Social-cognitive theory best fulfills the aims of explanation and prediction of

behavior, and communication and collection of information, while traditional trait theory is best for fulfilling the goals of moral appraisal and judgment as well as more general communication and collection of information.

I proposed a scalar structure of character that would satisfy both the descriptive and prescriptive aims of character attribution by including both conditional and robust traits that reflect the social-cognitive and trait approaches from personality theory. Robust traits track the trait theory approach in personality theory and are useful for defining and limiting the types of behaviors, beliefs, values, goals, motivations, etc., that fall within the purview of a particular trait. Robust traits are useful for the purposes of moral appraisal and judgment or when making broad character descriptions. Conditional traits, on the other hand, track the social-cognitive approach and are useful for compiling a more accurate description of the character of a particular agent. Conditional traits can help us explain and predict individual behaviors with greater accuracy.

I also argued that just as there are two types of character traits to fulfill the multiple aims of character attribution, there are two ways in which we talk about virtue that meets different purposes: ideal and non-ideal virtue. Ideal virtue is primarily normative and prescriptive but not empirically adequate. Ideal virtue requires an agent to have developed psychological factors consistent with all of the virtues, a moral identity that is central to his sense of self, integrity, willpower, autonomy, self-transparency, a strong sense of personal responsibility, and the ability to deliberate well about how to make one's actions consistent with one's psychological factors (similar to Aristotle's idea of practical wisdom). Ideal virtue is a description of perfect virtue.

Non-ideal virtue, on the other hand, tracks the conditional approach in personality psychology and is both empirically and normatively adequate, although flawed and not ideal. Non-ideal virtue describes the type of virtue that agents actually have. An agent with non-ideal virtue might have only *some* of the goals, beliefs, and values consistent with each virtue (or may lack certain virtues) and will probably not exhibit cross-situationally consistent behavior. Agents with non-ideal virtue may lack autonomy, self-transparency, some integrity and responsibility, willpower or practical deliberation, but must have a moral will and must have attempted at least to develop integrity, responsibility, willpower, and practical deliberation.

Non-ideal virtue is fragmented, susceptible to moral luck, and socially dependent. An agent with fragmented virtue has merely conditional virtues and does not display behavioral consistency across all situations. An agent's virtue may be socially dependent if he lacks willpower, practical deliberation, or centrality of moral will. Moreover, because this type of virtue is partly dependent on an agent's social networks for its maintenance, it is susceptible to moral luck, namely, the agent's luck of ending up in a situation with negative social influences. Because an agent with non-ideal virtue lacks some of the components of ideal virtue, situational features can influence an agent with non-ideal virtue to behave inconsistently with some of his moral commitments in strong situations.

An agent with a high degree of non-ideal virtue will have developed enough virtue to be able to behave consistently with his moral commitments in (at least) normal or predictable life circumstances, although unfamiliar circumstances may baffle him or lead to behave inconsistently with his moral commitments by negative social influences. The degree to which an agent has

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developed non-ideal virtue depends on the degree to which the agent has developed the six components necessary for ideal virtue as well as on the life experiences of the agent.

A high degree of non-ideal virtue comes closest to approximating ideal virtue. The key difference between ideal virtue and a high level of non-ideal virtue is that even a high development of non-ideal virtue does not guarantee that an agent will be able to behave consistently with the virtues in strong or unfamiliar situations. The agent with a high degree of non-ideal virtue may lack some cognitive abilities necessary to maintain his virtue in strong or unfamiliar situations but will have genuine dedication toward behaving consistently with his moral commitments because his moral identity is a central part of his self-identity.

In Chapter 1, I mentioned that if the situationist critique is right, then moral education programs grounded in an Aristotelian conception of character are grounded in an erroneous conception of the causes of human behavior. However, non-ideal virtue theory specifies the necessary components of virtue that could be incorporated into a character-based moral education curriculum. Besides being taught goals, beliefs, and values consistent with the virtues, agents also need to master critical thinking skills, self-regulatory mechanisms, and a sense of personal responsibility for their actions.[1] Although agents can ultimately

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[1] There are already some theorists in moral education arguing that critical thinking skills and self-regulatory mechanisms are a necessary component of a moral education in the virtues. In "The Virtues of Will-Power: Self-Control and Deliberation," philosopher Jan Steutel argues that, in addition to virtues of character like compassion, kindness, justice, courage, etc, agents also need virtues of willpower in order to be truly virtuous. According to Steutel, virtues of willpower include deliberative capacities and powers of self-control. These virtues include crude, subtle, mechanical or reflective, simple or complex, psychological techniques or strategies that serve as a corrective function of contrary inclinations. Steutel mentions a number of possible strategies for teaching these "virtues of willpower" via moral education programs. See Jan Steutel, "Virtues of Will-

only gain practical deliberation through time and experience with a variety of different situations, teaching individuals critical thinking skills, skills that help with self-regulation and willpower as well as autonomy, self-transparency, and personal responsibility may help agents develop practical deliberation over time, rather than their failing to learn from their experiences.

Moreover, agents need to be taught the true causes of human behavior in order to learn greater understanding and empathy with the behavior of others as well as their own. Moral education programs also need to educate individuals on the types of situations that often influence agents to behave inconsistently with their moral commitments as well as the psychological mechanisms that we often use to deceive ourselves into thinking we are behaving consistently with our moral commitments when we are not.

Furthermore, teaching individuals that most agents have a merely non-ideal virtue may actually help those individuals behave consistently with their moral commitments. Rather than assuming that one's character can withstand temptations of any kind, if we realize that our virtue is partially socially dependent and that we are susceptible to various temptations, including temptations arising from pressures of social influences, then perhaps we are less likely to go willingly into the types of situations that we know to influence most

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Power: Self-Control and Deliberation" in V*irtue Ethics and Moral Education: Routledge International Studies in the Philosophy of Education,"* eds. David Carr and Jan Steutel (New York: Routledge, 1999), 125-137.

See also: Ben Spiecker, "Habituation and Training in Early Moral Upbringing" in V*irtue Ethics and Moral Education: Routledge International Studies in the Philosophy of Education,"* eds. David Carr and Jan Steutel (New York: Routledge, 1999), 210-233. Spicker argues that through habituation of multi-track instead of single-track habits, we can teach children to have a more "sensitive appreciation of their responses to circumstances." Multi-track habits are not unreflective responses learned through conditioning and drill, but rather habits that include both an affective and an intellectual component and can be tailored to fit different circumstances.

agents negatively. At the very least, we can learn to be wary of our own behavior when we find ourselves in psychologically strong moral situations.

If we accept a non-ideal theory of virtue based on a scalar theory of character, then we accept the role of moral luck in the development and maintenance of character and virtue. This leaves unanswered questions about moral responsibility and moral agency. If moral luck plays a part in the development and maintenance of many agents, can we still hold agents morally responsible for their actions in psychologically strong situations? Can we be considered to have moral agency when influenced by situational features like social influences to behave in ways inconsistent with our moral commitments?

Accepting a non-ideal theory of virtue may require us to adopt a theory of moral responsibility that bases responsibility on quality of the will, or coherence with a central sense of self or character. Since many individuals are susceptible to negative social influences, judging whether they are morally responsible or not for their actions may depend on the quality of their moral will, or on whether their actions are consistent with their character as a whole. Attributing moral responsibility would revolve around the question of whether the agent would normally have endorsed an action inconsistent with his moral commitments if he had been fully aware that it was inconsistent with his moral commitments. Moreover, how are we to assign praise and blame? These questions require further research and thought.

Ultimately, a non-ideal theory of virtue provides us with a more realistic picture of human functioning than either trait theory or situationism. Endorsing a non-ideal theory of virtue requires one to accept the relative fragility of human

virtue. Somewhat paradoxically, recognizing the fragility of our virtue may

actually help us strengthen our virtue.

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