The Possibility of Virtue

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ABSTRACT: To have a virtue is to possess a certain kind of trait of character that is appropriate in pursuing the moral good at which the virtue aims. Human beings are assumed to be capable of attaining those traits. Yet, a number of scholars are skeptical about the very existence of such character traits. They claim a sizable amount of empirical evidence in their support. This article is concerned with the existence and explanatory power of character as a way to assess the possibility of achieving moral virtue, with particular attention paid to business context. I aim to unsettle the so-called situationist challenge to virtue ethics. In the course of this article, I shall defend four claims, namely, that virtues are more than just behavioral dispositions, that at least some virtues may not be unitary traits, that psychologists cannot infer virtues from overt behavior, and that the situationist data do not account for the observational equivalence of traits. Since it rests on a misconception of what virtue is, the situationist objection remains unconvincing.

KEY WORDS: virtue; moral psychology; situationism; character; business ethics

> "For the proof that an unjust man is a bad man would require a positive account of justice as a 'virtue.' This part of the subject-matter of ethics is, however, completely closed to us until we have an account of what type of characteristic a virtue is—a problem, not of ethics, but of conceptual analysis—and how it relates to the actions in which it is instanced: a matter which I think Aristotle did not succeed in really making clear."—Elizabeth Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy" (1958)

IF YOU SEE YOUR NEIGHBOR donate $300 in response to a given fund appeal, you tend to think of him as a generous person. If you see him give up his seat on the bus to a pregnant woman, you are inclined to deduce that he is a considerate person. If you see him kick a dog in the street from an evident desire to hurt the animal, you conclude that he is a cruel man.

We all do that. And folk psychology and virtue ethics tell us that we have good reasons to do it. We ordinarily think of persons as governed by character traits. So do virtue ethicists. We explain what others do and what we do by reference to the character traits they and we possess. Ascribing a virtue to my neighbor entails, among other things, that she has a tendency to do what the virtue calls for under the appropriate circumstances. These acts are supposed to issue from a stable and robust trait. A trait that is consistent across situations, that is, relatively insensitive to differences in the environment of the agent.

However, a large collection of experiments in social psychology apparently indicates that small changes in the environment—such as whether someone is in

a good or a bad mood, is in a hurry or has plenty of time, receives instructions by phone or in person—explain why a person who behaved in accordance to virtue in one context acted against virtue in another.

The results of these experiments have been seen as grounds for doubting that there are virtues or vices. Traits are so weak, Ross and Nisbett argue that "one cannot predict with accuracy how particular people will respond . . . using information about an individual's personal dispositions." (Ross and Nisbett 1991: 2)

On the basis of such empirical evidence, a number of philosophers—notably Harman (1999), Levy (2004), and Doris (2005)—have recently posed a radical challenge to virtue ethics. The objection holds that character traits of the sort postulated by the virtue ethics tradition as virtues do not exist (Harman 2000) or, under a more qualified version of the objection, that they do not make any significant contributions to predicting and explaining behavior (Doris 2002). Human behavior, the argument goes, is primarily determined by situational factors rather than by such character traits.

In this article, I shall address the debate over the possibility of virtue and the explanatory power of character traits. The research question is whether a plausible theory of virtue can account for the findings in experimental social psychology, in particular the empirical evidence on the virtues of honesty and compassion. Elsewhere, I have offered six methodological objections against the standard interpretation of the situationist data (Alzola 2008). I shall complete the project in the course of this article by arguing that Situationism relies on a misconception of virtue. I shall provide four arguments to show that the situationist thesis does not hold.

Three clarifications about the scope of this article are in order. First, this is not an article about the so-called person-situation debate, the existence of personality traits, or the relative influence of individual differences on predictions of human behavior. It is an article about the possibility of attaining certain sort of character traits that are postulated by virtue ethicists as virtues and vices.[1] Second, given the nature of the question, this article is not intended as a contribution to the measure and operationalization of the virtues. Third, the style of this article is defensive. Here I do not intend to defend virtue ethics by offering plausible reasons to support it. Neither do I aim to show the strengths of the character traits investigated by virtue ethicists. I am merely defending virtue ethics by showing that the situationist challenge is unconvincing.

The article is divided into four sections. In section one, I begin by briefly introducing virtue ethics and exploring the question of whether the findings in experimental psychology are relevant to normative ethics. In section two, I shall summarize the experimental evidence on the existence and explanatory power of traits and reconstruct the situationist argument. In section three, I shall offer four objections against the situationist thesis. Section four concludes.

1. CHARACTEROLOGICAL ETHICS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL REALISM

Virtue ethics is primarily concerned with the moral appraisal of persons; that is, with questions of what people should be like and what traits of character are best

for human flourishing (Foot 2001, Annas 2004). The basic judgments in ethics are, according to virtue ethics, judgments about character (Slote 1992, Hursthouse 1999). That explains why virtue ethics is commonly referred as an ethics of being, as different from an ethics of doing (Appiah 2008).

As a character-based ethical theory, it embodies two main theses. First, at least some judgments about the value of character traits are independent of judgments about the rightness or wrongness of actions. Second, the notion of virtue justifies the notion of right conduct in a sense that is explanatorily prior to the notion of right conduct: the moral value of an act cannot be assessed independently from the moral value of the person performing such an act. Such theses oppose two traditional views, namely, that the value of character traits depends on the value of the conduct these traits tend to produce and that the concept of right behavior is theoretically prior to the concept of virtue. The right thing to do, according to virtue ethics, is what an agent with a virtuous character would characteristically do.[2]

Which character traits are the virtues? The justification of the virtues lies in the essential role of these character traits in human flourishing. Virtues are deemed as necessary and as constitutive elements of well-being. By constituting his flourishing, the virtues benefit its possessor as a human being.

Character traits of the sort postulated by virtue ethicists as virtues and vices may be used to summarize the agent's past behavior and predict the agent's future behavior, to explain the agent's behavior with reference to the individual's character, and to provide evaluations of the agent, his activities, and practices in a way that the value of the virtues—and the disvalue of the vices—attaches directly to their possessor rather than its products.

One of the main appeals of the virtue ethical account just presented, which explains its centrality in moral theory and business ethics, is that unlike its main competitors, it offers a richer account of moral motivation. As Murdoch (1970) suggests, the concept of person advocated by mainstream moral philosophy is psychologically unrealistic and morally degrading, merely a thin and abstract will that produces behavior. In contrast, virtue ethics provides a better fit with our moral experience in life and in the context of decision-making. We do not judge nor make decisions on the basis of abstract rules or universal principles. Rather, we act on the basis of whether our behavior fits well with what the sort of person we want to be would do under the circumstances.

Thus, a central question any theory of virtue needs to address is whether we can live a good life as a matter of fact. Moral theories too often neglect facts about human nature and about society to the point that, as a result, they become distorted and inadequate for our real needs. Normative theories must take seriously the kind of persons we are, what we can actually achieve, and the types of cognitive and motivational structures we have (Alzola, 2011). In short, psychological facts matter. They impinge on normative ethics by setting constraints of feasibility.

There is a fundamental determinant of what standards a moral theory can put forward, which I shall call here the requirement of psychological realism. As Griffin puts it:

One cannot, in the sense relevant to obligation, meet a demand if the demand is beyond the capacity of the sort of people that, on other especially important grounds, we should want there to be. (Griffin 2007: chap. 5, p. 4)

The requirement of psychological realism sets a number of constraints for any normative theory. For a theory of virtue to meet the standard of psychological realism, one expects the following four conditions to be fulfilled. First, there must be character traits of the sort postulated as virtues by virtue ethicists. Second, human beings differ in their possession of such character traits. Third, since such traits enable their possessors to flourish, they raise the probability of certain appropriate attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. Fourth, people are capable to develop the sort of traits that constitute the virtues as well as the mental features that ground such traits. If any of these claims is false, charges of lack of psychological realism are justified.

More need to be said about the "character traits of the sort postulated by virtue theorists as virtues." Roughly, a virtue is a deep-seated trait of character that provides (normative) reasons for action together with appropriate motivations for choosing, feeling, desiring, and reacting well across a range of situations. The traits of character traditionally postulated as virtues have at least two fundamental features. First, they have a tendency to influence conduct. The virtues characteristically yield appropriate behavior. If someone is, say, honest, we assume that he has a character of a certain sort that makes us expect that he habitually behave honestly (when he acts *in character*) over time. Second, character traits are global in the sense that someone who possesses the trait of, say, benevolence is inclined to behave in a benevolent manner across a broad range of circumstances. Thus, so-called "global traits" entail predictions of behavioral consistency.

2. MORAL INCONSISTENCY AND THE SITUATIONIST CHALLENGE

The strongest interpretation of this consistency condition is that the possession of a virtue entails for the agent that she will unfailingly behave in a virtuous way anytime the circumstances call for such a behavior. In other words, trait attributions entail predictions of behavioral consistency, stability, and integration.[3]

Doris illustrates the requirement of consistency with the case of his babysitter:

When we hire a babysitter, we are not necessarily attributing broadly admirable dispositions to him. But what we are confidently predicting is that he will not molest our children next Tuesday night from seven to eleven when we go out for dinner. . . . Here, and elsewhere, it is not the broad behavioral trend but the particular behavior that is of central interest. (Doris 2002: 74)

Situationists claim that virtue ethics is incapable of providing these kinds of predictions. There exists, so they claim, a vast quantity of empirical evidence indicating that behavior radically varies with slight situational variations, such as whether the would-be helper is in hurry or has plenty of time, or whether he is standing alone or finds himself standing with other persons in an emergency. These findings are taken to indicate that cross-situational consistency of behavior is so low as to call into

question the causal role of character traits of the sort postulated by virtue ethics as virtues and vices in determining behavior (Mischel 1968, Ross and Nisbett 1991).

While a comprehensive discussion of the experimental literature merits its own paper, I shall briefly summarize in this section the major findings of the studies as they pertain to the virtues of compassion and honesty, the most widely cited by situationists. Next, I shall lay out the situationist argument.

2.1. How Situation Explains Behavior

One would expect a caring person to be quite insensitive to her moods when it comes to help someone in need. However, a body of evidence on mood effects apparently shows a large influence of mood states on people's pro-social behavior. For example, students given a cookie while studying at a university library were more likely than those not given a cookie to agree to help another student (Isen and Levin 1972). Finding a dime in the coin return slot of public phone booths was highly related to helping a third person pick up a folder full of papers (Isen and Levin 1972). Likewise, it is widely documented that people are more likely to help when exposed to pleasant aromas (Baron 1997) and that some seasonal anomalies in stock returns are caused by mood changes of investors due to lack of daylight (Kamstra, Kramer, and Levi 2003) and temperature variations (Cao and Wei 2005).[4]

In a similar vein, the empirical literature on group effects suggests that when one is alone, one is more likely to help someone in need than when other people are around. For instance, bystanders hearing an epileptic seizure over earphones were less likely to seek assistance for the victim when they believed other witnesses were present than when they believed they were alone (Darley and Latané 1968). Recent research indicates that merely imagining the presence of others can lead to less helping behavior on a subsequent unrelated task (Garcia, Weaver, Moskowitz, and Darley 2002). And Levine and Crowther (2008) found that when bystanders share group level psychological relationships, group size could encourage as well as inhibit helping.

Another classic work related to the virtue of compassion is the Good Samaritan experiment, which showed that the subject's degree of hurry offered the best explanation of the helping behavior of seminary students. Seminarians who were told they were not in a hurry were six times more likely to help a confederate who appeared to be in distress than those in the rushed condition (Darley and Batson 1973). More recently, a study conducted by Tang, Sutarso, Davis Wu, Dolinski, Ibrahim, and Wagner (2008) on employee helping behavior fully supported the Good Samaritan Effect across four cultures. And in a laboratory experiment, Wright, George, Farnsworth, and McMahan (1993) found that people displayed the lowest helping behavior when they were assigned difficult tasks and paid on the basis of goal attainment.

But compassion is not only associated with helping behavior. One expects a compassionate person to avoid inflicting pain on innocent human beings. Yet, studies on obedience to authority document that, paraphrasing Hannah Arendt, under certain circumstances, the most ordinary decent person can become a villain. In the most

widely cited experiment in social psychology, the Milgram's studies on obedience to authority, subjects were instructed by an authority figure to administer "painful but not dangerous" electrical shocks in fifteen-volt increments to a coparticipant (unbeknownst to the subjects, a confederate of the experimenter who received no shocks) for incorrect answers to word-matching questions. In the first set of experiments, 65 percent of the subjects went all the way to the highest voltage (450 volts) even though the coparticipant was banging on the wall at 300 volts (Milgram 1974). There were no significant differences on standard personality measures between maximally obedient and maximally disobedient subjects. But small situational variations in the design of the experiment apparently made the difference. When subjects were free to choose the shock levels to administer, only 3 percent delivered the maximum shock, but when the experimenter was physically absent and gave his orders by phone, there was a 21 percent level of obedience. And when the shocks were administered by a confederate while the subject performed subsidiary tasks, obedience climbed to 93 percent. In the business setting, Brief, Buttram, Elliot, Reizenstein, and McCline (1995) found that people in a simulated corporation would obey orders to employ racist criteria when making personnel decisions. And Brief, Dietz, Reizenstein Cohen, Pugh, and Vaslow (2000) found effects of prejudice and business justifications by authority figures in discrimination against minorities in hiring situations.

   The experiments on the virtue of honesty yielded similarly disturbing results. Studies of temptation and cheating behavior challenge the assumption of global traits that virtue ethics shares with folk psychology. Hartshorne and May (1928) conducted one of the most comprehensive studies on honesty and deception. Schoolchildren were placed under moderately enticing situations. Specifically, they could cheat on tests by copying from a key, by adding more answers after time was called, by peeping, and by faking a solution to a puzzle. They also had an opportunity to cheat on homework. They could cheat by faking a record in athletic contests. They could also cheat by faking, peeping, or stealing in party games. They could steal money from a box used in a test. And they could lie about their conduct in general or about cheating on the tests mentioned above.

   The experimenters had expected to find that there really were honest and dishonest subjects, distributed on an honesty-dishonesty scale. In fact, individual children were fairly consistent over time in repeated tests under the same type of situation, but not across different situations. Hartshorne and May found that almost everyone cheats some of the time. And they found that honesty in one situation, such as a school test, failed to predict behavior in a different situation, such as a stealing situation or a party game. Behavioral consistency was due to situational similarities and not to trait measures:

> It may be contended of course that as a matter of fact we rarely reach a zero correlation . . . and that this implies some common factor in the individual as might properly be called a trait. . . . Our contention, however, is that this common factor is not an inner entity operating independently of the situations in which the individuals are placed but is a function of the situation in the sense that an individual behaves similarly in different

situations in proportion as these situations are alike, have been experienced as common occasions for honest or dishonest behavior, and are comprehended as opportunities for deception or honesty. (Hartshorne and May 1928: 385)

In the same vein, a large study on extroversion and introversion by Newcomb (1929) and an experiment on punctuality by Dudycha (1936) both reported little or no consistency from one situation to another.

The relative power of situational effects has been widely documented in organizational scholarship as well (Snyder and Ickes 1995). A large body of research suggests that "structural characteristics appear to be more directly linked to job attitudes than personality traits" (Davis-Blake and Pfeffer 1986: 388). For instance, effects of perceptions of the organization's ethical climate (Victor and Cullen 1988; Cullen, Victor, and Bronson 1993), effects of ethical culture (Treviño, Butterfield, and McCabe 1998), attitudes and behaviors of peers in the workplace (Weaver, Treviño, and Agle 2005), effects of leadership (Brown, Treviño, and Harrison 2005), issue intensity (Nill and Schibrowsky 2005), codes of ethics (Greenberg 2002); and informal incentives (Tenbrunsel 1998).

This literature on the psychology of compassion and honesty provides a disturbing insight into how easily certain circumstances can overwhelm character traits. It follows from the evidence, according to the standard interpretation, that prosocial behavior is not accounted for by character variables but is rather a function of seemingly irrelevant features in the environment. Destructive behavior is also situation-specific rather than governed by global traits of the sort postulated by virtue theorists. And the fact that a person cheats in one situation does not mean that she will (or will not) in another.

In sum, attributions of honesty and compassion appear to lack cross-situational and cross-temporal consistency as well as evaluative integration. The existence of character traits of the sort postulated by virtue ethicists and the explanatory and predictive power of character attributions are allegedly threatened. For what a person with a seemingly good character will do in a particular circumstance, situationists conclude, is what anyone else will do in exactly that situation, if we allow for random variation (Harman 2000).

2.2. *The Situationist Argument*

There are at least two ways to articulate the situationist threat to virtue theory.

The stronger version of Situationism, which is defended by Harman, challenges the reality of character and hence, of virtue. In his words:

[T]here is no evidence that people differ in character traits. They differ in their situations and in their perceptions of their situations. They differ in their goals, strategies, neuroses, optimism, etc. But character traits do not explain what differences there are. (Harman 2000: 329)

Then, if there are no traits of the sort postulated by virtue ethicists as virtues (and vices), we are not capable of being virtuous. And if there are no virtues, neither can there be theories of virtue.

A second, more qualified, version of Situationism does not defend the claim that traits do not exist at all. Rather, it holds that character attributions do not have much explanatory and predictive power. In contrast, situational factors that would seem to have little moral significance have more explanatory power than any personal qualities. Trait attributions, the argument goes, lack cross-situational consistency and evaluative integration. This is taken as evidence that these personal qualities, if they exist at all, are too weak and local to qualify as virtues. This nuanced view of Situationism was first articulated by Flanagan (1991) and has been recently defended by Doris (2002).

Ultimately, the situationist challenge to virtue ethics entails an accusation of lack of psychological realism. But notice that Situationism does not challenge the claim that virtues are not attainable by 'normal' human beings because the theory is too demanding (say, because only heroes and saints can attain full virtue). Rather, the situationist simply denies the very possibility of building a theory on the basis of traits of character that do not exist or whose explanatory power is negligible.

We might reconstruct the logical form of the situationist argument as follows:

(1) The moral psychology that underlies virtue ethics is dispositionalist.
(2) Dispositionalism defends the determinative influence of global character traits on human behavior.
(3) Empirical data in social psychology discredit the determinative influence and the very existence of global character traits on human behavior.
(4) Therefore, empirical research discredits the dispositionalist assumptions on human behavior.
(5) Therefore, the moral psychology that underlies virtue ethics is empirically inadequate.[5]

If the situationist argument holds, virtue ethics would be inadequate as an empirical theory and, one may argue, questionable as a normative theory, on grounds of psychological realism.

3. THE CASE AGAINST SITUATIONISM

One may think of, at least, four ways to respond to the situationist attack.

First, one may free virtue ethics from any commitment to character. Virtue notions, according to such a view, would apply primarily to actions and mental states occurring at a particular time rather than to global and robust traits. Hurka defends this strategy by suggesting that in typical areas of moral concern, "virtue should mainly be found in occurrent attitudes" (Hurka 2001: 43) More radically, Harman (1999) and Thomson (1997) advocate an unusual—to say the least—version of virtue ethics, a "Virtue Ethics without Character Traits," as the title of a recent article by Harman states (2001). This position can easily accommodate the situationist challenge but it gives up all aspirations for the improvement of character. Explanations of behavior are not the only function virtue attributions serve. Virtue ascriptions serve as a source of information, explanation, prediction, and moral evaluation under the best account of virtue ethics.

Second, one may argue that virtue ethics is untouched by the experimental evidence. Virtue ethics is primarily a normative theory; it should not be dismissed on the grounds that it does not provide infallible predictions of how most of the human population behaves. This response might follow along the lines of a pure aretaic theory, which aims to provide an account of the ideal moral life. Virtues are moral ideals that we should aim to attain even if we are unsuccessful. Appiah, among others, defends such a view:

> Philosophical accounts of the character ideal of compassion, the conception of it as a virtue, need make no special assumption about how easy or widespread this deep disposition is. Acquiring virtue, Aristotle already knew, is hard; it is something that takes many years, and most people don't make it. . . . But difficult is not the same as impossible; and perhaps we can ascend the gradient of these virtues through aspiring to the full-fledged ideal. (Appiah 2008)

The fact that virtue is rare—assuming for the moment that it is a fact—the fact that people are imperfect and not fully virtuous, is not a serious threat to virtue theory. True virtue is rare enough to leave a statistically significant footprint in psychological studies (Kamtekar 2004).

The second response is also tricky. If it is true that we are so susceptible to situational variations and so oblivious of such fact, it might be simply impossible to develop compassion, honesty, and other virtuous character traits. And if virtues are unattainable by normal human beings, if they are just ideals, virtue ethics fails to meet one of the standards attached to the requirement of psychological realism presented in section one.

Third, one may dispute the situationist interpretation of the empirical evidence. Considering my reconstruction of the situationist argument in section two, one may argue that the third premise of the argument fails. Elsewhere, I have challenged the third premise—the claim that the empirical data discredit the determinative influence (and the very existence) of character traits of the sort postulated by virtue ethicists—because it relies on a misinterpretation of the empirical evidence. There is a fair amount of evidence in personality psychology documenting dispositional effects on ethical decision-making. And there are a number of methodological problems associated with the aforementioned experiments that discredit the situationist thesis.[6]

Fourth, one may challenge the conceptualization of virtue that is in place under Situationism. Accordingly, in this section I shall provide four arguments to challenge the first premise of the situationist argument, that is, the claim that virtue ethicists are committed to the twofold thesis that only character traits explain people's behavior and that virtues are just behavioral dispositions.[7] In other words, I shall argue that Situationism holds a misleading notion of virtue.

3.1. Virtues as Behavioral Dispositions

Two dimensions of character can be distinguished. Situationists emphasize the behavioral aspect of virtue to the neglect of the inner dimension. If some dispositions are virtues and some are vices, they are, according to Situationism, merely

dispositions to morally good and bad behavior, respectively.[8] That is, for a person to possess a virtue, say the virtue of courage, is for him to be disposed to behave in the correlated typical way, under certain conditions, relatively frequently.

As Doris puts it,

> [T]o attribute a character or personality trait is to say, among other things, that someone is disposed to behave in a certain way in certain eliciting conditions. (Doris 2002: 15)

The qualification "among other things" is crucial, but Situationists seem to have little to say about the "other things," as they focus overwhelmingly on the behavioral component. A courageous person, they suggest, is simply one who unfailingly behaves in a courageous way in response to certain conditions that call for courageous behavior.

Situationism suggests that we can investigate the appropriateness of trait attribution without any conceptual analysis of the sort suggested by Anscombe in the initial quote about what type of characteristic a virtue is. Trait attributions are made solely on the evidence of behavior. Even if behavior is caused by inner factors, behavior can be classified and predicted without resorting to those factors. Since the experimenter fails to observe the relevant behavioral regularities for the attribution of traits, Situationists conclude, we cannot attribute traits or classify into types.

In contrast, virtue theorists highlight the importance of the inner dimension of character in defining virtue as "an inner quality of an agent and of his acts" (von Wright 1963). Virtue ethics is concerned with the whole span of a human life rather than with a particular action or a single decision.

The best philosophical account of virtue is non-reductive. We understand virtue to be something enduring, as opposed to momentary feelings, thoughts, and actions, which are insufficient to characterize the psychological apparatus of virtue. To have a strong character entails the possession of a capacity to entertain higher-order thoughts about thoughts that enables the person to reflect on and to change his own beliefs and patterns of reasoning. A virtuous person will consider what highest-order desires, values, and beliefs should govern his life (Frankfurt 1971). Within limits, he will cultivate certain higher-order desires—such as the desire to overcome his fear of being embarrassed—and free himself from other higher-order desires—such as the desire to be vindictive. These desires being not merely to have or to lack certain first-order desires but desires that one or another of his first-order desires should be effective, in the sense of ordering action (Lewis 1989). He will also develop values and cultivate adherence to certain principles by reflection and disciplined habituation. Possessing a value entails wanting to possess certain kinds of desire. If I value 'honesty,' that entails that I want to be the sort of person who really wants to return the wallet I find in the street to its owner, even if the wallet is full of money that I desperately need. I do not want to be just someone who merely acknowledges a duty to return the wallet. To have a strong character is also a matter of cultivating the appropriate emotions. I will feel good rather than angry about giving the wallet back. Admittedly, even a person of strong character will be influenced by the environment. But a virtuous person will perceive situations correctly; he will grasp

the morally salient features of the situation, such as whether a particular act is, say, a lie or not. Consequently, good character is also a matter of rationality

Moral character, in short, consists of higher-order desires and values, beliefs, framing capacities, emotions, and enduring patterns of behavior that have any bearing on moral matters. Although they are interrelated, these elements of character cannot be described solely in terms of each other (i.e., in terms of behavioral dispositions). For an action to be from a state of virtue—i.e., for an action to be expressive of virtue—it must be expressive of appropriate inner states.

Notice how this objection discredits the first premise of the situationist argument. Traditionally, personality psychologists have been concerned with how psychological states vary across individuals, while social psychologists have been more concerned with how psychological states vary across situations. Now, framing capacities and perceptions involves cognitions. Thus, there is not such a clear-cut distinction between the two. Such a conclusion is consistent with what is called the interactionist approach, under which behavior is seen as the product of the interaction between the person and the situation (Chatman, 1989).

To reprise, the virtues operationalized by the situationist have little to do with the traditional conceptualization of virtue. Situationists argue that the possession of a certain character trait X entails that X-like behavior is a necessary and sufficient condition of attributing trait X to the agent. But X-like behavior is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to grant a virtue ascription. It is not necessary because a virtuous person may fail to act in an X-like manner yet still be virtuous, as Aristotle explained when describing the generous man who may respond in a less-than-perfectly generous manner (*EN* 1121a5-7) and the just man who need not always act in a perfectly just manner (*EN* 1134a16-17).[9] And it is not sufficient because, as explained above, a behavioral disposition does not constitute a virtue. At a minimum, the agent must have a good motive for her behavior if her disposition is to count as a virtue. It is possible to have a disposition to behave honestly out of fear of the negative consequences of dishonest behavior for myself, without caring at all about others' dignity. Such a behavior—provided that it makes sense to call it 'honest behavior'—does not count as a manifestation of a virtue because the action does not stem from the character trait of honesty. Conversely, an agent may possess the virtue of gratitude without saying the words "thank you." Or, an agent may lack the virtue of gratitude and still perform an "act of gratitude." Such a badly motivated disposition may still be socially useful when compared with the alternative of lacking any disposition towards honest or grateful behavior. But few will think that it is excellent enough to be regarded as a virtue.

Therefore, lack of cross-situational consistency is not a serious threat to virtue ethics when virtue is correctly conceptualized, that is, when it is not merely reduced to behavioral dispositions.

3.2. Non-Unitary Virtues

We know by now that virtues are not merely behavioral dispositions. Honesty, for example, is not just a disposition to behave in an honest manner, that is, as required

by the duty of honesty. Next, we need to discuss what kind of traits the virtues are. Consider, again, the case of honesty. The studies on honesty and deception by Hartshorne and May are widely cited in support of the claim that trait-relevant behavior is inconsistent and, specifically, that honest behavior is highly situation-specific. What do Hartshorne and May's results tell us about the existence and the explanatory power of the character trait of honesty (and deceitfulness)?[10]

Hartshorne and May expected to find that there were honest and dishonest subjects distributed bimodally on an honesty-dishonesty scale. They did find behavioral stability. Individual children behaved consistently honestly and dishonestly, in repeated tests of the same type of situation. Yet, they only found very low correlations between the cheating tests to produce evidence of the existence of a trait of honesty (or deceitfulness). For example, copying from an answer key correlated strongly with copying from a key on a similar test at a later day (0.70), but not with continuing to work on a speed test after the time is called (0.29). True. A few children (less than 4 percent) cheated as often as they got a chance and a few children did not cheat in any opportunity presented (7 percent). But social psychologists are not concerned with these extreme cases. Instead, they are looking for causal factors that have social—rather than individual—explanatory power.

Situationists argue that such causal factors are features of the environment rather than located within the person. The explanatory and predictive power of trait attributions—for example, of ascribing the virtue of honesty—is much weaker than that of certain features of the situations in which the person find himself.

Now, the argument that the low correlation coefficients reported by Hartshorne and May proved that children were not consistently honest (or dishonest) across situations implicitly assumes that honesty is a unitary trait. In other words, it is assumed that each child has the same propensity for cheating across situations. But it does not go without saying that not cheating, not lying, and not stealing are the same kind of behavior or that they should be ordered by one single psychological trait, even though they are included under the same label, 'honesty' or 'deceitfulness.'

This is not a new insight. Trait theorists have discussed the generality of the trait of honesty for decades. The doctrine of the specificity of moral behavior in psychology (Burton 1963) resists the abstract concept of honesty as a valid character trait and favors the alternative view that many different kinds of specific behaviors, which are independent, are grouped into the same rubric.

Even if we reduce honesty—as Situationists advocate—to a disposition not to cheat, a disposition not to lie, and a disposition not to steal that are packaged together for some reason, it is not obvious that such dispositions are deeply connected or that they cannot count as virtues independently of each other. Indeed, the justification, roles, and psychological structure of such dispositions are arguably quite different. Whereas the wrongness of cheating is related to taking unfair advantages of a system one is supposed to uphold, the wrongness of lying is concerned with respecting others' dignity, and the wrongness of stealing with undermining the secure possession of property which people must enjoy (Kamtekar 2004).

As Lehmann and Witty concluded in 1934:

> [O]ver and over, a battery of tests designed to measure traits such as . . . honesty, yields results so unreliable . . . that one is led to question the actual existence of the general trait. (Lehmann and Witty 1934)

If the motives behind cheating, lying, and stealing are different, it comes at no surprise that the corresponding behavioral dispositions are independent. We may still find cross-situational behavioral inconsistencies with respect to any of these three dispositions. But we should be very careful when assessing the findings reported by Hartshorne and May, Newcomb, and the likes about the virtue of honesty. Children might differ in their propensities to cheat in various ways, hence, we should not expect high correlation coefficients.

Some authors propose to add these heterogeneous and domain-specific groups of dispositions together to form a more inclusive composite disposition (Flanagan 1991). In the concluding section I shall briefly discuss whether these local and narrow dispositions can merit their consideration as virtues.

3.3. Virtue, Continence, and Akrasia

The third objection holds that the experimental data invoked by situationists to discredit virtue ethics do not capture a key distinction in the virtue ethics literature between incontinence and vice, and continence and virtue (Aristotle, *EN* 1145a15–1145b14). Virtue and vice do not constitute an exhaustive classification of states of character. Rather, they mark the end points of a spectrum of kinds of states of character, namely, heroic virtue, ordinary virtue, continence, incontinence, vice, and brutishness. The two states of interest here are continence (*enkrateia*) and weakness of the will (*akrasia*).

A weak-willed person lacks the unity of reason and feeling that characterizes the person of true virtue. Although he does recognize and aspire to the good, he has emotions and appetites that tempt him away from the good. And unlike the continent person, the weak-willed agent gives in to temptation and, perhaps with remorse, he does what he knows to be wrong (Davidson 1980; Audi 1979).

As Milgram explains, his subjects were not simply sadistic persons. They were not blindly obedient either. Subjects were observed to "sweat, tremble, stutter, bite their lips, groan, and dig their fingernails into their flesh. These were characteristic rather than exceptional responses to the experiment" (Milgram 1963: 375). One might say that the Milgram subjects who went all the way to the highest voltage in spite of their deep misgivings were too easily persuaded by a trusted authority-figure to do what was against their better judgment and feelings.

Even if one concedes that there may be a linear connection between virtues—defined as behavioral dispositions—and behavior, one might still explain behavioral inconsistencies by reference to cognitive and motivational obstacles to practical reason. People fail to do the right thing for the right reason because either they have wrong moral beliefs—the vicious person—or they have the right beliefs but do not act on them—the *akrates* (Aristotle, *EN*, 1105a23–1105a35).

If we are exclusively concerned with overt behavior, we lack enough information to draw inferences about a person's state of character. In observing behavior, the

experimenter might readily confuse the continent person with the virtuous person, and the incontinent person with the vicious person. And, as explained in the previous objection, while the absence of appropriate behavior may lead to doubts that a person possesses the relevant virtue, the presence of appropriate behavior does not imply that a person does possess the relevant virtue.

Let me illustrate the difference between virtue and continence with a business example. The continent (*enkratic*) manager does not pay the bribe and he can be reliably counted upon not to. But he will spend the rest of his life thinking about the professional opportunities and personal pleasures he could have had if he had paid it. Conversely, the virtuous executive is not tempted by these thoughts at all; he enjoys refraining from paying kickbacks because not only does he respond to the right principles, but also his behavior stems from the right feelings, desires, and beliefs that are relevant to the matter.

A similar distinction should be made between the incontinent (the *akrates*) and the vicious person. Milgram reports:

> I observed a mature and initially poised businessman enter the lab smiling and confident. Within 20 minutes, he was reduced to a twitching, stuttering wreck, who was rapidly approaching a point of nervous collapse. He constantly pulled on his earlobe, and twisted his hands. At one point he pushed his fist into his forehead and muttered: "Oh God, let's stop it." And yet he continued to respond to every word of the experimenter, and obeyed to the end. (Milgram 1963, 377)

Compare such a reaction with Bruno Batta's, one of the subjects who went to 450 volts in the so-called touch-proximity variation of the Milgram studies (Experiment 4), in which the teacher was pressing the learner's hands onto a shock plate. Batta displayed "total indifference" to the learner, he was "submissive and courteous" to the experimenter, and he even blamed the learner for his stubbornness in refusing to answer after 330 volts (Milgram 1974: 46–47). While the executive's behavior may reveal a weak will, Batta's behavior does not seem in conflict with his inner states: he does not experience any remorse because he does not see anything wrong in administering the electric shocks.

I should insist, however, that observation of one single action cannot say anything about the character of a person, because even the fully virtuous person may fail to behave in a perfectly virtuous manner sometimes (see note 9). One may act out of character. And without longitudinal studies of the subjects, the experimenter has no way to reach any serious conclusion about their moral character.

Still, Aristotle's classification of states of character offers at least two alternative interpretations of the situationist puzzle. First, perhaps there were not many wholly virtuous persons among the subjects of these experiments (Solomon 2003, Athanassoulis 2000). If virtue requires practical wisdom, one would expect virtuous persons to be rare. Full possession of a virtue is atypical. There are a number of ways to fall short of this ideal (*NE*, 1105b13–1105b15). Kupperman claims that "perhaps what [the experiments] show is that [the idea of virtuous character] is much rarer than most people might suppose" (Kupperman 2001: 243).

Alternatively, the behavior of the majority—conflicted obedients, unresponsive bystanders, and so on—may have to do with a tendency toward unjustified humility (Badhwar 2009). Aristotle classifies pusillanimity as a vice and defines the pusillanimous man as "someone who thinks he is worthy of less than he is worthy of." (*EN*, 1123b10).[11] In the sphere of self-worth, both *akrasia* and pusillanimity have the same behavioral manifestations and they both come from the same emotional tendency, namely, hesitations about the merits of one's judgment.[12] As explained above, the difference lies in the *akrates*' appreciation that it is important to have a justified sense of self-worth, which is absent in the pusillanimous person. This thesis explains the behavior of these subjects who think they ought to disobey yet still obey because they come to believe—in spite of common sense, the labels on the shock generator, the victim's cries, and their own experience with a mild shock which is part of the experimental protocol—that their judgment is worth less than that of the man in a white coat lab (Badhwar 2009). Or, they fear the experimenter's disapproval and feel embarrassed at disobeying (Sabini and Silver 2005).

An objection arises to the thesis that virtue is rare. If the theory of virtue defended here involves a return to a sort of elitist conception of virtue, according to which only the sage, the saint, or the hero can be excellent, then the charge of lack of psychological realism may reappear. People must be able to become virtuous for the theory to be realistic, at least—or especially—in the context of business virtues.

But the objection overstates the significance of the situationist data. After all, even accepting the situationist interpretation, one needs to explain the caring behavior of the hurried Good Samaritans, the disobedient subjects in the Milgram studies, and so on. There may have been virtuous persons among the subjects, even under a dispositional account of virtue, and even if they are not in the majority. Thirty five percent of the subjects were not fully obedient in the Milgram experiments. A few subjects decisively stop at 150 volts even in the baseline version of the experiment. "Only" sixteen percent of the Australian female subjects were fully obedient (Kilham and Mann 1974). Ten percent of the subjects were *Good* Samaritans in spite of the rush. None of these results can be accounted for by the situationist.[13]

In short, the conceptualization of virtue advocated by Situationism prevents us from making a central distinction between continence and virtue and between vice and weakness of the will, which is crucial for the assessment of the evidence on behavioral consistency.

3.4. Multiple Traits and Virtue Ascriptions

Situationism defends a linear account of traits, according to which a trait is supposed to bear a one-to-one correspondence with certain behavior in any situation where it might be relevant. Such an account of virtue is unable to say much about the explanatory power of virtues when it comes to the experimental data presented in section two. For situationists might readily attribute behavior to a wrong disposition. Or, they might mistakenly attribute to situations what should be attributed to a different, conflicting disposition.

Behavior is overdetermined. It is a truism that people have more than one character trait. Those traits—even defined along the lines of a dispositional account—may sometimes conflict in a situation. If so, behavioral inconsistency may be the result not of the absence of any trait underlying behavior but, rather, the result of different traits that are manifested in a situation. In that case, we need observations of behavior in different situations in order to judge which trait is currently displayed.

To keep talking about our two virtues: honesty points to telling the upsetting truth, compassion to remaining silent or even lying. Then, the virtue of honesty and the virtue of compassion have observationally equivalent manifestations, as when you respond to the Nazi official's request for the whereabouts of the Jews you have hidden in your basement (Audi 1988).

In any situation, a plurality of motivations may have caused the observed behavior. The observational equivalence of different traits means that we cannot just assume that any typology based on observed behavior maps onto the anatomy of the underlying traits (Sober 1990). And where they come apart, our predictions of future behavior and our prescriptions of how to achieve particular outcomes may go wrong. The closer the correspondence between our classification of types and the underlying causes of individual differences in behavior, the more accurate we might expect our predictions to be. To this end, a trait analysis of the sort required by Anscombe is necessary to improve our understanding of types and classification into types and, hence, the usefulness of those classifications. Situationists maintain that even if behavior is caused by inner factors, behavior can be classified and predicted without resorting to those factors and so trait analysis is just irrelevant. That is a poor account of traits and trait attributions.

When a disposition is present together with a countervailing disposition, manifested in identical circumstances, behavior may appear inconsistent only if it is assessed with reference to that one trait. Thus, it is wrong to automatically conclude that if behavior is not guided by the trait under investigation, then it is controlled by situational factors. Multiple traits may be relevant in a situation, and different traits may motivate different behavior.

At least some of the experimental situations designed by Hartshorne and May might be considered inappropriate on these grounds. For instance, in one of their lying situations, Hartshorne and May recorded whether or not a child would lie to prevent another child from getting into trouble. We may think that this case is not just a paradigmatic case of honesty because there are other traits relevant to the situation. For instance, in the example of the lying situation, being honest and being loyal may be observationally equivalent.[14]

Similarly, the experimental evidence on prosocial behavior can be interpreted in a radically different way. Arguably, one could not be, say, a good helper if one always allowed one's helping activities to be interrupted by new calls for help. The subjects of the Good Samaritans experiment solved their conflict, one may say, by choosing to help the experimenter rather than the person in the doorway. We have all experienced this sort of situation in life. You are running late to a lecture or to a business meeting when you see someone in need. In this situation, we see how a virtue—related to your commitment to give the lecture or attend the business meet-

ing—is pitted against another virtue—associated with helping a person in distress. When two virtues are pitted against each other, the agent is forced to act, to some extent, out of character. In the Good Samaritans studies, it might be rational and morally appropriate (for the seminarian) not to aid a person in need.[15]

A similar reading of the Milgram experiments has been defended by Solomon (2005), who argues that the Milgram subjects had, in addition to a disposition not to harm innocent human beings, a disposition to obey or to cooperate with the experimenter. A more robust disposition than compassion, a disposition that is more prominent in this unusual experimental situation, is a disposition to obey. Virtually everyone had been brought up with this "virtue" whereas compassion is "a virtue more often praised than practiced, except on specially designated occasions." (Solomon 2003, 53)[16]

In short, the multiplicity of traits and their observational equivalence pose a serious problem for Situationism. The realization that the correspondence between traits and behavior is not one-to-one but many-to-one leads us to the conclusion that the evidence on lack of cross-situational consistency does not amount to the nonexistence of character traits of the sort postulated by virtue ethicists as virtues. In the end, we might have been looking at the wrong trait.

4. CONCLUSION

Situationism questions our view of what it is for someone to have a virtue. The empirical evidence casts doubts on the extent to which people's reactions depend on character and on the very possibility of virtue. The situationist challenge is, after all, an objection from psychological realism.

The situationist argument fails, I have argued, because virtue ethics is incorrectly presented as a dispositionalist theory and because the empirical evidence does not truly discredit the existence or the influence on behavior of traits of the sort postulated as virtues.

Contrary to the first premise of the situationist argument, virtue ethics does not rely on a dispositionalist moral psychology but rather on an interactionist account of human behavior. Whereas dispositionalists traditionally investigate how psychological states vary across individuals, situationists are more concerned with how psychological states vary across situations. Both Situationism and dispositionalism are problematic. Virtue ethicists are so ready to accept the influence of the environment on our behavior that their analysis of individual differences involves the agent's framing capacities, as explained in section three.

In the end, the person-situation debate might be just a false dichotomy, which has been overemphasized in the context of character-based moral theories. For situational explanations and individual differences explanations of social behavior do not compete with each other. Rather, they answer two different questions. Situational factors explain aggregate behaviors. Individual differences explain variations within the aggregate. Hence, the power of the situation does not really undermine the value of character explanations. And evidence for the virtues cannot undermine situational explanations of behavior either.

I have posed four conceptual objections to the premise (1) that "the moral psychology that underlies virtue ethics is dispositionalist." First, I have argued that Situationism inappropriately conceptualizes virtues as behavioral dispositions. Second, I have disputed the consideration of honesty as a unitary trait instead of a cluster of heterogeneous and unrelated dispositions. Third, I gave reasons as to why the Situationist evidence is blind to the state of character of the subjects. Fourth, I have explained how the observational equivalence of traits hinders the situationist interpretation of the empirical evidence on cross-situational and cross-temporal behavioral consistency.

In a sense, my objections are intended as an explanation of what virtue is not. Virtues are not just behavioral dispositions. (At least some) Virtues are not just unitary traits. Virtues are not linear traits. Virtues are not single traits.

Enough for the negative argument. What is virtue, then? Virtue involves, as explained in section three, higher-order desires and values, beliefs, framing capacities, emotions, and enduring patterns of behavior that have any bearing on moral matters. These elements of character cannot be described solely in terms of each other; they cannot be reduced to just behavioral dispositions without losing the essence of virtue.

The first premise does not hold because virtues are more than behavioral dispositions, because at least some virtues such as honesty may not be a unitary trait, because the problem of *akrasia* makes it very difficult to infer virtues from overt behavior, and because Situationism does not account for the observational equivalence of traits. Whereas situationists may reply to some of these objections, when taken together, they constitute a strong case against the situationist argument. If my objections hold, then the first premise of the situationist argument fails. And if these objections are compelling, the situationist thesis is in trouble.

Consequently, lack of cross-situational consistency, in case it is really a fact, is not a serious threat to a character-based moral theory. Virtue ethicists do not need to dispose of character notions in order to accommodate the evidence in experimental social psychology examined in this article.

Now, even if the empirical evidence provided by Situationism does not seriously undermine virtue ethics, it can help virtue ethicists to think about moral education and organizational design. Business leaders have a responsibility not only to behave from virtue, but also to create opportunities for the development and the expression of the virtues. They should promote the institutions under which human excellences can be elicited and remove the circumstances under which most human beings will be overwhelmed or enticed by the wrong incentives.

In order empirically to establish that any person could attain the mental states that are necessary for global traits, virtue ethicists need the assistance of psychology. Objective behavioral measurements are plainly deficient. The contents of a person's mental states may be accessible through introspection but the reliability of our judgments about our mental states and processes is quite controversial.[17] In particular, whether character traits are introspectible aspects of our mentality is an unsettled issue (e.g., Taylor and Brown 1988, Paulhus and John 1998, Funder 1999).

One can envision how virtue ethicists and behavioral scientists will collaborate on this enterprise, along the lines of a reconciliation project (Alzola 2010). Psycholo-

gists need the assistance of virtue ethicists to establish the set of mental states and modes of response to what sort of situations a person must develop in order to grant virtue attributions. And virtue ethicists need the assistance of a variety of techniques over the course of several years and across a range of situations in order to be able to determine the state of mind of a person. The investigation may profit from the integration of behavioral measures, recordings of brain activity, and introspective evidence.[18]

In order for an empirical study to be considered a good test of the manifestation of a virtue, certain conditions must be met. Longitudinal studies are required for a behavioral measure to appropriately operationalize a character trait of the sort postulated by the virtue ethics tradition as a virtue (or a vice). The examination should go beyond the level of overt behavior to focus on the main constituents of virtue, including desires, beliefs, and framing capacities. Furthermore, we should carefully assess behavioral inconsistencies when two or more traits are observationally equivalent.

Regarding the explanatory power of virtue, I hope I have shown that the charge of lack of psychological realism does not succeed. Even if situationists are right that virtue ethics cannot offer infallible predictions of the whole population on every single occasion, three things need to be said. First, competing normative theories do not fare any better than virtue ethics. Second, the low but positive correlations found by experimental psychologists can be used to produce fairly reliable predictions about the average response that each individual will exhibit over a great number of future observations and about each individual's distribution of responses. Third, as discussed for the virtue of honesty, virtue may come in domain-specific modules. That is, if we learn to be good and to appreciate certain considerations only after we have been exposed to relevant situations, there might be good reasons to think that such modules can be virtues and that modular virtues "can be added together to form a more inclusive composite disposition" (Adams 2006: 127).

The "modularity of virtue" was first introduced by Flanagan (1991). He suggests that virtues such as honesty and generosity have different emotional bases, domains, and learning histories and thus possess characteristics of other skills that have been modeled modularly, such as language and the basic emotions. Behavioral dispositions are, according to this thesis, autonomous competences, in the sense that a person develops and exercises a disposition to behave in a certain way in certain domains—for example, in the workplace or while playing games, as in Hartshorne and May studies—without being disposed to behave in the same way in other domains—for example, at home or while completing a school assignment. The argument is an Aristotelian one. Insofar as behavioral dispositions are part—and only part—of what a virtue is, there is no reason to expect a firefighter who fearlessly races into a burning house to save a child to be equally fearless in contemplating a trip to the dentist's office.

Whether these composite behavioral dispositions or—as Doris call them—local virtues can be excellent enough to merit their classification as real virtues is a complex matter whose elucidation requires further investigation. Suffice it to say that some virtue theorists traditionally defend the unity of virtue thesis—according

to which anyone who has one of the virtues must have all of them because there is really no set of distinct and separate virtuous character traits, but rather at the bottom, only a single, unitary virtue (Irwin 1988, Cooper 1998, Annas 2011). Other virtue ethicists regard the unity thesis as a platitude (Williams 1985), argue that there is no necessary connections among the virtues (Geach 1977), acknowledge that certain virtues are incompatible (Foot 1981), and even consider that a narrow disposition may have positive moral value, and so be part of a virtue (Adams 2006). While I have emphasized that virtues should not be reduced to behavioral dispositions, such dispositions are still part of the virtues. Thus, instead of dismissing the situationist data, we can entertain the possibility that these narrow—as opposed to global—behavioral dispositions, whose existence situationists are willing to acknowledge, can support fairly reliable predictions and, under certain conditions, be considered modules of virtues.

The other important lesson virtue ethicists can learn from the situationist experiments is that human beings may be weaker than we expect, especially when confronted with a resolute authority, a unanimous group that sees the world in radically different ways than they do, or an intense situation that elicits "counter-dispositional" behaviors. Our weakness is not just cognitive—i.e., situational pressures make us lose our moral compass—but also motivational.

But virtue ethicists, I conclude, can account for the experimental evidence, without abandoning the centrality of character notions in normative ethics and business ethics. Virtues may not express themselves under all circumstances. We may act out of character. We may fail to frame the situation as a situation that calls for a certain moral response. We may hold the wrong beliefs. We may have failed to develop the appropriate higher-order desires. And our character depends in many different ways on our relations to social institutions and organizations. None of this, however, denies that character traits of the sort postulated as virtues do exist. None of this impairs our capacity to become morally better persons and attain the excellences of character that virtue ethicists call the virtues.

Yes, virtue is possible.

NOTES

1.   Personality traits, as studied by psychologists, are distinguished from character traits, which are the main concern of philosophers. Character traits are a subset of personality traits that have a moral dimension (Gert 2005, Brandt 1970). Some virtue ethicists in business ethics (e.g., Solomon 2005, Hartman 1998, Moberg 1999) have suggested that character traits of interest for virtue ethics supervene on the traits studied by personality psychology. Others (e.g., Audi 1997) have stressed the distinction between character and personality because two people can be radically different in personality yet quite alike in moral character.

2.   This virtue ethical account of rightness faces some objections on grounds of incompleteness, insularity, and circularity. The discussion is beyond the scope of this article. See, for example, Das (2003) and Johnson (2003) for criticisms, and Annas (2004) and Zyl (2009) for a defense of virtue ethical theories of right action.

3.   Cross-situational consistency means that character traits are reliably manifested in trait-relevant behavior across a diversity of trait-relevant eliciting conditions. Temporal stability involves that character traits are reliably manifested in trait-relevant behavior over iterated trials of similar trait-relevant eliciting conditions. Evaluative integration entails that the occurrence of a trait with a particular evaluative valence is probabilistically related to the occurrence of other traits with similar evaluative valences (Doris 2002: 22).

4.   For a review of the impact of moods and feelings on judgment and decision-making, see Schwarz 2002.

5.   Alternatively, Doris proposes to see the situationist argument as abductive: the variousness of human behavior is best explained by reference to the hypothesis that virtues are rarely instantiated in human beings (Doris 2005: 633). I shall use my reconstruction because it brings together the stronger and the weaker versions of Situationism.

6.   Specifically, I have offered six methodological objections—which, for the sake of brevity, I shall only mention here—indicating that the empirical data provide no reason to doubt the existence of character traits of the sort postulated by virtue ethicists as virtues or the influence of such traits on human behavior whatsoever. The studies cited by the situationist involve artificial consistency, incongruous results, experimental conditions that prevent the expression of virtues, cross-sectional studies that can be unreliable, potentially misleading inferences from group behavior to individual behavior, and inappropriate inferences from child behavior to adult behavior in studies related to moral reasoning (Alzola 2008). Taken together, the six objections make a good empirically-based case against the third premise of the situationist argument.

7.   I have distinguished a stronger and a weaker version of the situationist argument in section two. I argue that if my objections hold against the stronger version, they should work against the weaker version as well. I thank R. Edward Freeman for pressing this point.

8.   We say that a wineglass has a disposition to smash when dropped, which means that such a disposition has to do with the possibility of glass's smashing in certain conditions. I have a disposition to burst into tears when I listen to Lenski's aria from Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*. Dispositions—unlike categorical properties—entail subjunctive conditionals. The fragility—a dispositional property—of the wineglass requires that the glass would smash if it were knocked. A number of philosophers—e.g., Carnap 1936–1937; Ryle 1949; Quine 1960; Mackie 1977; Armstrong, Martin, and Place 1996—have endorsed the view that an object has a certain disposition if and only if the object would produce the associated manifestation if it were under the conditions of manifestation. I shall not examine in this article the question whether it makes sense to treat traits of character as metaphysical dispositions (see also Upton 2009).

9.   Annas seems to disagree. She advocates the strongest view on cross-situational behavioral consistency. A courageous person must behave courageously across a broad range of situations, which means, roughly, *every* situation. As she puts it: "It is hard to see how any situation could be excluded" (Annas 2003: 33). However, as other commentators argue, the Stagirite does not go that far. He provides a realistic rather than an idealized portrait of the virtuous person (Curzer 2005, Upton 2009). Still, we must be careful. If even the fully virtuous person may fail to behave in a perfectly virtuous manner, virtue ethics cannot determine the right action by reference to what the virtuous person would do (see note 2). In response to Annas, one might argue either that even the non-ideally but still reasonably virtuous person may fail to behave in a perfectly virtuous manner or that even the fully virtuous person may act in ways that are undesirable from the standpoint of a local virtue, such as honesty or compassion (see section 3.4). The first claim seems to refer to some kind of deficiency in the agent, while the second refers to some deficiency (or better undesirability) in the world rather than the agent. All I need for my argument is the second claim, which is also less controversial (because we do not need to call these actions "less than fully virtuous" or even "wrong" but just undesirable from the standpoint of some other virtue). In other words, the claim that the virtuous person sometimes fails is different from the claim that the world is sometimes such that the virtuous person must act in ways that are undesirable in certain respects. Moral dilemmas can only support the second claim, but not the first. I am grateful to Benjamin Kiesewetter for pressing me to clarify this point.

10.   One may quickly answer this question by saying, simply, "Nothing." There is not much to be said about the state of character of adults on the basis of observations of schoolchildren's inconsistent behavior because children are expected to be more impressionable, less committed to particular ideals of conduct,

and less integrated than adults. I have discussed this objection to the Hartshorne and May's experiments elsewhere (Alzola 2008).

11. There is a problem here. According to the Aristotelian taxonomy, a person is either *akratic* or vicious, but not both. For an explanation of how the subjects of the situationist experiments can be described both as *akratic* and pusillanimous, see Badhwar (2009).

12. Here, judgment means not only *moral* judgment, but even *visual* judgment, as in the famous studies on conformity conducted by Solomon Asch (1956), which are not described in this article.

13. Not to mention the famous case of the student who was one of the disobedient subjects when the Milgram experiment was conducted at Princeton University, and who eventually went on to blow the whistle on the My Lai massacre (Kupperman 2001: 243).

14. Two different traits, thought of as internal individual differences, may come into conflict in a situation, such that we are unable to establish through observation which one of the two traits is expressed in the person's behavior. This is what I have called observational equivalence here.

15. Unless, of course, the situation is one of extreme emergency, like the drowning child example. Again, a person cannot possibly be a good helper if he lets his helping behavior be continuously interrupted by further calls for help because, among other things, a good helper is someone who is effective.

16. Surely, obedience is not always a virtue. This sentiment is indeed manifested by the subjects' reactions to the Milgram's experimental situation. Most obedient subjects felt deeply disturbed about their deeds both during and after the experiment (Milgram 1974, Blass 1991). The lack of evaluative distinction between a concern for the experimenter's wellbeing and the victims makes this thesis less convincing in the context of the Milgram studies (as opposed to the Good Samaritans situation, in which failure to help involves an omission). A key aspect of good character in the virtue ethics tradition is the ability to prioritize correctly, something that apparently most Milgram's subjects lacked. In addition, the Milgram subjects have not explained or excused their behavior by saying that they thought that obedience was that important. I thank Joshua Knobe for raising this point.

17. Indeed, the status of introspective methods in the literature is a testimony of the intellectual divide between science and the humanities. Philosophers often hold that introspection allows us to apprehend the properties of mental states directly. Philosophical claims about consciousness, emotion, personal identity, thought, belief, and other mental phenomena are thought to be susceptible to introspective examination. But psychologists—concerned with establishing the status of psychology as a science—are not comfortable with the dimension of the subject's mental states that are not directly verifiable; they are traditionally skeptical about introspection, especially of the causes of our attitudes and behavior (Watson 1913, Boring 1953, Nisbett and Wilson 1977, Wilson 2002). However, there is a revival of introspective methods in the last decade in the field of consciousness studies (Jack and Roepstorff 2003), the study of imagery (Kosslyn, Reisberg, and Behrmann 2006), emotion (Barrett, Mesquita, Ochsner, and Gross 2007), and in the studies of the "neural correlates of consciousness" (Rees and Frith 2007).

18. A next generation of scholars may be able to approximate mental states with the required degree of precision through alternative routes. Implicit measures of attitudes and priming research are attracting considerable attention in the psychological literature, as they are supposed to reveal unconscious or implicit attitudes that are unavailable to introspection or erroneously introspected (Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz 1998). For a skeptical view about measures like the Implicit Association Test see Zimmerman (2007) and Gendler (2008). In addition, the use of neuroimaging techniques such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and positron emission tomography (PET) may help us access the neural correlates of mental states as they pertain to our inquiry. I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

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